Between Two Thought Worlds: Reframing Responses to Reconciliation Through the Lens of an Ethical Trans-Systemic Educational Space in Québec's English-language CÉGEP Network

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ABSTRACT

Between Two Thought Worlds: Reframing Responses to Reconciliation Through the Lens of an Ethical Trans-Systemic Educational Space in Québec's English-language CÉGEP Network

Juliet Lammers

This qualitative study seeks to understand and reframe responses to reconciliation in the public English-language CÉGEP network in Québec, Canada through an analysis of publicly available documents from three major institutions in the network, posts on institutional social media accounts, and interviews with participants from one of the institutions represented in this study. While the primary research question "What reconciliation initiatives exist in the English-language CÉGEP network?" guided this work, it also raised a more fundamental question about the nature of reconciliation and what it means. This paper asserts that true reconciliation in education requires a fundamental transformation of our educational system in order to support Indigenous resurgence, and create, what Mi'kmaw scholar Marie Battiste (2013), calls an ethical trans-systemic educational space. This transformation involves *unlearning* colonial practices, *making space* for Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing and being, and establishing systems of *shared governance*. Guided by a Two-Eyed Seeing (Bartlett et al., 2012) approach, this study examines current reconciliation initiatives in the English-language CÉGEP network—initiatives that have largely been developed and implemented by non-Indigenous people—and considers these through the lens of unlearning, making space, and shared governance in order to contribute to an understanding of how the network is working meaningfully towards reconciliation. While there is evidence of some of this work occurring in the English-language CÉGEP system, overall efforts are still limited and in early stages.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

June 2025 marked the ten-year anniversary of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) publication of its final report and 94 Calls to Action (CTAs). It is widely agreed upon that progress on the implementation of the CTAs has been exceedingly slow (Csontos, 2019; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Gilmore, 2022; Indigenous Watchdog, 2023; Pashagumskum, 2020; Cicek et al., 2021; Sinclair, 2022; Wentzell, 2023a, 2023b). Despite promises made by the Canadian government, the TRC's Calls to Action have, so far, not had the impact that was hoped for (Miles, 2018).

> The loss of enthusiasm for a transformative policy proposal is significant, as it betrays that much of this "reconciliation turn" has been more discursive than substantive, and that few policies that have aimed to uproot the established epistemological privilege of the Western tradition, remain a substantial priority. While aspirational language remains the norm, there is seemingly little concrete commitment in many places to actually meet those goals" (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018, p. 222).

In the context of the TRC's Education for Reconciliation Calls to Action, academic research and reports in the media tell us two things; first, that educational institutions across the country are engaging in different kinds of initiatives that are aimed at responding to reconciliation; and second, that we are far from having achieved reconciliation in our schools (Battiste, 2013; Csontos, 2019; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; MacMath & Hall, 2018; Miles, 2018; Cicek et al., 2021;).

Tracking of the TRC's CTAs is minimal. The government has yet to follow through on CTA 53 which calls for the establishment of an independent oversight committee to "monitor, evaluate, and report" (TRC, 2015b, p. 6) on the progress of reconciliation. Without this kind of

national oversight, there are no mechanisms to ensure accountability in our education system. While there are some independent tracking initiatives that provide an overview and some analysis of progress, the information that they provide and the accountability that they command is limited. Nonetheless, these initiatives are important and necessary—they provide at least some understanding of where we currently stand. The goal of this study is to add to that independent tracking work by exploring responses to reconciliation in education in one small sub-section of education: the English-language CÉGEP network in Québec.

CÉGEP is a French acronym that stands for Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel, which translates to general and professional teaching college. In Québec, Canada, CÉGEPs represent the first level of post-secondary education (Les CÉGEPs, 2024). Secondary education in Québec ends at grade 11, or what is commonly referred to as Secondary V. Students who plan to go to university must complete a two-year pre-university program at CÉGEP. For those who do not intend to pursue university studies, CÉGEPs offer three-year technical programs that train students to work in specific fields in the job market. Upon completion of a CÉGEP program, students receive a Diploma of College Studies (DCS), also commonly known by the French acronym DEC (Diplome d'études collégiales). The typical age of CÉGEP students is late teens to early twenties, though anyone of any age can attend. There are 48 colleges in the public CÉGEP network; 43 are French-language schools and five are English-language schools. College students can choose whether to pursue their studies at a French or English CÉGEP. Like universities, CÉGEP professors are specialists in their fields—they must hold graduate degrees but are not required to have degrees in education.

My Interest in this Topic

I began working in the English-language CÉGEP network in 2021 which is around the same time that I started to feel the need to learn more about colonial history and reconciliation in Canada (more about that in my positionality statement later). The CÉGEP where I work offers opportunities for that kind of learning; there are frequent talks and workshops hosted by Indigenous presenters on colonial histories and Indigenous cultures and worldviews. I have also had the opportunity to participate in a semester-long reading and discussion group with a small group of co-workers. These opportunities were a good point of entry.

I spent a long time—almost two years—mostly listening because I did not feel equipped with the knowledge or vocabulary to participate in discussions and felt worried about accidentally saying or proposing the wrong thing. I know I wasn't alone in that feeling. As Restoule and Chaw (2017) point out, the "fear of trespassing" (p. 15) is common among educators; they describe fears related to "rocking the boat or offending others, fear of appropriation, fear of misinformed and inappropriate action, and fear of perpetuating stereotypes" (p. 15). I have experienced all of these fears. My hesitation deepened when I found myself part of discussions about whether it was our role as settlers to be doing Indigenization work particularly in light of the widely held position that you cannot Indigenize or decolonize a colonial institution. It is not that I disagreed, I just did not know enough to fully understand how to navigate this work—what it involves, who it belongs to, and what I, as a settler working in the education system and interested in participating in this work, should be doing. When it came time to choose a thesis topic, developing a better understanding of this work was a priority for me.

Research Study

This is a qualitative study that seeks to understand responses to reconciliation among a group of schools in the public English-language CÉGEP network in Québec, Canada. Through an analysis of publicly available documents from three schools in the network and interviews at one institution, it aims to answer the following questions:

- What reconciliation initiatives exist in Québec's English-language CÉGEP network?
- How do these CÉGEPs work in collaboration with local Indigenous groups on reconciliation initiatives?
- How do the institutions' administrative bodies support reconciliation work?

The intention of this study is not to criticize or point fingers at institutions and their initiatives or lack thereof, but rather, to contribute to the process of reconciliation in education by exploring and developing an understanding of where we are at ten years after the TRC's publication of its 94 Calls to Action.

This thesis reflects the line of inquiry that I followed in order to develop an understanding of reconciliation work in the English-language CÉGEP network. While the primary research question "What reconciliation initiatives exist in the English-language CÉGEP network?" guided my work, it also raised a more fundamental question about the nature of reconciliation and what it actually means. Developing an understanding of reconciliation within historical, political, and educational contexts, led me to draw on scholarship from a diversity of disciplines including history, sociology, political science, Indigenous scholarship, and education and to reference a range of informational sources including academic articles, government documents, and reports put out by Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations, as well as mainstream, independent, and community media sources.

Positionality

I am a white cisgender financially stable colonial-settler woman of northern European descent. I was born into a white middle-class family in the 1970s in Detroit, Michigan which is located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabe and Wyandot People and was ceded to the U.S. government in the 1807 Treaty of Detroit. At the age of six, I moved to Frankfurt, Germany where I was raised throughout the 1980s. I have lived in various parts of what is now commonly known as Canada since 1990. While Canada has been my primary place of residence for most of my life, I have spent extended periods living, working, and travelling abroad. In 2003, I moved to Tiohtià:ke, otherwise known as Montreal, which is located on the traditional and unceded lands of the Kanien'kehà:ka (Mohawk) Nation. I have the opportunity to study, work, and own a home here. I have an MA in Media Studies from Concordia University and am currently completing a second MA in Educational Technology at the same institution. I worked as an independent documentary filmmaker for ten years, and for the last four, have been working as a pedagogical counsellor at a post-secondary English-language college in Québec.

Until just a few years ago, I knew very little about Indigenous and colonial histories and was not aware of the concept of settler colonialism. I did not learn this history in school, and though I was raised to be aware of and empathetic to injustices in the world, I never learned about colonialism and that it is at the root of so much injustice throughout the world. I came to that understanding relatively recently.

It was the discovery of the unmarked graves outside of Kamloops B.C. in 2021 that, for me, really started to drive home the reality of the violent and shameful history that Indigenous peoples experienced at the hands of European colonial settlers. I had been a mom for just about a year at that point and learning what it meant to be a parent when the news of the unmarked

graves of Indigenous children began to surface. The stories of Indigenous children being taken from their families and communities, to be so profoundly mistreated and abused, hit me hard. I became acutely aware of how little I knew about the history of colonialism in Canada and felt I could no longer turn my back to it. I wanted to learn more and do something but did not know where to begin.

That same year, in 2021, I began working as a pedagogical counsellor at one of the colleges in the English-language CÉGEP network in Québec where I have been since. The College offers workshops and talks by members of local Indigenous communities on colonial and Indigenous histories, Indigenous cultures, and contemporary realities on a regular basis; many of these are open to students, faculty, and staff, others are for faculty and staff only. I have attended as many as I can and have learned a lot over the past few years.

Working on this thesis is a way for me to deepen my knowledge of colonial history and our contemporary settler state in Canada, and a way to develop a better understanding of how my work in an educational institution can contribute to the work of creating a better society for all of us. In doing this research, I have come to believe that it is incumbent upon all of us to learn about colonial history and recognize the ways in which it shapes our present-day realities. I also believe that it is in our best interest to recognize, value, and engage with multiple ways of knowing and being in the world. My hope is that this research will put me in a position, as a pedagogical counsellor, to better support this kind of work at the CÉGEP level.

Working with an Indigenous Pedagogical Advisor

This project is mentored by Diane Labelle (no pronouns), an Indigenous pedagogical advisor, who is a consultant to several colleges in the English-language CÉGEP network with direct ties to the Kanien’kehà:ka nation. Diane has worked with the First Nation Adult Education

School Council since its inception in 2012 and presently holds the position of Regional Educational Consultant to Indigenous communities. Diane has over 40 years of experience in the world of education as a teacher, consultant, Indigenous program writer, administrator, and presenter.

I met Diane through the institution that I work at. Diane has given numerous presentations on colonial history and contemporary Indigenous realities and we have participated in discussion groups together. I asked Diane to consult on this research because Diane has worked so extensively in Indigenous education in the context of Québec, is incredibly knowledgeable on the subject, and can advise from an Indigenous perspective. This research does not engage directly with Indigenous communities; its focus is on how non-Indigenous institutions are responding to reconciliation. I have, however, drawn extensively on the work of Indigenous scholars and approached this research through the lens of an Indigenous theoretical framework. As such, it has been important to ensure that my understanding of both historical and contemporary contexts as well as my interpretation of theory are accurate and respectful.

Diane and I have been meeting to discuss my work for the past year. I approached Diane to advise on my thesis in May 2024 after a ceremony for students graduating from the Indigenous Studies certificate program. My thesis proposal had been recently accepted and I had just submitted my application for ethics approval from Concordia's Research Ethics Board. Over the past year, we have met about every other month with a few more frequent meetings in the last few weeks of finishing up the writing of this thesis. Diane has access to a shared draft of my work and provides comments frequently. Diane has offered valuable insight into Indigenous educational approaches, has prompted me to dig into provincial legislation, and provided important information that is otherwise not documented. Diane's guidance throughout this

research process has been invaluable and played a vital role in ensuring it meets academic standards and respects the sensitivity of the subject matter.

Chapter one of this thesis introduces the topic, describes my interest in this work, and the research questions that have guided this study. I discuss my positionality as a non-Indigenous researcher, and the process of working with an Indigenous pedagogical advisor.

Chapters two and three are a result of the interdisciplinary approach that I took in conducting this research. Chapter two provides an overview of key moments in Canada's colonial history—from the time of confederation to present day—to provide basic context and illustrate the lack of committed action on behalf of the federal government when it comes to reconciliation work. The last section in this chapter discusses reconciliation as a contested concept that has been criticized by Indigenous scholars who advocate for a process of Indigenous resurgence rather than reconciliation. Chapter three focuses on educational pathways for Indigenous students in Québec; it provides some historical background on the founding of the CÉGEP system, and discusses recent policies implemented by the provincial government that demonstrate an ongoing reluctance to prioritize the needs of Indigenous students.

In chapter four, I turn to Indigenous scholars to understand what a new system of education could look like—what kind of system do Indigenous scholars envision and what do we need to do to get there? Mi'kmaw educator Marie Battiste's (2013) concept of an ethical trans-systemic educational space is central to this chapter and has defined my understanding of what it means to achieve reconciliation in education. In this chapter, I describe the processes of *unlearning*, *making space,* and developing systems of *shared governance* as foundational to creating an ethical trans-systemic educational space.

Chapter five outlines the methodological approach used in this research. I employed a single case study design that draws on data from multiple sources including institutional documents, social media posts, and interviews with key participants who work in the CÉGEP system. I discuss my process of coding the data and developing themes, and the use of a Two-Eyed Seeing approach which involved analyzing data gathered through a Western qualitative approach using an Indigenous theoretical framework.

Chapter six describes the themes that emerged in my research and provides excerpts from the data to support these themes. A total of five themes emerged, these include: Indigenous Collaboration, Indigenous Student Support, Indigenous Campus Life, Faculty Engagement, and Institutional Commitment. These themes highlight key areas of focus for transforming college campuses.

Chapter seven provides an analysis of this study's findings in light of the processes of unlearning, making space, and shared governance. While there is evidence that these processes are at work in the English CÉGEP network, they remain sporadic, under-resourced, and rely on the dedication of grassroots actors.

Chapter eight offers a summary of this research, some concluding thoughts on this work, and possible next steps for sharing this work.

The goal of this work is to demonstrate that true reconciliation in education requires a fundamental transformation of our educational system through the processes of unlearning colonial practices, making space for Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing and being, and establishing systems of shared governance in order to support Indigenous resurgence, and create, what Marie Battiste (2013) calls, an ethical trans-systemic educational space.

Chapter 2: Historical Context and a Brief History of Indigenous Education in Canada

The following section offers a brief overview of Canada's colonial history from 1867—the year of confederation under the British North America Act—to present-day in order to provide context for this study and illustrate the urgency of working meaningfully towards reconciliation in education.

Education as a Tool for Violence

The destiny of a people is intricately bound to the way its children are educated
-Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996

The violent expansionist agenda carried out by the French and British colonial empires in the territory now commonly known as Canada has had lasting effects and continues to shape our society, its systems, and institutions. Education, specifically the Indian Residential School system, played a crucial role in the pursuit of the colonial agenda. The Canadian educational system rests on this legacy of violence and continues to play an active part in supporting and maintaining a present-day settler colonial society. The 1996 report on the Royal Commission for Aboriginal Peoples, proclaimed astutely, "The destiny of a people is intricately bound to the way its children are educated" (RCAP, 1996, p. 404). Reflecting on Canadian history and present-day realities of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, it is clear the Commission was right.

Canada was formed in 1867 under the British North America Act (BNA). The BNA united the British colonies, which included both British and French populations, under one federal government and created the first four provinces of Canada. Until this time, British and French colonizers had made various attempts to educate Indigenous populations according to European methods and values under the guise of converting them to Christianity, but their efforts

remained largely unsuccessful (White & Peters, 2009). With the BNA Act, the new government gave itself "power over 'Indians and Lands reserved for the Indians'" (as cited in McIntosh & McConnell, 2021) and the work of assimilating Indigenous populations began anew.

By 1876 the Canadian government had introduced the *Indian Act* which consolidated all laws pertaining to the federal government's control over Indigenous Peoples, forever altering their political and governance structures, cultural practices, and education. A report released by the Department of Indian Affairs that same year states, "our Indian legislation generally rests on the principle that the aborigines are to be kept in a condition of tutelage and treated as wards or children of the State" (as cited in Crey & Hanson, 2009), reflecting the government's paternalistic approach in their dealings with Indigenous communities.

The Indian Act created a new legal category which classified people of different Indigenous nations and languages under the single category of *Status Indian*. According to the Indian Act, those who belonged to this new category, were "first, any male person of Indian blood reputed to belong to a particular band; secondly, any child of such person; thirdly, any woman who is, or was, lawfully married to such person" (excerpt from the Indian Act as cited in Facing History & Ourselves, 2019). Conferring or denying status gave the Canadian government the power to decide who was Indigenous and who was not, introducing and imposing the notion of exclusion. As such, it was an attempt to weaken Indigenous cultures by pulling apart families and communities (White & Peters, 2009). "These systems [of classification and regulation of Indigenous identity] forcibly supplanted traditional Indigenous ways of anchoring relationships among individuals, their communities, and the land—erasing knowledge of self, culture, and history in the process" (Lawrence, 2003, p. 24).

Under the Indian Act, Status Indians were given certain rights that those without status did not have. The Act and the rights described within it have changed according to various amendments over the years, but when it was created, only Status Indians had the right to live and participate in communities; those without status were effectively cast out by federal law. This included Indigenous women who married non-Indigenous men, any children from that union, as well as Inuit and Métis communities who, according to the government, were not First Nations or "Indian." The designation of status and non-status has indeed, over the long term, had the effect of alienating future generations from their cultural roots and communities (D. Labelle, personal communication, June 7, 2025).

The Indian Act also gave the government the right to move Indigenous communities from their ancestral lands and relocate them to areas less conducive to the colonial expansionist agenda. Entire communities were displaced to make way for the establishment of new cities and towns that would accommodate European settlers, to provide vast swaths of land for agricultural development, and to allow for the construction of railroads to connect the newly established settlements. In addition to displacing communities, the Act, moreover, imposed restrictions on Indigenous cultural practices and ceremonies, limited and even disallowed the continuation of traditional governance structures, and eventually mandated residential school attendance for Indigenous children with status (Facing History & Ourselves, 2019).

Residential schools, which first appeared as industrial schools in the 1840s, became mandatory for Status Indians in 1894. These schools were funded by the Canadian government and managed by a confederation of Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Presbyterian churches (Crey & Hanson, 2009). Prime Minister John A. MacDonald, who spearheaded the Indian residential

school (IRS) system, proclaimed to the House of Commons in 1883 that these schools needed to be off reserve in order to separate Indigenous children from their parents, he explained:

> When the school is on the reserve, the child lives with his parents who are savages; he is surrounded by savages, and though he may learn to read and write, his habits and training and mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write. It has been strongly pressed on myself, as the head of the Department, that Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influence, and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men. (TRC, 2015a, p.2).

The purpose of these schools was to separate Indigenous children from their families, their cultures, their languages, and ultimately their identities (TRC summary, 2015, p.2). They were terrible places that amounted to little more than work camps where children were frequently victims of psychological, physical, and sexual abuse (White & Peters, 2009).

> Diseases such as tuberculosis ran rampant and mortality rates were alarmingly high…For those students who did survive their years in boarding establishments, the education they received was minimal at best. The schooling often focused more on religious indoctrination and manual labour than on academic knowledge. When students left the schools they were ill-equipped to compete for jobs in the "White man's world," and were alienated from their own societies (White & Peters, 2009, p. 17).

The word school is an egregious euphemism for these institutions in which Indigenous children faced "deplorable conditions and abuse…[and that] were a death sentence for many students" (MacMath & Hall, 2018, p.89). The Indian residential school system was a tool of assimilation; its purpose, "to indoctrinate [Indigenous children] into a new culture–the culture of the legally

dominant Euro-Christian Canadian society" (TRC Summary, p. V). It was central to the "cultural genocide" (TRC, 2015a, p.1) that the Canadian government has waged on Indigenous people over seven successive generations.

There were 139 residential schools in operation across Canada for over 100 years. The first residential schools were established in western Canada in the mid-1800s. The majority closed in the 1970s, while the very last schools operated as late as the 1990s (TRC Summary, 2015, p.3). During that time, "the federal government has estimated that at least 150,000 First Nation, Metis, and Inuit students passed through the system" (TRC Summary, 2015, p.3). A disproportionate number of children died while in the IRS system "from tuberculosis, malnutrition and other diseases resulting from poor living conditions" (Mas, 2015, para. 2). Due to poor record keeping, the exact number of children who perished remains unknown; estimates range from 3,200 to 32,000 (Reconciliation Education, 2024). The many recent discoveries of unmarked grave sites across the country suggest that the number of deaths is likely at the higher end of this range.

2006: The Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement

During the 1980s and through the early 1990s, survivors of the residential school system came forward in large numbers and spoke of the abuses they had suffered (de Bruin, 2020). They filed lawsuits against the Canadian government and the Christian churches and ultimately came together to form the largest class-action lawsuit in Canadian history (de Bruin, 2020). In 2006, the lawsuit was finally settled with the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA), which resulted from negotiations among IRS survivors, the Assembly of First Nations and other Indigenous led organizations, the Christian churches, and the Canadian government (Government of Canada, 2021a). The IRSSA mandated the Canadian government to provide

funding for five reparative initiatives. The first initiative was the Common Experience Payment (CEP), a $1.9 billion fund that was provided by the government to compensate former IRS students. Upon application, IRS survivors were eligible to receive $10,000 for their first year in the IRS system and $3,000 for each subsequent year that they were in the system (de Bruin, 2020). The second initiative mandated by the IRSSA was the Independent Assessment Process (IAP), which was an out-of-court process to resolve individual claims of severe sexual, physical, and psychological abuse. The IRSSA's third initiative was to provide $125 million for emotional and mental support services for survivors which included the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program (de Bruin, 2020). The fourth initiative provided $20 million in funding for commemoration projects "that honored, educated, remembered and paid tribute to former Indian residential school students, their families and their communities" (Government of Canada, 2021a). The fifth initiative earmarked $60 million for the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, an independent Indigenous-led commission that would hear the stories of residential school survivors, create a public record of their stories to educate Canadians, and provide recommendations for reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples (de Bruin, 2020).

2015: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established in 2008 and included three commissioners who were appointed by the Canadian federal government. The Commission was chaired by the late Honourable Murray Sinclair of the Pequis First Nation, who at the time, was a judge in the highest trial court in Manitoba and later became a senator in the Canadian parliament (Government of Canada, 2024). By his side were commissioners Wilton Littlechild, a Cree chief from the Treaty 7 First Nation, a lawyer, and a survivor of the residential school

system (CTF, 2025), and Dr. Marie Wilson, an award-winning journalist and broadcaster and the wife of Stephen Kakfwi, former president of the Dene Nation and premier of the Northwest Territories from 2000 to 2003.

The TRC held nation-wide hearings in which survivors of the residential school system were invited to share their stories in either "a written or recorded statement, a private one-on-one interview, [or] in a public discussion" (TRC, 2010). The goal of the hearings was to "reveal to Canadians the complex truth about the history and the ongoing legacy of the church-run residential schools" (TRC, 2015a, p.23), and in doing so, "guide and inspire a process of truth and healing, leading toward reconciliation within Aboriginal families, and between Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal communities, churches, governments, and Canadians generally" (TRC, 2015a, p.23). The TRC likens its understanding of reconciliation to the process of overcoming a situation of family violence, explaining that "it's about coming to terms with events of the past in a manner that overcomes conflict and establishes a respectful and healthy relationship among people" (2015a, p. 6).

From 2010 to 2014, over 6,750 people from different Indigenous Nations and affiliations shared their stories of the horrendous abuses they suffered in the Indian residential school system under the Canadian government and the Christian churches (TRC Summary, 2015a). A six-volume final report published by the commission in 2015 describes the following:

> The residential school system failed as an education system. It was based on racist assumptions about the intellectual and cultural inferiority of Aboriginal people—the belief that Aboriginal children were incapable of attaining anything more than a rudimentary elementary-level or vocational education. Consequently, for most of the system's history, the majority of students never progressed beyond elementary school.

> The government and church officials who operated the residential schools ignored the positive emphasis that the Treaties and many Aboriginal families placed on education. Instead, they created dangerous and frightening institutions that provided little learning (TRC, 2015a, p. 144)...Residential schools were a systematic, government-sponsored attempt to destroy Aboriginal cultures and languages and to assimilate Aboriginal peoples so that they no longer existed as distinct peoples (p. 153).

In addition to the final report, the commission put forward 94 Calls to Action intended to initiate a process of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. Upon release of the report, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said,

> What is needed is a total renewal of the relationship between Canada and Indigenous peoples. We have a plan to move towards a nation-to-nation relationship based on recognition, rights, respect, cooperation and partnership, and we are already making it happen (Prime Minister of Canada Justin Trudeau, 2015, para.7).

The TRC's 94 Calls to Action (CTAs) are presented as "actionable policy recommendations" (Reconciliation Education, 2025) and are directed at all implicated parties, this includes federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments, as well as health and educational institutions, the private sector, and ultimately, all Canadians. The CTAs are divided into two parts. The first 42 calls comprise the legacy section of the document; their implementation is meant to publicly acknowledge and rectify the lasting impact of residential schools on survivors and their families in the areas of child welfare, education, language and culture, health, and justice (Wentzell, 2023b). The remaining 54 calls are intended to advance a process of reconciliation; as such, they are meant to restore the fundamental human rights of Indigenous Peoples by rectifying ongoing systemic injustices (Wentzell, 2023b). The

reconciliation CTAs are divided into 17 subcategories that are meant to transform our government and its systems to ensure that systemic racism is "meaningfully and permanently [dismantled]" (Reconciliation Education, 2025).

After the TRC: Tracking the TRC's 94 Calls to Action

While the TRC pointed out that reconciliation is a shared responsibility, it falls to our governments, as representatives of the people, to ensure accountability as well as meaningful and sustained effort in a process that will take a very long time. In 2015, upon publication of the TRC's Calls to Action, it seemed that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau recognized and accepted this responsibility on behalf of Canadians when he said, "we will, in partnership with Indigenous communities, the provinces, territories, and other vital partners, fully implement the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission" (Trudeau, 2015).

Despite repeated promises and commitments, progress on the implementation of the TRC's Calls to Action has been remarkably slow. According to a report released in June 2022 by the Assembly of First Nations, "progress has slowed considerably in the last three years." Research published in July 2025 by Indigenous Watchdog (IW)—an Indigenous-led non-profit organization that monitors and reports on the progress of reconciliation and the implementation of the 94 Calls to Action—says that 14 Calls have been completed, 45 are in progress, 21 are stalled, and 14 have not yet been started. Douglas Sinclair of Indigenous Watchdog explained in a personal email communication that IW's progress assessments are based on stakeholder evidence that demonstrates past and current responses to each of the Calls to Action. For example, IW has determined that Call to Action 62—the development of curriculum on colonial histories and Indigenous contributions to knowledge, teacher training to integrate Indigenous knowledges and pedagogies, and the establishment of senior-level government positions

dedicated to implementing Indigenous content in education—is stalled. Sinclair provided the following two reasons to explain why:

1. Alberta and Ontario have both reneged on previous commitments to include and/or revise K-12 curriculum to include Indigenous content. They have actually either recommended content be eliminated (Alberta) or made previous mandatory content optional (Ontario).
2. Limited commitment to appoint senior-level positions in government at the assistant deputy minister level or higher dedicated to Aboriginal content in education (personal email communication, December 4, 2023).

According to IW's assessments, nearly all of the CTAs "that are 'Not Started' or 'Stalled' are the direct responsibility of governments" (Sinclair, 2022, p.44).

Lack of progress may be due to the fact that there is not yet a fully functioning independent body that the federal, provincial, and territorial governments are accountable to. CTAs 53 to 56 call for a National Council for Reconciliation, which would be a government funded independent body made up of Indigenous and non-Indigenous members to "monitor, evaluate, and report" on the progress of reconciliation, but that council has been slow to form. Bill C-29, the act to establish a National Council for Reconciliation was first introduced to Parliament in November 2021; the first reading of the Bill was in June 2022; the Bill received royal assent on April 30, 2024; and in March of 2025—ten years after the call was released—the National Council for Reconciliation was finally formed (Government of Canada, 2024b). The new Council has 18 months, as of March 2025, to begin its tracking and monitoring work (IW, 2025).

There are, at present, some tracking initiatives, but they are fragmented. The Government of Canada tracks and reports on its progress on the CTAs for which it is directly responsible. Likewise, some provincial and territorial governments including Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Manitoba, Alberta, and the Yukon publish annual reports on their progress. The Assembly of First Nations provided a 2022 status update of progress on the CTAs but does not track efforts on a consistent basis. There are other efforts such as *Indigenous Watchdog* which hosts a website providing annual (and occasionally more frequent) status updates on all of the CTAs alongside articles that provide some analysis. The CBC began tracking progress on the CTAs in 2018 on an interactive website called *Beyond 94*, but, according to Douglas Sinclair of Indigenous Watchdog (IW), they do not update as frequently as IW (D. Sinclair, personal communication, Jan. 7, 2024). The Yellowhead Institute, an Indigenous-led research centre at Toronto Metropolitan University, tracked and published annual status updates and in-depth analyses of progress on the CTAs from 2019 until 2023. Their 2023 update on the status of reconciliation showed 13 of the 94 Calls to Action as completed, meaning "81 Calls remain unfulfilled" (Jewell & Mosby, 2023, p. 4); they further reported that "zero Calls to Action were completed in 2023" (p. 4) and explained that they would no longer continue their tracking efforts. Their final report ends with the following statement of defeat, "there are limits to how many times you can write a report about how Canada, once again, has failed to make any meaningful progress" (p. 23).

Monitoring, evaluating, and reporting on the implementation of the 94 CTAs, and thereby holding the Canadian public and its governments accountable, is an enormous task that requires immense resources. If our government is, as they say, serious about "fully implement[ing] the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission" (Trudeau, 2015), then a National

Council for Reconciliation that is funded by the Canadian government should be a priority. In the absence of a national coordinated effort, these various tracking initiatives, though fragmented, are important. They are the only source of information that we currently have that provide some indication of our current standing when it comes to implementing the TRC's 94 Calls to Action. The problem is that these tracking efforts command little, if any, accountability.

The TRC is not the first, nor has it been the last call for recognition, protection, and respect for the rightful place of Indigenous Peoples in this country (Battiste, 2013). From the first Numbered Treaties that were signed by the Dominion of Canada and Indigenous Nations between 1871 and 1921 (Government of Canada, 2023a), to the Canadian Constitution Act of 1982, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in 1996, the IRSSA in 2006, Jordan's Principle in 2007, the TRC's Calls to Action in 2015, Canada's endorsement of the United Nation's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2016 (Fontaine, 2016), the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls' Calls to Justice in 2016, Québec's Viens Commission in 2019, Joyce's Principle in 2021 (and more, but point made), our federal and provincial governments have signed on and committed to justice for Indigenous Peoples again and again. These reports and recommendations ask colonial settlers to take responsibility for and become accountable to the ongoing racism and injustices faced by Indigenous Peoples in our society and they lay out the meaningful changes that should be made. There is, at this point, however, little evidence to suggest that the Canadian government's commitment to a just and equitable society is genuine.

Moving Forward: From Reconciliation to Indigenous Resurgence

Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is one of five reparative initiatives that came out of the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement (IRSSA). The

IRSSA's initiatives, as Gunnarsson (2020) has pointed out, clearly align with a transitional justice framework. Transitional justice provides a set of measures that are designed to ensure accountability, deliver justice, and promote reconciliation in societies in which large-scale human rights abuses have occurred (UN, 2023). The concept of transitional justice emerged with the fall of authoritarian governments in Eastern Europe and Latin America in the 1980s and the transition to democratically elected governments in these countries (Coulthard, 2014; Gunnarsson, 2020). Measures that are typical of a transitional justice framework include criminal prosecutions of individual perpetrators, public apologies, truth commissions, security system reforms, and commemoration initiatives of past abuses (Gunnarsson, 2020). Traditionally, the transitional justice process has been accompanied by a change in regime. It is only in more recent years that the concept has been applied more broadly to contexts where large scale human rights abuses have occurred but in which the state has no intention of transitioning to a new government.

Canada was, in fact, the first established democracy to attempt using a transitional justice framework without a transition in government (ICTJ, n.d.). In 2006, the IRSSA mandated multiple measures that align with a transitional justice framework to redress the harms caused by the Indian Residential School system. These measures were implemented without making any major changes to our governmental structure. Dene scholar Glen Sean Coulthard (2014) doubts the effectiveness of a transitional justice framework in achieving reconciliation when no actual transition occurs, raising the question of whether true reconciliation is possible in Canada without major governmental and institutional reform. The answer, it would seem, depends on one's understanding of reconciliation.

The TRC posits that, to many, the concept of reconciliation in Canada is contentious because it implies that there was at one time "a conciliatory state…[which]...many Aboriginal people assert never has existed" (TRC, 2015a, p. 6). Cherokee professor and writer Jeff Corntassel explains that there is no word for reconciliation in most Indigenous languages which, he says, "is the truest test of its lack of relevance to communities" (2012, p. 93).

Wyile (2017) says that the term reconciliation is both "ubiquitous" and "ambiguous" (p. 380). Referencing the work of Paulette Regan, Wyile points to the "stark difference" (p. 382) between the two definitions of the verb 'to reconcile' in Webster's Dictionary. The first says that to reconcile is "to restore to friendship or harmony," while the second is "to cause to submit to or accept something unpleasant" (p. 382). In the context of reconciliation in Canada, the former implies Indigenous and non-Indigenous people coming together to find what Miles (2018) calls "common ground" (p. 298), while the latter implies Indigenous submission to colonial authority. According to Miles (2018), the current process of reconciliation resembles the latter.

> In settler states such as Canada and Australia, where there has been no restructuring of state institutions, or meaningful shift to Indigenous sovereignty, a reconciliation framework faces serious challenges in building common ground…in its current form, reconciliation is a form of pacification, assimilation, and ultimately re-colonization of Indigenous peoples and nations…reconciliation is asking Indigenous people to reconcile with colonialism, rather than to dismantle it (p. 298).

Citing the work of Denis and Bailey (2016), Miles (2018) explains that there are "two major approaches to reconciliation in Canada…the mainstream/TRC version and the radical version" (p. 298). The mainstream/TRC version, which is commonly endorsed by media and government, advances "reform-based changes" (p. 298) that focus primarily on mending

relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Coulthard (2014) writes that mending relationships can be understood in two ways: first, through state recognition of "individual or collective practices that Indigenous people undertake to reestablish a positive relation-to-self," and second, by "[overcoming] the debilitating pain, anger, and resentment that frequently persist in the wake of being injured or harmed by a perceived or real injustice" (p. 107). Coulthard goes on to say that in the Canadian context, mending relationships between Indigenous Peoples and the state is undermined by the state's expectation that Indigenous Peoples adjust their understanding of their own nationhood to align with the state's claim to Indigenous lands and the right to govern over Indigenous Peoples (p. 107). In other words, the unwillingness of the Canadian government to transition to a new form of government stands in the way of repairing relationships.

Coulthard (2014) argues that attempting to make amends for large-scale abuses without making changes to government, forces the state to "manufacture" (p. 108) a way of setting itself apart from those abuses. In this context, he says, the state must "[allocate] the abuses of settler-colonization to the dustbins of history, and/or purposely disentangle processes of reconciliation from questions of settler coloniality" (p. 108). In Canada this has meant situating colonialism as a static event that occurred in the past (Corntassel, 2012; Coulthard, 2014). From this perspective, colonialism belongs to our ancestors. The role of the present-day state, in this scenario, is to repair the damage that was caused by our ancestors. This perspective misses the point. Yes, our European ancestors initiated colonization, but our present-day systems and institutions carry it forward by prioritizing a settler worldview that first and foremost serves a settler vision of the present and future. Aside from missing the point, this perspective is also misleading. In this narrative the state takes on the heroic and powerful role of saving Indigenous

people who are portrayed as victims lacking agency and who need the state's help. This *righting the wrongs of the past* trope bestows a false benevolence upon the state by positioning it as an arbiter of justice (Howell & Ng-A-Fook, 2023). How ironic it is that the state has attempted to set itself apart from colonization by relegating the violence of the colonial agenda to the past while maintaining the colonial narrative of settlers as saviors and Indigenous people as needing saving—the very narrative that the Indian residential school system was based on.

Nishnabeeg artist and scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson says that justice from a state perspective is self-serving; she explains that it is "about white people feeling better about themselves" (2016, p. 21). Similarly, Unangan scholar Eve Tuck and her frequent collaborator K. Wayne Yang point to a "long and bumbled history of non-Indigenous peoples making moves to alleviate the impacts of colonization" (2012, p. 3), noting a tendency in educational settings, in particular, to use phrases such as "'decolonize our schools,' or…'decolonizing methods,' or 'decolonize student thinking'" (p. 2). Tuck & Yang argue that the misuse of the concept of decolonization is "yet another form of settler appropriation" (p. 3) and that "bumbled" and misguided efforts to decolonize amount to little more than "settler moves to innocence," which they explain, are "strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve the settler feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all" (p. 10). Such "moves to innocence," according to Tuck & Yang, reduce the concept and process of decolonization to little more than a metaphor (p. 3). "When metaphor invades decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recenters whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future" (p. 3).

Simpson asserts that the TRC's focus on "individual pain and suffering" (2016, p. 21) meant that "we were unable to account for how residential schools were a strategic tool of

dispossession. We were unable to talk about regenerating the damage caused to Indigenous political systems, languages, or spirituality" (p. 21). Simpson critiques the Canadian process of reconciliation for what it failed to bring to light and cautions Indigenous people away from seeking reconciliation with the state, explaining that "engagement with the system changes Indigenous Peoples more than it changes the system…[it is] a process of co-option and neutralization…that guts [Indigenous] resistance movements" (p. 24). First Nations scholars such as Battiste (2013), Corntassel (2012), Coulthard (2014), and Simpson (2004; 2014; 2016) call for Indigenous resurgence over reconciliation.

Simpson says that from a Nishnaabeg perspective, resurgence is "the rebuilding of Indigenous nations according to our own political, intellectual and cultural traditions" (2014, p. 13). It is a proactive movement aimed at strengthening Indigenous identity by restoring and revitalizing Indigenous languages and cultures, knowledge systems, and political structures that were attacked and suppressed by colonizers (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Simpson, 2004). Corntassel (2012) says that resurgence is enacted through culturally significant everyday practices such as prayer, ceremony, language, and honoring ancestors, practices which serve to reconnect Indigenous peoples with their heritage and restore a sense of community, or as Corntassel puts it, "peoplehood" (p. 89). Fundamentally, resurgence recenters Indigenous ways of knowing which locate knowledge in community, on the land, and through story (Corntassel, 2012; Simpson, 2014). Simpson tells us that "knowledge comes from the land through the relationships Indigenous Peoples develop and foster with the essential forces of nature. These relationships are encoded in the structure of Indigenous languages and Indigenous political and spiritual systems" (Simpson, 2004, p. 378). A resurgence of Indigenous cultures, knowledges,

and spiritualities, therefore, must happen in communities, on the land, in localized Indigenous languages; resurgence cannot happen in the context of colonial settler systems and institutions.

Without resurgence, reconciliation serves settler interests (Coulthard, 2014; Simpson, 2014). True reconciliation makes space for Indigenous resurgence and the restoration of Indigenous governance, cultures, languages and knowledge systems; it centers Indigenous agency and sovereignty. Our current institutions need to transform in order to create the space that Indigenous resurgence requires, only then will Indigenous and non-Indigenous people be able to come together on equal footing and begin to establish respectful relationships and find some semblance of true reconciliation, or perhaps better said, truly equitable and co-operative co-existence. The TRC recognizes the need for Indigenous resurgence, though it doesn't refer to it as such, when it says,

> as First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities access and revitalize their spirituality, cultures, languages, laws, and governance systems, and as non-Aboriginal Canadians increasingly come to understand Indigenous history within Canada, and to recognize and respect Indigenous approaches to establishing and maintaining respectful relationships, Canadians can work together to forge a new covenant of reconciliation (p. 17).

True reconciliation is extremely complex and is perhaps further complicated by the fact that it does not require the same work of all people; but rather, calls for different roles based on our respective positions. Indigenous people are responsible for resurgence within their own nations. Resurgence will likely look differently for different nations, but regardless of nation, it has to happen on Indigenous lands and within Indigenous communities and in Indigenous languages (Simpson, 2004). As settlers, our work is to learn about and own up to our colonial history and develop an understanding of how the systems and institutions that we benefit from and

participate in continue to be oppressive to Indigenous cultures and communities. It is our responsibility to pressure our governments and its institutions to relinquish land and power (Tuck & Yang, 2012) and to transform our systems in a way that allows real change to occur.

This chapter has provided a brief overview of colonial history in Canada, examined the inadequacy of the federal government's response to reconciliation, and described the increasing call from Indigenous scholars for Indigenous resurgence over reconciliation. The next chapter describes educational pathways for Indigenous students in Québec and considers the ways in which provincial government policies impede meaningful progress in Québec's education system.

Chapter 3: Education for Indigenous Students in Québec

In 2019, Québec premier, François Legault, said, "We can and we must improve our relationship and create conditions that permit Indigenous communities and the Inuit of Québec to flourish…In order to succeed, the Québec state has to absolutely avoid imposing solutions. The key word is respect" (Lalonde, 2023, para. 32). While Legault's rhetoric emphasizes respect, collaboration, and consultation with Indigenous communities to build a more inclusive society, provincial policies tend to contradict these ideals, confirming, as Gaudry & Lorenz (2018) have observed, that calls for reconciliation are frequently "more discursive than substantive" (p. 222). This chapter considers the state of education for Indigenous students in Quebec; it describes the educational pathways available to Indigenous students, traces the evolution of the CÉGEP system as one that is purported to have democratized education, and analyzes present-day actions and policies that reflect a gap between stated commitments to reconciliation and the realities of implementation.

Educational Pathways for Indigenous Students

Schooling in Communities in "Territories Under Agreement" and "Territories Not Under Agreement"

In Québec, Indigenous students have three options for primary and secondary schooling—they can attend the regular public-school system, they can attend schools in communities that are in territories under agreement, or they can attend schools in communities that are in territories not under agreement (AGQ, 2024).

Schools in communities in territories under agreement are a result of landmark land claim settlements that are considered the first modern treaties in Canada (Peters & White, 2009). In exchange for the use of Indigenous lands for hydro-electric projects, these settlements—the 1975

James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement (JBNQA) and the 1978 Northeastern Québec Agreement (NEQA)—provided, among other things, resources from the federal and provincial governments for the creation of Indigenous school boards (Turcotte, 2019). These include the Cree School Board; Kativik Ilisarniliriniq, an Inuit school board serving communities in Nunavik; and the Naskapi Education Committee which serves the Naskapi Nation in Northeastern Québec. Although these schools are considered part of the provincial system, they have—in theory, according to the agreement—the authority to provide culturally relevant curricula (White & Peters, 2009). This could include, for example, history courses from the communities' perspectives rather than the ministry's history of Canada and Québec course—the caveat being that the courses are approved by the ministry (D. Labelle, personal communication, June 4, 2025). These schools can also teach in their respective Indigenous languages; however, students are required to select either English or French as their "mother tongue" and pass the provincial language exit exam based on that selection (D. Labelle, personal communication, June 4, 2025). So, a student in Atikamekw—an Indigenous Nation about 160 km north of Montreal—who chooses French must take exams in français langue maternelle (which translates to French mother tongue) in order to graduate (D. Labelle, personal communication, June 4, 2025). According to the agreements, students who graduate from these institutions receive secondary school diplomas that are recognized in Québec (D. Labelle, personal communication, June 4, 2025).

Schools in communities in territories not under agreement are self-governing. In Quebec, the First Nations Education Council (FNEC) oversees the educational interests of eight First Nations' schools across 22 communities; all other schools in Indigenous communities are managed by the communities themselves. Schools in communities in territories not under

agreement are funded primarily by the federal government. Historically, this funding has been inconsistent with the needs and priorities of Indigenous communities (Government of Canada, 2023c). Until 2019, the amount of funding that these schools received was determined by a formula called the Band Operating Funding Formula (BOFF) which was developed in 1987 (AFN, 2025) and in effect until 2019. According to a 2016 report by the Assembly of First Nations, the BOFF, though still in effect, was severely outdated, ignoring "essential education components such as libraries, technology, First Nations language immersion, sports and recreation programs, [and] student data management systems" (AFN, 2016, p. 1). As a result, schools in communities were not able to procure the resources they needed to "develop on par with provincial schools" (Battiste, 2013, p. 168; also Drummond & Rosenbluth, 2013; Blatchford, 2016). According to a 2016 report from the CBC, "the funding divide between educational programming on reserves and in the provincial systems was as wide as $595 million in 2012-13" (Blatchford, 2016, para. 2).

In 2019, the BOFF was replaced by the Interim Funding Formula which was designed to "ensure base education funding is comparable to provincial systems across the country while First Nations negotiate Regional Education Agreements that are reflective of the diverse needs and circumstances of First Nations learners, schools, communities, and education organizations" (AFN, 2025). In 2022, FNEC—the Indigenous-led oversight committee representing eight First Nations' educational interests across Quebec—reached a new agreement with the federal government for $1.1 billion in funding over five years to improve education services in the 22 communities that FNEC serves. Planned improvements include the offering of "a culturally appropriate curriculum, improved funding for school transportation, recruitment and retention of more than 600 teachers and specialized resources, improved student success, and increased

student retention and high school graduation rates" (Indigenous Services Canada, 2022, para. 4). So far, there has been no publicly available reporting on how this funding has been used or the impact that it has had.

Schools in communities in territories not under agreement can define their own curriculum. They have the option of adhering to the requirements of Québec's public school system but it is at their discretion. These schools can choose to teach in their respective mother tongues (White & Peters, 2009) and have the option of deciding whether to include English or French in the curriculum. Students who attend these schools are not required to take an English or French exit exam and their diplomas are not recognized by the provincial government, meaning they are not eligible to apply for college or university through the usual mechanisms. To accommodate these students, some post-secondary schools in Québec provide alternative pathways. In a personal communication, Diane Labelle explained that some colleges in the English-language network have made accommodations for students whose secondary school diplomas do not reflect the courses required by the government, such as history and language courses. Instead of following the typical process of applying through SRAM (Service de régional d'admission du Montréal/Montreal Regional Admissions Service), these students are encouraged to apply directly to the colleges where their applications will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Similarly, some universities in Québec including Concordia and McGill offer special application processes and bridging programs to Indigenous students who do not meet the standard requirements (Concordia University, n.d.; McGill University, 2025a). While such workarounds are helpful to students who do not have provincially sanctioned secondary school diplomas, implementing such alternative processes is at the discretion of individual institutions, meaning these alternatives are not necessarily guaranteed to every student every year and largely

depend on the people in the admissions offices (D. Labelle, personal communication, June 4, 2025).

Post-Secondary Options

When it comes to post-secondary education in Québec, there are fewer options for Indigenous students to study in their home communities. In recent years some post-secondary institutions have started to offer distance education options, but program offerings are limited.

There is one Indigenous CÉGEP in Québec called Kiuna College located in the Abenaki First Nations community of Odanak. Kiuna is run by the First Nations Education Council (FNEC) and works in collaboration with two CÉGEPs in Québec's public system—Dawson College and CÉGEP de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue—to meet the criteria of Québec's Ministry of Education. Graduates from Kiuna receive Québec's Diploma of College Studies while still meeting the educational goals of local First Nations communities. Kiuna is the only First Nations-led post-secondary educational institution in Québec; it is a small school with a limited selection of programs and is open to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

Aside from Kiuna, students who want to pursue post-secondary education in Québec must move into the regular provincial system which means moving away from their home communities, adapting to new cultural environments, and studying in languages other than their mother tongues (Smith, 2025). In these new institutional environments, students are confronted with "ongoing structural challenges, racism and inequity [which has] significant impacts on mental health and well-being (Smith et al., 2022) and ultimately retention and graduation rates" (Smith, 2025, p. 3). Although some efforts have been made to meet the needs of Indigenous students over the years, the post-secondary system in Québec has, indeed, been criticized for its failure to adequately support Indigenous students (Ratel et al., 2021). According to a report by

Mareschal & Denault, “most CÉGEPs are in their infancy in implementing support policies and measures tailored to Indigenous students” (as cited in Ratel et al., 2021, p. 73).

The following section takes a closer look at some of the government policies that have shaped certain aspects Québec’s CÉGEP system, illustrating how, despite significant systemic reforms and its aim of democratizing education, the system continues to lack support and relevance for many Indigenous students (AGQ, 2024; Smith, 2021).

Unequal Access to Québec’s CÉGEP System

The CÉGEP system is widely credited with the achievement of democratizing education in Québec. However, an historical examination of the creation of the CÉGEP system reveals that while reforms addressed the barriers that poor and rural populations faced, the needs of Indigenous communities were not considered.

CÉGEPs were first established in the late 1960s as part of the sweeping reforms that reshaped Québec during the Quiet Revolution. Prior to these reforms, Québec’s public education system was, by many accounts, abysmal (CBC, 2001; Dupuis, 2024). Teachers were clergymen and women who lacked pedagogical training, the curriculum was outdated, corporal punishment was still in effect, and dropout rates in Québec were the highest in the country (CBC, 2001; Dupuis, 2024). Access to university was limited to the very few who could afford to attend elite private schools that served a small, primarily English-speaking upper class (CBC, 2001).

In response to these systemic issues, Québec’s new liberal government, under the leadership of Premier Jean Lesage, created the 1961 *Royal Commission of Inquiry on Education in the Province of Québec*, colloquially known as the *Parent Commission* after the lead commissioner. Following a multi-year investigation, the commission released recommendations

that led to a massive overhaul of the province's education system. An important part of that overhaul was the creation of the CÉGEP system in 1967.

The new system extended the opportunity of higher education to poor and rural populations by eliminating tuition fees and improving geographic accessibility (FNEEQ, 2017, p. 6; Lessard & Brochu, 2020). Groups who had previously been excluded from higher education—particularly women, francophones, and people living in rural areas—were newly encouraged to pursue post-secondary studies (Ratel, 2021). "The commissioners believed education to be an essential public resource for social, cultural and human development on both the individual and collective level…the Commission considered education a process by which a society shapes the next generation" (Dupuis, 2024). The three stated aims of a CÉGEP education emphasize the belief that education is a key factor in shaping human development and society at large; these aims include: educating students to live responsibly in society; helping students integrate cultural knowledge into their studies; and helping students master language as a tool for thought, communication, and openness to the world. These aims are part of every CÉGEP program in the system.

Today, there are 48 schools in the public network: 43 French-language schools and five English-language schools (Fédération des CÉGEPs). CÉGEPs, like all other educational institutions in Canada, fall under the jurisdiction of the provincial government (MELS, 2006) and are overseen by the Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur (Minister of Higher Education).

While the Parent Commission was actively shaping the future of education in Québec throughout the 1960s, Indian residential schools were still in operation. The last residential school in the province, Pointe Bleue, did not close until 1991 (NCTR, 2025). Although the government clearly recognized and addressed the need for educational reform in the province,

their efforts did not extend to the needs of Indigenous communities. The democratization of education in Québec significantly reduced disparities between non-Indigenous French and English students, but failed to include the needs and realities of Indigenous students (Ratel et al., 2021).

Structural and Legislative Barriers to Indigenous Inclusion in Québec's Education System

Competency 15: Value and Promote Indigenous knowledge, worldviews, cultures, and history

In 2020, the First Nations Education Council (FNEC), the Institut Tshakapesh, and the Centre de développement de la formation et de la main-d'oeuvre Huron Wendat released a new teacher training and professional development competency that they called Competency 15.

> Competency 15 is an exhortation to the province of Québec to fulfill its duty, and to integrate the recommendations issued by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, by the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls National Inquiry and by the Viens Commission, not only for education, but in all areas affected by its calls to action (FNEC, 2020, p. 1).

The preamble to the competency explains that the "add and stir approach" (p. 1) that has been adopted by Québec's school system will not suffice, arguing that knowledge of Indigenous cultures and realities and the needs of reconciliation should be at the center of professional development for all teachers. Competency 15 was developed in order "to guide practicing teachers on what…Indigenous peoples, expect of them" (p. 1); its key elements are:

- Create respectful and welcoming learning environments that connect and reflect the holistic lifelong vision of education.
- Actively engage in cultural security practices including cultural consciousness, awareness and competence.

- Value Indigenous culture, language, land and knowledge in the classroom and in relations with families and the community.
- Provide culturally responsive Indigenous instruction and assessment.
- Develop respectful professional relationships with Indigenous learners, parents and community.
- Incorporate Indigenous ways of learning and teaching in the classroom and of those on the land.
- Recognize that each learner is part of a greater and wider family and community that contribute to his/her lifelong learning journey.
- Participate in opportunities that involve establishing connections with students, colleagues, parents, the community and its members as well as connections to place.
- Know how to select authentic material to address Indigenous culture and history.
- Engage in a continuous learning process and see yourself as a learner, not an expert (p. 2).

Competency 15 was released on November 24, 2020. As of the time of this writing, it has not been incorporated into the Ministry's *Reference Framework for the Professional Competencies for Teachers* which was published in 2021. The framework only marginally addresses the role of education in reconciliation and the needs of Indigenous students at the beginning of the document in a short paragraph titled "Integration of Indigenous perspectives into teaching." The paragraph acknowledges the existence of Indigenous Peoples in Québec, it mentions the TRC, and ends with the statement, "The TRC report noted that teachers play an indispensable role in the process of reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples and encouraged them to prioritize the strengthening of intercultural understanding, empathy and mutual respect" (p.

14). Despite the mention of the TRC and the importance of the teacher's role in the process of education, the framework does not include a competency that specifically addresses the role of education in reconciliation.

There has been no official response to Competency 15 by the government and it has received very little attention in the media and academic writing. The timing of its launch in November 2020—mid-pandemic, months after the death of Joyce Echaquan, around the time that unmarked graves were beginning to be discovered across the country, and shortly before the Québec government tabled Bill 96—meant that it was put on the back burner by all (D. Labelle, personal communication, June 7, 2025).

The work of implementing Competency 15 in teacher education has been left to the discretion of the universities. The University of Québec at Abitibi-Temiscamingue is working in consultation with a pedagogical advisory group, made up of Indigenous and non-Indigenous members, to develop a course on Indigenous approaches to learning (D. Labelle, personal communication, July 7, 2025) and McGill University's Faculty of Education has developed an initiative in collaboration with Indigenous educators and scholars called *Walking Alongside*. The McGill project, which has received funding form the provincial government, specifies that its aim is "to act on Competency 15—to highlight Indigenous knowledge, worldviews and approaches, and to build meaningful, respectful relationships with the original peoples and territory where [teachers] live and work" (McGill, 2025). It explains that in "walking alongside," teachers will go through an ongoing process of learning which includes understanding one's own positionality and role as a teacher; forging relationships with the land and people of the territories of Québec; developing knowledge of history, context, and contemporary realities; and developing a practice that puts these things into action (McGill, 2025).

Although the Ministry has provided funding to the McGill initiative, it has, otherwise, done little to demonstrate accountability to the clear and repeated calls from Indigenous communities and national and provincial commissions to prioritize reconciliation in education. Québec's framework for professional competencies for teachers was published in 2021—just one year after FNEC introduced Competency 15 and two years after the release of the Viens Commission's Calls to Action in Québec and the Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The teacher framework does not include Competency 15, nor does it reference these recent calls, and it only marginally acknowledges Indigenous students and communities, all of which point to a reluctance on the province's behalf to take definitive action to include Indigenous voices in shaping education in the province.

Law 14 (Bill 96): An Act Representing French, the Official and Common Language of Québec

French is the only official language in Québec. Under the province's Charter of the French language, primary and secondary students are required to attend school in French. An exception is made for students who have already completed the majority of their primary or secondary education in English in Canada as well as for students who have an immediate family member (parent or sibling) who completed the majority of their education in English in Canada. These students, upon application to the Ministry of Education, can receive a Certificate of English Eligibility (COE) that allows them to go to primary and secondary school in English in Québec. Until recently, there were no such eligibility requirements for post-secondary education. Students have, historically, had the option to choose whether they pursue post-secondary studies in Québec's English or French CÉGEPs and universities. Although students still have a choice, the recent legislation of Law 14 by the Québec government imposes new limitations for students

who are not fluent in French, including many Indigenous students, for whom French is often neither a first or even second language.

Québec's Law 14 came into effect in September 2023. The law was created to "affirm that the only official language of Québec is French…[and]…that French is the common language of the Québec nation" (ANQ, 2022, p. 2). In addition to the many implications of the law in various sectors across the province, it also affects students who attend English CÉGEPs. The law states that in addition to the two French as a second language courses that were already required, all students in the English-language network must successfully complete three additional French courses for a total of five. For students who do not have a Certificate of English Eligibility, these courses have to be program courses that are taught in French not French as a second language courses; they must also pass a French exit exam called the *Épreuve uniforme de français* (EUF) in order to graduate. The EUF is a four-and-a-half-hour exam which requires students to write a 900-word literary analysis. Even with the three preparatory classes that students will be required to take, for those not fluent in French, this exam and the successful completion of three French program courses will present significant hurdles to graduation.

There are about 300 Indigenous students in Québec's English CÉGEP system (Stevenson, 2024). For many, the most commonly spoken non-Indigenous language is English not French (Saint-Arnaud, 2023). For these students, Law 14 introduces yet another barrier to post-secondary education and reflects a disregard for the rights and realities of Indigenous Peoples. Under international human rights law, Indigenous Peoples have the right to education in their own languages. As Métis educator, scholar, and filmmaker Michelle Smith (2025) points out, "Article 13 of UNDRIP states that 'Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their languages…' and 'States shall take effective measures to

ensure that these rights are protected'" (p. 5). Implementing a law that mandates French proficiency while not taking measures to ensure that Indigenous students have access to education in their own languages, is another way in which the government has remained unresponsive to the educational rights and realities of Indigenous peoples. The preservation of the French language and culture is an extremely important issue in Québec, but that same level of import is not extended to Indigenous languages and cultures.

Because of the new law, many Indigenous students are now considering leaving the province—which means moving further away from their home communities—in order to pursue post-secondary education in English (Dawson College, n.d.). In a widely circulated video produced by Dawson College, Indigenous students from the English CÉGEPs spoke about the issues that Law 14 presents for them. A Cree student who attends John Abbott College explained,

> Québec is my home too. I've lived here my whole life. I haven't really traveled to Ontario much, maybe twice and I'm moving there this fall, but Québec is my home. I would like them to acknowledge that it is our home too and we deserve freedom of choice, and we deserve to stay in Québec (Dawson College, n.d., 14:58).

Others point to the way in which this new legislation is a continuation of colonial practices, making links to historic policies and practices of assimilation. As another Cree student from John Abbott said,

> There is a historical precedent on language being forced onto our people, which, I think that alone is enough reason to see why this might be an issue. I don't think there's going to be a repeat of residential schools, but the idea of having a language forced on you and not having any say is concerning to say the least" (1:42).

A Kanien'kehà:ka student from Champlain College added, "I have to put my own language aside just because of a new law, and now I have to respect their language when they never respected mine, ever." (6:10).

In 2022, the Québec government refused a request from First Nations and Inuit communities to be exempt from the law, claiming that Law 14—or Bill 96 as it was known at the time—was not pertinent to the issue of the preservation of Indigenous languages and cultures (Bell, 2022). In April 2023, the Assembly of First Nations Québec-Labrador (AFNQL) and FNEC requested a judicial review of the legislation by the Québec Superior Court, arguing that "the provisions in question reinforce, unjustifiably perpetuate, and intensify existing disparities in education, in addition to hindering efforts to reclaim, preserve, and revitalize First Nations languages" (AFNQL, 2023, para. 4). A month later, the province announced partial exemptions for Indigenous students from the law. First Nations leaders said they were not adequately consulted in decisions regarding the exemption and declined to comment on it before having a chance to analyze it (Nerestant, 2023). The government's exemption proposes to apply the same rules to Indigenous students that currently apply to English eligibility certificate holders, that is, Indigenous students, who have lived in community and have at least one year of schooling in either English or an Indigenous language, would be exempt from writing the French exit exam but would still be required to take and pass five French language courses that could be courses in French as a second language (Lalonde, 2023). This partial exemption is still problematic. Because of the requirements of Law 14, programs in the English CÉGEPs have had to implement program courses in French. This means that even students who are exempt from taking the EUF and are allowed to take French as a second language courses instead of program courses in French might still have to take program courses in French in order to graduate. This might be the

case in smaller programs and CÉGEPs where a program is too small to offer more than one section of a course and that section is in French.

Francesca Roy, a French teacher from Dawson College, explained in an interview with the Montreal Gazette, that students from places like nearby Kahnawà:ke are simply not exposed to French enough to become fluent, she said “these are really big obstacles. This is not motivating.” (Lalonde, 2023, para 7). The director of Dawson College, Diane Gauvin, indicating that the proposed exemption does not go far enough, commented that, “many of these students will not be able to come to CÉGEP at all, because there is no way they will graduate…they might go to Ontario or they might simply not go to higher education at all” (Lalonde, 2023, para 6). John McMahon, former general director at Vanier college, said, “This has not been thought out…It’s another example of lack of consultation and lack of understanding of what needs to happen on the ground” (Lalonde, 2023, para 19). In a personal communication on June 4, 2025, Diane Labelle explained that the ministry has still not defined the exemptions, “there is a promise to consider it,” Diane said. More recently, some of the English-language colleges have advocated to have two of the five required French courses replaced by two Indigenous language courses. The ministry has apparently accepted this request (D. Labelle, personal communication, June 4, 2025) though they have not yet published any publicly available documentation to this effect.

Challenges in Meeting the Needs of Indigenous Students

A November 2024 report by Québec’s Auditor General titled *The Educational Success of Indigenous Students*, reported that 31.4% of Indigenous students aged 25 to 34 in Québec have not obtained a secondary school certificate or diploma compared to only 9.3% of non-Indigenous students in the same age group in the province (AGQ, 2024). Across Canada, the rate of

Indigenous students aged 25 to 34 without a secondary school diploma is 18.9%, meaning Québec's rate of high school non-completion among Indigenous students is, by far, the highest in the country (AGQ, 2024). The Auditor General's report also found that although Québec's Ministry of Education has acknowledged a gap in Indigenous student success rates in its recent action plans, there "are no objectives or targets…[and]...few tangible actions" to address Indigenous student success in the school system (AGQ, 2024). The report attributes any positive initiatives that have been implemented to local efforts carried out by "dedicated individuals" (p. 15), a finding that echoes Cicek et al. 's (2021) research which explains that the most transformative efforts occur at the grassroots level.

The Auditor General's report points to three key issues that present problems for Indigenous students—a lack of support when students transfer from schools in their communities to the provincial system, including a lack of support for the improvement of French language skills when entering the French system; a lack of staff and teachers who have the knowledge and understanding to ensure "a safe and culturally relevant learning environment for Indigenous students" (AGQ, 2024, p. 28); and ineffective methods of funding that do not adequately take the needs of schools into account and that are either "not recurring [or are] confirmed late" (p. 33), making it difficult to implement long-term sustainable actions.

The Auditor General's findings are underscored by stories from Indigenous students about their lived experiences in Québec's postsecondary education system. These stories were documented in a SSHRC supported research project that was conducted from 2016 to 2021 called *The First People's Postsecondary Storytelling Exchange* (FPPSE), and offer valuable insight into the challenges that Indigenous students face in Québec's postsecondary system. Participants—who in the report are referred to as storytellers—described the difficulty of leaving

their home communities to pursue educational opportunities in distant locations. Storytellers shared experiences of homesickness, loneliness, and isolation alongside academic challenges such as “a lack of academic preparedness, including language skills, reading, writing, [and] grammar” (Smith, 2024, p. 17). They described tensions between their traditional ways of knowing and being and the expectations imposed by the non-Indigenous institutions they attended. They encountered frequent racism and emphasized a “need for training of non-native teachers and students on historic and ongoing colonization” (p. 17). Storytellers also expressed a desire for more Indigenous content and pedagogy, they voiced concerns about losing their languages and cultural connections, and indicated a desire to “learn the best from both worlds” (FPPSE, 2025).

The provincial government has demonstrated a longstanding disregard for the educational needs and rights of Indigenous students in Québec, a pattern that was evident in the development of the CÉGEP system and continues into present-day with the imposition of policies and actions that fail to meaningfully and respectfully recognize the rightful place of Indigenous knowledges, cultures, and languages, as well as students and communities in education in Québec. The cursory mention of Indigenous education in Québec’s teacher competency framework, the implementation of Law 14 and the development of a proposed exemption without consultation with Indigenous Nations both exemplify this failure. Recent findings from Québec’s Auditor General further highlight serious and persistent shortcomings in primary and secondary education for Indigenous students in Québec. These shortcomings are echoed in stories by Indigenous students about their experiences in the provincial education system. Despite decades of calls to action aimed at improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students, government

responses have been slow, inadequate, and sometimes entirely absent, putting into doubt the sincerity of the province's commitment to reconciliation.

Chapter 4: Indigenous Perspectives on the Transformation of our Educational System

Education is the key to reconciliation.
-Murray Sinclair, as cited in Waters, 2015

The late Honourable Justice Murray Sinclair who chaired the Truth and Reconciliation Commission said in an interview just before the release of the TRC's final report, "Education is what got us into this mess—the use of education at least in terms of residential schools—but education is the key to reconciliation" (as cited in Waters, 2015). Our educational institutions can play a pivotal role in a process of meaningful reconciliation—we can re-envision them to "[reach] beyond the two distinct systems of [Indigenous and non-Indigenous] knowledge to create fair and just educational systems and experiences" (Battiste, 2013, p. 100) for all. This chapter explores reconciliation in education from the perspective of Indigenous scholars. It centers the work of Mi'kmaw scholar and educator Marie Battiste (2013) who proposes an ethical trans-systemic education system as a way forward. Battiste's work builds on that of Cree professor Willie Ermine (2007) who proposes the concept of an ethical space of engagement which is similar to Bartlett et al.'s (2012) vision of two-eyed seeing. This chapter then describes the processes of *unlearning, making space,* and *shared governance* as ways of working towards this new kind of educational space.

The TRC's Calls to Action address education in both the *Legacy* and *Reconciliation* sections of the document. In the *Legacy* section, education is addressed in CTAs 6 to 10. These CTAs call for an elimination of educational achievement gaps and discrepancies in funding as well as the full participation of Indigenous people in drafting new "Aboriginal education legislation" (TRC, 2015b, p. 1-2). In the *Reconciliation* section, education is addressed in CTAs

62 to 65 (TRC, 2015b, p.7). CTAs 62 and 63 focus specifically on revising curricula and teaching methods in K-12 and post-secondary settings; they call for an integration of Indigenous histories and contributions to knowledge into the curriculum, for teacher training to implement revised Indigenized curricula, to incorporate Indigenous teaching methods, and to build "student capacity for understanding, empathy, and mutual respect" (TRC, 2015b, p.7).

Initially, these CTAs elicited feelings of enthusiasm and optimism among educators, "universities vowed to undertake a concerted program of reconciliation, to correct the historical misuse of education in Canadian colonial endeavours…the new dynamic brought about by the TRC helped expand discussions of Indigenization from scholarly debate into administrative dialogue" (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018, p. 221-222). Despite this initial enthusiasm, progress on the implementation of the CTAs related to education has been slow. The Yellowhead Institute's 2023 status update reports that all of the education-related CTAs are incomplete.

The reality is that most educators in the Canadian education system are non-Indigenous and have largely been educated within the very system that they are now charged with changing—a colonial system that neglects the full truth of the history between European colonizers and Indigenous Peoples (Miles, 2018). Many educators "have limited understanding of the impacts of Canadian colonialism" (Csontos, 2019, p. 151) and have not necessarily spent time contending with the ways in which our present-day educational institutions have been shaped by and perpetuate colonialism, nor have most considered the ways in which they themselves are implicated in and have benefited from colonialism. Additionally, the majority of teachers lack the training, resources, and institutional support that is necessary to appropriately integrate Indigenous knowledges and pedagogies into their curriculum (Battiste, 2013; Csontos, 2019; MacMath & Hall, 2018; Miles, 2018; Watt, 2019). At both the classroom and

administrative levels, there is reluctance, uncertainty, and fear when it comes to transforming the system (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Cicek et al., 2021). Educators do not know what a new system looks like, how to get there, or where to begin. The next section turns to the work of Indigenous scholars to discuss a theoretical framework for a transformed educational system and a conceptual framework that outlines what is required to put it in place.

A Theoretical Framework for a Transformed Education System

A number of Indigenous scholars have described a new kind of educational space, one that doesn't exist yet, one in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledges can co-exist and work together. Marie Battiste (2013) calls it an "ethical trans-systemic education system." Within this system, she imagines "a regeneration of new relationships among and between knowledge systems, as scholars competent in both knowledge systems seek to unite and reconcile them" (p. 100). Battiste's concept builds on Willie Ermine's work in the legal system. Ermine (2008) describes an "ethical space of engagement," which, he says, is a "theoretical space…between the Indigenous and Western thought worlds" (p. 194), it is "a neutral zone between entities…a venue to step out of our allegiances, to detach from the cages of our mental worlds and assume a position where human-to-human dialogue can occur" (p. 202). Bartlett et al. (2012) present a similar idea of "weaving curricula" (p. 332) with the concept of Two-Eyed Seeing, which, they explain,

> is the gift of multiple perspectives…it refers to learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of Western knowledges and ways of knowing, and to using both these eyes together, for the benefit of all (p. 335).

The concept of a space between two thought worlds, as Ermine describes it, is useful. He explains that it is the differences between thought worlds that defines the space in between—like a Venn diagram. These differences are not just superficial such as dress or appearance—they are more profound; they are a result of descending from different histories, communicating in different languages, living daily life in different cultures, and embodying different identities. Language, for example, is not only about the words that we use to say things to one another, language shapes how we perceive and interact with the world around us. Knowledge is embedded in language and the knowledge that we derive from and through language influences our worldviews (Battiste, 2013). The profound differences in our worldviews, Ermine tells us, are not immediately obvious or accessible to one another, yet they have a significant impact on how we come together and interact. Ermine refers to these profound differences in worldviews as a "deeper level force, the underflow-become-influential, the enfolded dimension" (p. 195).

In order for two thought worlds that encompass different worldviews, different ways of knowing, and different ways of being to come together "for the benefit of all" (Bartlett et al., 2012), there has to be an acknowledgement, acceptance, appreciation of, and respect for those differences; that is, the "underflow-become-influential" needs to be recognized, shared, respected, and talked about. When we come together in this way, we create an *ethical space of engagement* (Ermine, 2007), and in doing so, we lay the groundwork for Battiste's (2013) *ethical trans-systemic education system*, and, at the same time, we allow for the possibility of Bartlett et al.'s (2012) concept of *Two-Eyed Seeing*. When this space is invoked, Ermine says it is an "electrifying space" (p. 197). "It is in this space that Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples can begin to truthfully speak to the predicaments and issues that face them and the standards they

speak for" (Battiste, 2013, p. 105). This space would be a decolonized space, a space in which true reconciliation can occur.

This vision of a transformed educational system—one that accommodates both Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of knowing and being, that allows different thought worlds to come together as equally valid and relevant, one in which the strengths of each thought world is recognized—is still "aspirational" (Battiste, 2013, p. 69). The attitudes, tactics, events, and sheer violence of European colonialism has disrupted all possibility of this kind of space. We have not created a balanced foundation upon which Indigenous and non-Indigenous thought worlds can come together. Creating an educational space in which this is possible first requires an Indigenous resurgence (Battiste, 2013; Corntassel, 2012; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018).

In their exploration of Indigenous resurgence in the context of post-secondary institutions, Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) articulate an important distinction between current practices in decolonization work and the concept of Indigenous resurgence. While decolonization efforts tend to focus on transforming colonial institutions, resurgence is fundamentally about revitalizing Indigenous cultures, knowledge systems, and political structures (p.224). Resurgence recenters Indigenous ways of knowing which locate knowledge in community, on the land, and through story (Corntassel, 2012; Simpson, 2014). In the context of education, Indigenous resurgence means centering Indigenous knowledges and experiences (Csontos, 2018) which are rooted in Indigenous communities, and that it is the communities, from which the knowledge comes, that are best positioned to govern access and transmission of that knowledge (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). Our current educational systems lack the structural capacity and resources—personnel, time, funding, and curricular goals—to meaningfully support Indigenous resurgence in education (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018).

Indigenous scholars argue that the process of creating educational spaces that support resurgence is threefold. First, it requires a process of *unlearning* that challenges Eurocentric indoctrination (Allard-Gray, 2024; Battiste, 2013). Second, it requires *making space* in education for members of Indigenous communities to express and share Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being in the world (Allard-Gray, 2024). Finally, effective resurgence involves the development of systems of *shared governance* to ensure that Indigenous voices are not only heard but actively involved in shaping the educational landscape.

Unlearning (Changing Hearts and Minds)

Before we can begin to lay the groundwork for an educational space in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews can come together, we—as a society and in our educational institutions—need to do some significant back-pedaling. Our system has worked to actively suppress Indigenous languages, cultures, and ways of knowing and being with the goal of eradication. As a result, we are left with an education system that is predicated on a "monopoly of Eurocentric knowledges, assumptions, and methodologies" (Battiste, 2013, p. 103). This monopoly of knowledge is so enmeshed that it is barely, if at all, visible to those circulating within the system (Ermine, 2007; Kuokkanen, 2008, p.1). "Teachers themselves are not aware that they are normalizing views that are dominant but only one part of the picture" (Darder, 2015, p. 49). Most of us who were educated in this colonial system did not realize that what we learned in school was based on just one of many ways of understanding and interacting with the world around us. We accepted what we learned as universally true. If we were aware of or taught about other ways of knowing and being in the world, these were likely situated as "other" and not considered truly relevant or worth taking seriously (Battiste, 2013, p.103; Ermine, 2007, p. 199). "Difference gets read as aberrations from the normative Eurocentric cultural

traditions…[it] marks Indigenous peoples as largely historical and local, but not contemporary and global…thus teachers and institutions can easily ignore Indigenous knowledge, peoples, and histories" (Battiste, 2013, p. 103).

Ermine refers to the monopoly of the Eurocentric thought world as a "brick wall of a deeply embedded belief and practice of Western universality…a singular world consciousness, a monoculture with a claim to one model of humanity and one model of society" (p. 198). Battiste (2013) calls it "cognitive imperialism" (p. 26); she says "it is about white-washing the mind as a result of forced assimilation, English education, Eurocentric humanities and sciences, and living in a Eurocentric context complete with media, books, laws, and values" (p. 26). Cognitive imperialism invalidates other ways of knowing and being and marginalizes those who do not conform to the same mindset. It lays the foundation for racism and prejudice in our schools and our society. If we are to undo this monolith of "cognitive imperialism" in order to move towards a system that recognizes, respects, and is capable of engaging with other models of thinking, doing, and being, educators and students alike have to go through a process of *unlearning*.

Unlearning, then, "is a process of unpacking…powerful Eurocentric assumptions of education…narratives of race and difference in curriculum and pedagogy" (Battiste, 2013, p. 107). It involves learning about colonial history and reflecting critically on the ways in which settler systems, institutions, and ideologies have and continue to shape education and society. As we engage in a process of unlearning, "the colossal unseen dimension that influences Indigenous-Western relations" (Ermine, 2007, p. 198) will begin to be revealed. Unlearning allows us to see our own indoctrination, understand how our systems work to indoctrinate us, and recognize the ways in which we are implicated in and benefit from the colonial project. Unlearning allows us to make space for other ways of knowing and being and enables us to "put

our values and actions and knowledges in front of us, like an object, for examination and discussion" (Bartlett et al., 2012, p. 340). It is a process that students, faculty, and administration should all participate in. It is the first step in developing an educational system in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous thought worlds can come together.

Making Space (Opening Hearts and Minds)

If unlearning involves deconstructing how colonizers and colonial systems have subjugated Indigenous Peoples, cultures, languages, and knowledges to advance the Eurocentric thought world and its agenda, then making space is about decentering the Eurocentric thought world—literally, within our educational institutions through the active participation of Indigenous communities, educators, knowledge keepers, and Elders—as well as in the minds of non-Indigenous educators and students (Allard-Gray, 2024; Battiste, 2013). This shift is essential to creating educational spaces in which one thought world does not dominate another. As Battiste (2013) reminds us, a "trans-systemic education system" is about "bringing two diverse knowledge systems together" (p. 103), it requires "a regeneration of new relationships among and between knowledge systems, which needs scholars competent in both knowledge systems to converge and reconcile these and other knowledges, ways of knowing, and systems" (p. 103).

The common approach to including Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing currently relies on what Battiste (2013) calls an "additive approach" (p. 6). This approach, Kuokkanen explains, aims to make the academy more "hospitable and relevant" (2008, p. 1) to Indigenous students, staff, and faculty but fails to contend with the main issue of cognitive imperialism. Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) describe the additive approach as "Indigenous inclusion," explaining that it encompasses a range of recruitment and retention strategies such as targeted outreach campaigns, transition programs that help ease student integration, scholarships

and awards to help students overcome financial barriers, and special support services to address Indigenous students' needs (Cicek et al., 2021). The additive approach also involves the inclusion of Indigenous content and pedagogical methods into the curriculum which is achieved through the creation of culturally responsive education for Indigenous students such as departments or programs of study that are dedicated to Indigenous or Native Studies, through specialized teacher programs for non-Indigenous teachers (Kuokkanen, 2008, p. 1), and measures such as "Indigenous course requirements (ICRs)" (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018, p. 223) which mandate the incorporation of Indigenous content in courses that all students are required to complete. The additive approach is a common approach to reconciliation in Canadian post-secondary institutions and is often the only approach in place (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018).

Research suggests that these initiatives have positively impacted Indigenous students, particularly in terms of completion and retention rates (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018, p. 220); however, as Battiste (2013) and Kuokkanen (2008) point out, they are often positioned on the margins of institutions, thereby—and often unintentionally—reinforcing the narrative that the Eurocentric worldview is the one that really matters. Stein (2020) and Ahmed (2012) elaborate on Kuokkanen's work, explaining that inclusion policies reinforce a dynamic that favours the settler thought world over the Indigenous thought world by framing "those who are 'being included' [as] objects of difference that are being invited into the institution by those who retain the power to make—or rescind, or deny—that invitation" (Stein, 2020, p. 161). Ahmed explains that, "to be welcomed is to be positioned as the one who is not at home" (2020, p. 43). This framing perpetuates the false settler narrative that Indigenous Peoples are guests on settler lands and in settler institutions when it is settlers and settler institutions who are guests on Indigenous lands (Stein, 2020).

The additive approach also tends to position Indigenous students as needing "special assistance" (Kuokkanen, 2008, p. 1) in order to succeed in the academic world. There is, under these circumstances, an often unspoken expectation that "Indigenous students, faculty, and staff…adapt to the intellectual worldview, teaching, and research styles of the academy" (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018, p. 220). In this scenario, Indigenous members of the academic community are invited to join but are expected to "[leave] their ontological and epistemological assumptions and perceptions at the gates of the university" (Kuokkanen, 2008, p. 2). When Indigenous epistemes are allowed to enter the academy, they are relegated to specific—and often marginal—spaces within the institution, while the system as a whole continues to operate according to settler structures and approaches (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). Indigenous people are invited to join and are offered special services on the condition that they capitulate to the thought world of the settler educational system. As such, inclusion or additive strategies can bear a strong resemblance to assimilation.

In order to truly make space in education, we need to be open to, curious about, and receptive to other ways of knowing and being; we have to decenter our own knowledge and ways of knowing and be open to others (Allard-Gray, 2024; Bartlett et al.,2012). An important aspect of making space, then, is about recognizing that Indigenous and non-Indigenous thought worlds are fundamentally different and being receptive to those differences. Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall who coined the term "Two-Eyed Seeing" explains how the concept relies on a process of making space:

> Two-Eyed Seeing adamantly, respectfully, and passionately asks that we bring together our different ways of knowing to motivate people, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike, to use all our understandings so we can leave the world a better place…The advantage to

> Two-Eyed Seeing is that you are always fine tuning your mind into different places at once, you are always looking for another perspective and better way of doing things (Bartlett et al., 2012, p. 336).

Important to the act of making space is recognizing that Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge systems have different priorities, goals, and objectives (Bartlett et al., 2012; Ermine, 1995, Simpson, 2014). Ermine's comparison of Indigenous and non-Indigenous approaches to knowledge production is helpful in understanding some of the ways in which they differ:

> The year 1492 marked the first meeting of two disparate world-views, each on its own uncharted course of exploration and discovery for purposeful knowledge. The encounter featured two diametric trajectories into the realm of knowledge. One was bound for an uncharted destination in outer space, the physical, and the other was on a delicate path into inner space, the metaphysical (1995, p. 101).

While the Western approach, according to Ermine, was to move outward in order to gather physical evidence and information about the context that we find ourselves in, the Indigenous approach was to move inward, into "that universe of being within each person that is synonymous with the soul, the spirit, the self, or the being" (p. 104). Bartlett et al. (2012) illustrate this dichotomous approach to knowledge production—outward versus inward or physical versus spiritual—using an image of a medicinal plant with four concentric circles. From outermost to innermost, the circles represent "physical knowledge of the medicine, personal connection to the medicine, respect for the medicine, and sacred nature of the medicine" (p. 336). Bartlett et al. explain that Western science and Indigenous knowledges both recognize and agree upon the properties of the outermost circle, that is, the physical or empirical properties of the plant. As the circles move inward, however, knowledge of the plant becomes more personal

and nuanced. “The innermost circle,” they explain, “wherein sacred knowledge resides, can only truly be understood within the language of the particular aboriginal or indigenous peoples of the area; it is not possible to translate this knowledge into another language” (p.336). In this example, “sacred” or spiritual knowledge of the plant is so deeply interconnected with language and place that it is not even translatable. Someone coming from a Western tradition of knowledge, particularly if they have not had access to the language or community from which the knowledge comes, cannot access that innermost circle.

Making space in education involves more than simply accommodating Indigenous students and including Indigenous knowledges and pedagogies within a settler framework; it is about repositioning intellectual frameworks—that is, moving the settler framework aside to make space to bring Indigenous frameworks towards the center. Ultimately, it will require a fundamental transformation of our institutions and the structures that govern them (Battiste, 2013, p. 99).

Systems of Shared Governance (Respecting One Another’s Hearts and Minds)

Our educational system and its organizational structures would need to undergo fundamental transformations to maintain an ethical trans-systemic educational space. A respondent to a survey conducted by Gaudry & Lorenz (2018) envisioned “a dual university…[that is] administratively autonomous and…able to protect the integrity of Indigenous knowledge and community participation” (p.224). The call for Indigenous self-governance in education to ensure self-determination and the autonomy of Indigenous knowledges, cultures, and languages has, indeed, been emphasized by Indigenous scholars as well international and national commissions again and again (Bartlett et al., 2012; Battiste, 2013; Ermine, 2007; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018).

Indigenous self-governance is not a new concept. Indigenous Peoples have maintained their right, need, and desire for self-governance since European settlers and Indigenous Nations first made contact and entered into the original treaties (Hanson, 2009). These treaties, which are "agreements that describe exchanges where Indigenous nations agree to share some of their interests in their ancestral lands in return for various payments and promises" (Albers, 2017, para 1), were made by people coming from vastly different thought worlds and were interpreted differently by each party (Albers, 2017). Settler governments "tended to see them as self-serving deals rather than sacred pacts between independent nations…non-Indigenous treaty negotiators believed treaties were inexpensive and convenient ways to strip Aboriginal title from most of the lands in Canada" (Albers, 2017, para 5). Indigenous scholars explain that Indigenous Nations conceive of treaties quite differently; from an Indigenous perspective, they are "a living, mutually agreed upon protocol used to create and regulate respectful citizenry relationships…[Treaty] is a word that describes an active relational process that includes seeking continuous counsel and dialogue on matters that have bearing on the parties it involves" (Kovach, 2013, p. 111-112). Ermine (2008) says of treaties that they "are nation-to-nation dialogues between one human community and another, with each party supported and informed by their own autonomy and their respective political and cultural systems" (p. 200). From an Indigenous perspective, then, treaties are about forging and maintaining relationships in which the autonomy and sovereignty of each party is respected, meaning treaties can and should evolve as needs and circumstances change (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018).

Before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission laid out its recommendations in 2015, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)—which was adopted by the UN in 2007 and finally came into law in Canada in 2021—underscored the

State's obligation to work "in conjunction with Indigenous peoples…in order for Indigenous individuals…to have access…to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language" (UNDRIP, 2007). Article 15, section 1 further states that "Indigenous peoples have the right to the dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories and aspirations which shall be appropriately reflected in education and public information" (UNDRIP, 2007).

The 1996 Report from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), which was based on six years of extensive consultation with Indigenous communities from across the country (Battiste, 2013), similarly emphasized the urgent need for fundamental reforms in the Canadian public education system. The RCAP report recommended that Indigenous people participate fully in decision-making processes in order to ensure that Indigenous educational needs are reflected in the system (RCAP, 1996). Key recommendations from RCAP regarding shared governance included Indigenous representation on school boards, Indigenous advisory committees, teachings by Elders, the implementation of Aboriginal education strategies, and that roles in school administration and leadership positions be populated by Indigenous people.

Bartlett et al.'s (2012) *Lessons Learned* also express the need for shared governance and a renewal of relationships. Their lessons, which are based on their experience with the creation and eventual demise of an accredited university degree program that brought together Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledges in science, describe the conditions that need to be met in order to "weave curricula" (p. 332) while "[remaining] true to the ways of knowing and knowledge systems of Indigenous peoples" (p. 332). They point to problems at the "administrative, faculty, budgetary and recruitment levels" (p. 333) that, over time, led to courses being disassociated with the degree program and instead housed "within access programming" (p. 333). In this new context, the courses eventually shifted focus from weaving Indigenous and Western knowledges

to just Western science. Lesson 8, the authors explain, “emerges from our reflections on the collapse of the Integrative Science academic program” (p. 334); it emphasizes the importance of shared governance through the development of an “advisory council of willing, knowledgeable stakeholders, drawing upon individuals both from within the educational institutions and within Aboriginal communities” (Bartlett et al., 2012, p. 334). Bartlett et al.’s experience underscores the difficulty (perhaps impossibility) of holding space for Indigenous knowledges in an institutional setting that has not undergone the necessary changes in governance.

The concept of *Two Eyed Seeing* is premised on the principles of Indigenous self-governance and the ongoing work of tending to the always evolving relationships between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous thought worlds, principles that are embedded within an Indigenous understanding of what a treaty is. As Margaret Kovach, professor of Education and a member of Pasqua First Nations, points out, “if treaty teaches us anything, it teaches us about relationships, particularly about relationships of power” (2013, p. 120). Establishing new relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders that are defined by cooperation rather than domination is essential to sustaining and nurturing a trans-systemic educational space. Returning to the original concept of treaties as understood from an Indigenous perspective provides a potential path forward.

Reconciliation in education is a complex and deeply contested undertaking. As this paper has shown, there is no shared understanding of how to achieve it, and at this point, there is growing skepticism around the process. Turning to Indigenous scholars such as Battiste (2013) Ermine (2008), and Bartlett et al., (2012) provides an alternative approach. Mi’kmaw scholar and educator Marie Battiste envisions an ethical trans-systemic educational space that reaches beyond a binary notion of Indigenous and non-Indigenous thought worlds, towards a combined

system that is “fair and just” (Battiste, 2013, p. 100) for all. Indigenous resurgence, which recenters Indigenous communities along with their knowledges, languages, and ways of knowing, is essential to achieving an ethical trans-systemic educational space. Working in service of this kind of space requires unlearning Eurocentric assumptions, making space for Indigenous voices to express Indigenous knowledges and worldviews, and establishing systems of shared governance to uphold and sustain an ethical and participatory system of education.

Chapter 5: Methodology

The following chapter outlines the methodological approach employed in this study, including the research design, data collection methods, data analysis procedures, ethical considerations, and limitations of this study.

Research Design

This qualitative study explores efforts that work towards an ethical trans-systemic educational system in Québec's English-language CÉGEP network by identifying existing institutional practices; considering how institutions collaborate with local Indigenous groups on reconciliation initiatives, and looking at the ways in which reconciliation work is supported by the administrative bodies that govern the institutions. Through an analysis of publicly available documents from three major institutions in the network, posts on institutional social media accounts, and interviews with participants from one of the institutions in this study, this work addresses the following questions:

- What reconciliation initiatives exist in Québec's English-language CÉGEP network?
- How do these CÉGEPs work in collaboration with local Indigenous groups on reconciliation initiatives?
- How do the institutions' administrative bodies support reconciliation work?

This study is guided by a Two-Eyed Seeing approach (Bartlett et al., 2012). It examines current reconciliation initiatives in the English-language CÉGEP network—initiatives that have largely been developed and implemented by non-Indigenous people—and considers these through the lens of unlearning, making space, and shared governance—processes recommended by Indigenous scholars which lay the foundation for an ethical trans-systemic educational space—in order to contribute to an understanding of how the network is working meaningfully

towards reconciliation, and consequentially where and how it might reconsider its approach. The data regarding reconciliation initiatives over the last ten years comes from non-Indigenous sources and was gathered using a qualitative methodological approach grounded in a Western academic tradition. The theoretical framework through which this data is examined relies on Mi'kmaw educator and scholar Marie Battiste's concept of an ethical trans-systemic educational space.

Our governments, as discussed in chapters two and three, have not demonstrated accountability to Indigenous Peoples in the process of reconciliation. Numerous and repeated calls to action have largely fallen on deaf ears at both the federal and provincial levels of government. Using an Indigenous theoretical approach to understand reconciliation in education under the consultation of an Indigenous pedagogical advisor is a way of being accountable to Indigenous communities and to understand what we need to do in order to eventually achieve reconciliation in education from an Indigenous perspective. A Western methodological approach to this study is appropriate given its context: it was conducted by a non-Indigenous researcher in the department of Education at Concordia University, a non-Indigenous academic institution, and is being presented to a non-Indigenous thesis committee. Furthermore, this study focuses on non-Indigenous academic institutions and, aside from ongoing consultation with an Indigenous advisor, it does not engage directly with Indigenous communities. While this could be seen as a limitation, as Kovach (2021) points out, "not all Indigenous research involves community-engaged primary data collection. Theoretical research, based upon secondary sources, is an example of Indigenous research that does not involve data collection and might not involve direct community partnerships" (p. 110). This study is exactly that; it employs an Indigenous theoretical framework that draws on secondary sources written by Indigenous scholars in order

to examine how non-Indigenous educational institutions are responding to reconciliation in education.

The qualitative approach employed by this study is a single case study design. Case studies are used to explore a bounded system in depth. A system can be defined by a program, event, or activity involving individuals; *bounded* refers to the limits that the researcher places around the case in terms of time, place, or other physical or conceptual limits (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 292). The bounded system of interest in this study is Québec's English-language CÉGEP network. Its intent is "to describe and interpret" (p. 289) reconciliation efforts—from 2015, the year the TRC released its final report, to 2024—by considering these initiatives through the lens of processes of unlearning, making space, and shared governance to better understand how the network is responding meaningfully to reconciliation.

Research Setting

Québec's public English-language CÉGEP network includes five institutions, four of which are located in and around the City of Montreal and one that is located in Gatineau. This study focuses on three schools in the network that serve different areas and different student demographics. Some schools in the system have larger Indigenous student populations than others—in some cases this is because they are in geographic proximity to Indigenous communities and others because of the accommodations they offer to Indigenous students.

Participants/Sampling

The participants in this study were the three institutions in the English-language network. I gathered publicly available data from the schools' institutional documents and social media accounts, and interviewed three participants from one of the institutions. In an effort to maintain anonymity for the institutions that are involved, I will not provide further detail about the

institutions. The interview participants in this study are professional contacts of mine in either faculty or management positions.

I first reached out to interview participants through an email in which I introduced myself, presented a description of the project, and outlined what participation in this study would entail (see Appendix B). Interview participants were advised that they would have until two weeks after the interview was conducted to withdraw their interview from the study without negative repercussions. The identities of interview participants and their affiliate organization will remain known only to the researcher.

I selected interview participants based on their active participation in reconciliation initiatives at their home institution as well as their collaboration with other institutions in the network because I felt that these people would be best positioned to provide insight into the work that is occurring, the impact it has had, and the challenges of doing this work. All of the interview participants have been working in the English-language CÉGEP network for a minimum of nine years.

Date Collection Methods

Data collection for this study involved three primary sources: institutional documents, school accounts on the social media platforms Facebook and Instagram, and semi-structured interviews with three participants. The use of multiple data sources enabled a process of triangulation in which all of the data sources contributed to the findings to help strengthen their validity (Yin, 2014).

> Triangulation is the process of corroborating evidence about a finding from different individuals or types of data. The inquirer examines each information source and finds evidence to support a theme. This helps to ensure that the themes found in a study are

> credible representations of people's experiences and perspectives because the information draws on multiple sources of information or individuals (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 364).

The time frame covered in this study is from 2015—the year the Truth and Reconciliation Commission released its final report and 94 Calls to Action—to the end of 2024, which marks nearly ten years since the release of the TRC's report and calls to action. Due to reasons that will be explained in the *Limitations* section of this chapter, this study relied on data that was publicly available as well as insight from interview participants at only one of the three institutions that this study focuses on.

Some data from this study, including pdfs of institutional documents and transcripts of interviews, is stored on a private computer and backed up on a USB key. Other data such as excerpts from websites and social media—both publicly available sources of information—are stored in a Google spreadsheet.

The section that follows describes the data gathering and preparation processes for each of the three primary sources in this study.

Institutional Documents

Publicly available institutional documents are interesting because they represent the institutions' public-facing position on reconciliation. The strengths of documents are that they are "stable [and] can be reviewed easily, [they are] unobtrusive, ... [and] broad, in that [they] can cover a long span of time, many events, and many settings" (Yin, 2014, p. 106). Weaknesses of documents include "retrievability—[they] can be difficult to find" (p. 106) and they may contain the bias of the document's author (Yin, 2014).

The institutional documents referenced in this study were all publicly available; they included strategic plans, annual reports, and institutional websites. Current strategic plans were available for all institutions; some were nearing the end of the timeframe they cover while some were just at the beginning. Summaries of previous strategic plans dating back to 2015 were available for two of the three institutions. The availability of annual reports dating back to 2015 was inconsistent among the institutions; one institution had publicly available annual reports for every year dating back to 2016 except for the years 2017/2018 and 2018/2019, another institution had one available annual report in the timeframe that this study looks at, the third institution did not have any annual reports available online. All three institutions, of course, have websites that are updated frequently and reflect relatively current information about the school's reconciliation initiatives.

I began by downloading pdf files of strategic plans and annual reports, and then reading through these documents to get an overall sense of the kind of information they provided. From this initial scan, I developed a list of the following search terms: *Indigenous, First Nations, Inuit, Metis, settler, colonial, decolonize, indigenize, Kahnawà:ke, Cree, Kativik, Aboriginal* and used a search function in my pdf viewer to conduct targeted searches in each of the documents. I gathered all of the relevant excerpts in a Google spreadsheet dedicated to institutional documents.

Data collection from institutional websites also started with several initial scans to develop an understanding of how the websites were organized. All of the websites have main menus with anywhere from four to six categories depending on the institution. I went through the submenus of each main menu category to look for headings that were either explicitly related to Indigenization or headings where I thought I might find information related to Indigenous

students or Indigenization more broadly and copied all the relevant information to the institutional documents' spreadsheet.

The institutional documents included in this study provided insight into the position that the institutions take on reconciliation, whether the institution appears to value reconciliation work, and can to some degree, through the level of detail that is provided, indicate how deeply the institution has thought about this work. These documents help address all three research questions guiding this study.

Social Media: Facebook and Instagram

Data from posts on institutional social media accounts offers insight into the types of student-facing activities and events that are available on campus. Social media posts are akin to physical artifacts as a source of evidence (Yin, 2014), although in this case, they are digital artifacts. Some of the strengths of this kind of evidence include insight into cultural and consciousness-raising initiatives and specific dates associated with these events, information that is not necessarily available in institutional documentation (Yin, 2014). Weaknesses of such evidence are that posting is not always consistent so the availability of information depends on what was posted (Yin, 2014). Another weakness of social media posts is that algorithms—particularly on Instagram—determine how information is displayed so posts that have not received a lot of engagement might not be discovered.

All of the schools in this study have presences on Facebook and Instagram so I limited my research to these two platforms. There are multiple accounts associated with each college so the amount of available information is vast. In order to make this task manageable, I focused on the accounts run by the Indigenous student centers at each school since these are the accounts that contain the most relevant information. In the case that a school's Indigenous student center did

not have an account on one of these social media platforms, I defaulted to the accounts run by the college, presumably by their communications offices.

The process for gathering data from these social media platforms was very similar to that which I followed in my institutional document research. I scanned social media accounts for relevant information and transferred that information to a Google spreadsheet. Posts included text, photographs, graphics, and videos primarily related to events and activities on campus, though occasionally off-campus activities were promoted as well. Facebook displays posts chronologically so I went back as far as I could; in some cases it was possible to go all the way back to 2015, other accounts only began in 2016. Depending on the account owner's settings, Instagram displays posts either chronologically or according to levels of engagement. When posts were displayed chronologically, I went back to 2015; in the latter case, when posts were displayed according to engagement, I scanned until I found posts from 2015.

Though they are, of course, available to all members of campus, social media posts are aimed primarily at students and, of course, only seen by those who have chosen to follow. They offer insight into the availability of Indigenous cultural activities and Consciousness-raising events on campuses and provide an overall impression of the vitality of this work on campuses.

Interviews

Interviews provide in-depth and nuanced information. They are targeted, offering insight and explanations as well as personal views (Yin, 2014). Interviews can provide context to data gathered from institutional documents and social media posts. Some weaknesses of interviews can be either personal bias or bias due to miscommunication between interviewer and interviewee or inaccuracies when a participant has difficulty remembering details (Yin, 2014).

The interviews conducted in this study ranged from 30 to 60 minutes in length and occurred either online or in person, depending on the participant's preference. The interviews were semi-structured and conversational, consisting of open-ended questions about reconciliation initiatives in the institutions, how the institutions work in collaboration with local Indigenous groups on these efforts, and how they perceive institutional support. Interviews were recorded on either audio or video with the participants' consent.

Interviews offer deeper insight into ongoing reconciliation efforts within the network, providing detailed accounts of the various initiatives as well as the benefits and challenges of these initiatives. Importantly, they also provide insight into grassroots initiatives, information that is not available via institutional documents or social media posts. They convey a human perspective on the work that is taking place in schools, explaining why people are involved in this work and how they feel about it. This is an important perspective to include since it is, after all, people who are pushing this work forward.

Data Analysis

Once all of the data was gathered, I began an iterative process of data analysis which included moving back and forth between the following phases: exploration of the data, coding the data, and grouping the coded data into common themes (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015).

Coding data and developing themes is a process of labeling, grouping, and organizing it into manageable segments of information (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015). When coding, the researcher "identifies segments of text (or images), places a bracket around them or highlights them, and assigns a code that describes the meaning of the segment" (p. 359). Inductive coding is often used in qualitative research. It is a "bottom-up approach" (p. 356) in which the researcher allows codes to emerge from an interpretation of the data rather than approaching the data with

pre-defined codes—it is a way of trying to ensure that meaning is derived from the data. Inductive coding involves an iterative process of coding data and refining coding to merge meaning and eliminate redundancy (p. 357).

I used a process of inductive coding to analyze the data. I first compiled data from institutional documents from all three colleges into one spreadsheet and conducted two rounds of coding. In the first round of coding, I applied a process of open coding, which is based on the researchers "interpretation of the meaning of the data" (p. 359) as well as in vivo coding which provides labels for codes using words or phrases found in the data (p. 359). I did not attempt to repeat codes during the first round of coding. In the second round of coding, I merged similar codes and eliminated redundancy. I applied the same process to the analysis of social media posts and interview transcripts. As I worked through each source of data, I found that some codes recurred while new ones emerged. Once all sources of data had undergone two rounds of coding, I consolidated all of the data into one spreadsheet and began developing themes. While drafting descriptions of themes and incorporating data excerpts, I revisited the coding a third time to either eliminate codes that were only marginally represented or to group them with codes that were more prominent. For example, the code *Spaces for Indigenous Students* which described just that—spaces on college campuses designated for Indigenous students—was folded into the code *Indigenous Student Wellbeing.*

I used a Google spreadsheet to manage and analyze my data. I divided the data by source, putting all of the institutional document data into one spreadsheet, social media into another, and interview excerpts into a third. Once I had done two rounds of coding, I put all of the data into a single spreadsheet so I could analyze everything in one place. I used the same column headings for all three sources of data so I could easily copy and paste large amounts of date from one

spreadsheet to another. I used the following column headings: Document (to describe the type of source), Date (used if relevant such as in strategic plans, annual reports, and social media posts), Content (for data excerpts), Open Code, Refined Code 1, Refined Code 2, and Notes (for any insights I wanted to note as I was reviewing and coding data). To analyze the data, I used the *column stats* function to derive information regarding the frequency with which codes appeared, as well as the sorting and filtering functions. Google spreadsheets was a simple, effective, and budget-friendly (i.e. free) software option. I did not have to worry about managing multiple (and possibly conflicting) backups, and, because the data I gathered was either publicly available, or in the case of the interviews, dissociated from the source, I did not worry about anonymity being compromised.

Ethical Considerations

A proposal for this study was presented to and approved by the Research Ethics Boards (REB) of Concordia University and the participating CÉGEPs. I submitted an ethics application to Concordia on May 2nd, 2024 and received notification of approval on June 25th, 2024. I submitted an ethics application to the REB at the college where I conducted interviews on August 29th, 2025 and received ethics approval on September 26th, 2024.

As stated above, I received informed consent from all interview participants in this study. Because of the sensitive nature of the topic, participants were told explicitly that they could withdraw from the interview at any time without negative repercussions. Participants were provided two weeks following their interview to withdraw their data from the study without any negative repercussions. I also provided, at the recommendation of Concordia's REB, a list of publicly available counselling resources to interview participants in case they felt triggered by their interview.

The identities of participating CÉGEPs and interview participants will remain strictly anonymous and known only to the primary researcher. No institutions or interview participants have or will be named in the final report or any iteration thereof without further consent.

Trustworthiness

This project is mentored by Dr. Giuliana Cucinelli, a professor in Concordia's Department of Education, as well as Diane Labelle, an Indigenous pedagogical advisor; both have provided guidance throughout the research process to ensure it meets academic standards and respects the sensitivity of the subject matter. The findings in this report have been validated through a member-checking process to verify that the themes are appropriate, that descriptions are complete, and that participants have been quoted accurately.

Limitations of This Research

This work provides an overview of reconciliation efforts in Québec's English-language CÉGEP network. There are five schools in the public network. In order to maintain a reasonable scope of work for this MA thesis, this study focuses on three of those schools rather than all five. My initial research plan proposed to gather data from institutional documents, social media platforms, and interviews with participants from all three institutions, but that planned changed as I sought ethics approval from each of the institutions that I hoped to work with. I submitted ethics applications to each of the institutions in late August and early September of 2024. I received ethics approval from the first institution within several weeks, the other two, however, took longer. The second institution granted ethics approval in November of 2024 but explained that I would also require institutional approval before they would allow me to recruit participants or collect data. I followed up immediately to inquire about the process of receiving institutional approval but did not receive any concrete information other than being told that they would get

back to me. I continued to follow up every couple of weeks but things did not progress. In mid-December of 2024, I wrote again to explain that I was on a schedule and asked if they could provide an anticipated timeline for institutional approval but was told that they could not provide a timeframe. I had also, at this point, despite several follow-up emails, still not received a definitive answer regarding my ethics application from the third institution. It was December and I had no idea when I would be able to begin recruiting participants at two of the institutions in my study. Time was running out. I consulted with my thesis supervisor and the Concordia Research Ethics Office who agreed that this was highly unusual. In January 2025, I received ethics approval from the third institution with the same stipulation that I would need institutional approval before I could begin to recruit participants and that my project was under review. In February of 2025, I notified the two institutions that required institutional approval beyond the ethics certificate that I would no longer seek to recruit participants from their institutions and would rely only on publicly available information from these institutions.

It is important to me, as someone who works in the network, to maintain good relationships with these institutions. Because the institutions were hesitant to be a part of this study, I want to do what I can to maintain their anonymity. I have, therefore, refrained from describing the institutions in any detail. The English public network is small and the schools are distinct enough that even minor details could compromise anonymity. In my research findings I have tried to report broadly about the schools. While this might be regarded as a limitation, I think the goal of the study to provide an overview of reconciliation efforts in the network has been satisfied.

Chapter 6: Findings

This study seeks to explore and describe the initiatives, partnerships with Indigenous communities, and institutional supports that have been developed by colleges in Québec's English-language CÉGEP network in response to calls for reconciliation in education. The findings described in this section are based on data gathered from two publicly available sources including institutional documents (institutional strategic plans, annual reports where available, and institutional websites) and social media platforms as well as data gathered from interviews with key actors engaged in reconciliation work in the network.

This chapter describes the codes that emerged from the data, the development of themes based on coding, and provides detailed descriptions of the activities and initiatives related to each theme, offering insight into the practices, progress, and challenges that shape reconciliation work in the institutions in this study.

Coding the Data

The goal of this study is to explore reconciliation initiatives in the English-language CÉGEP network in order to develop an understanding of how our institutions are responding to reconciliation in a meaningful way. The purpose of this study is not to compare institutions or single them out for work that is or is not being accomplished. The data gathered in this study is, therefore, presented according to its source—institutional documents, social media posts, and interviews. The codes emerged through an iterative process of open coding followed by two rounds of refinement. A total of 16 final codes emerged from the data.

Coding Institutional Documents

I began exploring the data that I had gathered from institutional documents by reading through it to get an overall sense of the kind of information that it provided and then did a first

round of open coding. I did not attempt to repeat codes during this first round of coding. I, then, went through the data and codes a second and third time to streamline and refine the coding. The third round resulted in the following 13 codes: Indigenous Consultation, Indigenous Partnerships, Transition Support, Indigenous Student Wellbeing, Academic Support, Cultural Initiatives, Decolonizing the Curriculum, Indigenous Guest Speakers, Consciousness-raising, Faculty Commitment, Employee Training, Indigenous Employee Recruitment, and Commitment to Reconciliation.

The top five codes found in institutional documents were, in order of highest to lowest frequency: Commitment to Reconciliation (22), Transition Support (14), Academic Support (13), Decolonizing the Curriculum (13), and Employee Training (12).

Coding Social Media Posts

I followed a similar process for the data that I gathered from social media posts. I began by exploring the data overall, then did a first round of open coding, followed by a second and third round of streamlining and refinement. Social media posts highlighted events and activities related to campus life. A total of five codes emerged from social media data. Four codes that I established in the document analysis phase reappeared, these included: Cultural Initiatives, Consciousness-raising, Indigenous Guest Speakers, and Indigenous Student Wellbeing One new codes, Mentorship, appeared exclusively in data gathered from social media.

The five most prominent codes that came from social media data were in order of highest to lowest frequency: Consciousness-raising (41), Indigenous Student Wellbeing (34), Cultural Initiatives (33), Mentorship (18), and Indigenous Guest Speakers (9).

Coding Interviews

I used transcription software to transcribe and explore the interviews. I started by reading through each transcript and taking note of my initial thoughts and impressions and marking interesting passages. I went through the marked passages and transferred them into a Google spreadsheet. After three rounds of coding, a total of eight codes emerged from the interviews; six codes that I had already established, including: Indigenous Consultation, Indigenous Partnerships, Transition Support, Indigenous Employee Recruitment, Faculty Commitment, and Decolonizing the Curriculum; and two new codes, which were: Institutional Support and Grassroots Efforts. The new codes appeared only in interview data.

The five codes that came up most frequently in interviews, from highest to lowest, were: Institutional Support (25), Faculty Commitment (12), Grassroots Efforts (9), Employee Training (7), and Indigenous Employee Recruitment (3).

A total of 16 codes were developed from three types of data sources: institutional documents, social media posts, and interviews.

Developing Themes Based on Codes

Themes in qualitative research "form a major idea about the central phenomenon in the database…They represent larger patterns in the data that emerged from the analysis" (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 362). While there are surely multiple approaches to organizing the codes in this data set, a clear pattern began to emerge in which the codes aligned with different groups of campus actors who are either involved in or impacted by Indigenous education initiatives. This grouping produced the following five themes:

1. Indigenous Community Collaboration
2. Indigenous Student Support

3. Indigenous Life on Campus
4. Faculty Engagement
5. Institutional Commitment

Table 1 illustrates how I grouped the 16 codes into the five themes.

Table 1

Grouping Codes into Themes

Codes	Themes
Indigenous Consultation Indigenous Partnerships	Theme 1: Indigenous Community Collaboration
Indigenous Student Wellbeing Mentorship Transition Support Academic Support	Theme 2: Indigenous Student Support
Cultural Initiatives Consciousness-raising Decolonizing the Curriculum Indigenous Guest Speakers	Theme 3: Indigenous Life on Campus
Faculty Commitment Grassroots Efforts	Theme 4: Faculty Engagement
Employee Training Institutional Support	Theme 5: Institutional Commitment

Commitment to Reconciliation

Indigenous Employee Recruitment

The codes that emerged from data from institutional documents and interviews appeared in all five themes. Data from institutional documents contributed most significantly to the themes Indigenous Community Collaboration, Indigenous Student Support, and Institutional Commitment. Social media data contributed to only two themes: Indigenous Life on Campus and Indigenous Student Support, with the most frequent contributions to Indigenous Life on Campus. Codes established from interview data contributed most to the themes Faculty Engagement and Institutional Commitment. Notably, the only theme that was supported by all three data sources (institutional documents, social media posts, interviews) was Indigenous Student Support. The table below provides examples of codes and corresponding data excerpts for each theme.

Table 2

Codes and Corresponding Data Excerpts

Code	Source	Excerpt	Theme
Indigenous Consultation	Institutional Document	"We are now very grateful to have a Council – which includes Cree, Kanien'kehà:ka (Mohawk), Inuit, and Métis community members – to guide the college in developing programs and services for Indigenous students…"	Theme 1: Indigenous Community Collaboration

	Interview	"To advance things even further, [College A's Group 2] proposed the creation of two specific committees in the College. One would be an Indigenous Advisory Committee, the IAC, and that would be made up of Indigenous individuals from different Indigenous communities who could advise the college in terms of moving forward on its commitment related to the CICAN Education Protocol…and they would work in collaboration with an internal committee of key individuals across the college from key sectors who could operationalize and contribute to the operationalization of key recommendations."	
Indigenous Student Wellbeing	Institutional Document	"One of the primary goals of [College A's Group 1] is to support all Indigenous students in terms of their personal wellbeing and academic goals…this can include…providing a safe social network for students to get together, meet members of other Indigenous communities and share their stories and experiences."	Theme 2: Indigenous Student Support
	Social Media	"New and Returning Aboriginal Student Welcome Gathering, Wednesday, August 26, 2015 12:30 to 13:30 pm"	
	Interview	"We were focusing more on…making the curriculum reflect Indigenous perspectives and we put together all these documents that we've recycled over the years making the argument that having more faculty who are trained to teach this in a way that's respectful, that centers Indigenous perspectives, is going to help Indigenous students because they will see themselves in the curriculum."	

Decolonizing the Curriculum	Institutional Document	"Upon completion of the certificate, students will be able to better understand the diversity and contributions of Indigenous peoples, across Turtle Island and globally. They will be able to critically connect the history of Indigenous communities to contemporary issues that frame the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples today, and to be a part of a dynamic, innovative and growing community of practice."	Theme 3: Indigenous Life on Campus
	Interview	"Students in my classes always have great things to say. Yesterday we were talking about Indigenous ways of knowing and one of my students said, 'everybody should be learning this.' And then seeing the students at the graduation ceremony always inspires me and keeps me going. We are having an impact. Indigenous students who are in the major or in our classes can find their voices better and other students do as well. They share this information with their families and it has a ripple effect."	
Grassroots Efforts	Interview	"I think the first initiative would have been the Native Awareness group. That would have been around 2005 or 2006. It was very informal and I mean we before we formed a group, we were already doing things - just kind of organizing activities, organizing trips to Kahnesatà:ke, to the Pines, we were running around finding money to be able to pay speakers. It was all very informal and grassroots."	Theme 4: Faculty Engagement
Employee Training	Institutional Document	"Provide training on decolonization and cultural safety to all college employees."	Theme 5: Institutional Commitment
	Interview	"I was kind of getting frustrated with the workshops. I mean, I loved the fact that we had those workshops… but what I found frustrating and many other teachers did, too, is that we never got past an introductory level…And that's where the discussion group was born, the model for it was at [College C]."	

Theme 1: Indigenous Community Collaboration

This theme represents the role of Indigenous communities on campuses. The codes associated with this theme are Indigenous consultation and Indigenous partnerships. It is supported by data from institutional documents, social media, and interviews. This theme was developed to address the second research question which looks at how the English-language CÉGEPs work in collaboration with local Indigenous groups and communities. The data shows that the colleges collaborate with Indigenous communities at an administrative level and on educational, cultural, and consciousness-raising initiatives.

Collaboration at the Administrative Level

In their institutional documents, the colleges recognize the importance of Indigenous representation in decision-making processes. They describe existing partnerships and a desire to create partnerships with Indigenous communities. These descriptions range from broad to specific. Some examples of broad descriptions include “Create partnerships with local Indigenous communities” and “Build accountable relationships with Indigenous communities in support of self-determination through education, training and applied research.” Examples of more specific descriptions of partnerships include “Community Accountability and Engagement protocol is created and implemented” and “Meetings with communities occur regularly” and “Collaborate with [College C’s] Indigenous Students’ Resource Centre and the Kativik Ilisarniliriniq.” Specificity is an indication of thought and consideration and is valuable when it comes to setting goals and carrying out definitive actions.

Another way that the colleges collaborate with Indigenous communities is through consultation committees. One interview participant described the development of the Indigenous consultation committee at their institution,

> We were asked to work on developing a college committee to make sure that the things in the strategic plan actually got done and all projects would be vetted. So that central advisory committee would make sure that we were being culturally sensitive and accountable to communities and students, especially Indigenous students. We had funds to meet with several advisors from different nations and different colleges about what this should look like. We wound up going with the model that [College C] did, why reinvent the wheel, it seemed like a very nice model.

Another participant explained that the model the college went with actually involves two committees, an external committee called the Indigenous Advisory Committee and an internal committee called the Reconciliation, or sometimes Reconciliaction Committee. The participant explained,

> The Indigenous Advisory Committee, the IAC, is made up of Indigenous individuals from different Indigenous communities who advise the College in terms of moving forward on its commitment related to the CICAN Education Protocol…and they work in collaboration with an internal committee made up of key individuals from across the college from key sectors who can operationalize and contribute to the operationalization of recommendations.

This participant elaborated on how the two committees work together,

> The Reconciliaction Committee would look at, for example, a recommendation to increase the number of Indigenous students who are accepted into our college, so we would need to work with the admissions office to reduce barriers. The question then becomes how do we operationalize that? So the Reconciliaction Committee would come up with a set of recommendations, and it would be important, to have people from the

> admissions office on that committee who can say that will or that won't work because of X, Y, and Z. The idea is to have those key people around the table so that a discussion could be had at the committee level and recommendations could be formulated. Once the recommendations are formulated, the Indigenous Advisory Committee reflects on them and says, well, from an Indigenous perspective, that does or does not satisfy our perception of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's goals. So, the idea is that there is harmony between what the college is trying to do in order to respect the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations and an Indigenous perspective on those recommendations.

In their institutional documents, the colleges recognize their consultation committees and express gratitude for their contributions, as in the following excerpts, "We are now very grateful to have a Council—which includes Cree, Kanien'kehà:ka (Mohawk), Inuit, and Métis community members—to guide the college in developing programs and services for Indigenous students, as well as ways to raise awareness within the larger [College B] community about First Peoples cultures, traditions, and perspectives," and, "We acknowledge the wisdom and knowledge shared with us by collaborators and advisors from local Indigenous communities such as the urban Indigenous community of Montreal and the communities of Kahnawà:ke and Kanehsetake. In particular, we thank members of our advisory committee."

While there is a stated appreciation for the contributions of Indigenous communities, it is not clear how much influence communities have—via the committees and councils that they sit on—when it comes to institutional decision-making. Institutional documents refer to the need to "Ensure appropriate Indigenous representation in decision-making," and that "All recommendations received from the IAC or the RC are considered by the College." These

statements indicate that these committees have an advisory role but not a definitive decision-making role. There may be other institutional documents that include a more comprehensive description of the role and scope of influence that these committees have, but if such documents exist, they were not discovered in this research process.

Collaboration on Educational, Cultural, and Consciousness-raising Initiatives

Social media and some interview data indicate that the schools also collaborate with Indigenous groups and communities on educational, cultural, and consciousness-raising initiatives.

One participant reported visiting a local community to develop relationships and collaborate on the issue of Bill 96 and its effect on educational pathways for Indigenous students. The participant explained,

> The goal was to develop closer relations with the Indigenous community. So I did do that, particularly with Kahnawà:ke. There were a couple of times where I actually went to the community and worked with them and gave them presentations on Bill 96. We worked very closely on the concerns that they had as an Indigenous community on Bill 96.

Educational partnerships between the colleges and Indigenous communities and school boards are also evident in institutional documents and social media posts. There are, for example, collaborations with the Cree School Board on two transition programs; one is called the Cree Nursing Program, as indicated in this social media post, “Have you ever wanted to be a Cree nurse? Now's your chance to apply to our new program: Cree Springboard to Nursing!” Another is a more general transition program that helps students from Cree communities transition to college, as described in this post, “The Iyeskuwiiu Springboard to DCS [Diploma of College

Studies] program is a collaboration between the Cree School Board (CSB) and [College C] and is designed for Eeyou (Cree) students to prepare them for post-secondary education." Another post indicates collaboration with the Post-Secondary office at Kanehsatà:ke, although it is not clear what this collaboration entails, "Attention students from Kanehsatake, Garth Ryan, the liaison officer from the Post-Secondary office will be visiting students on Thursday, October 20th at 10:30 am in the ASRC. Come meet him."

Colleges also collaborate with Indigenous communities and groups on cultural and consciousness-raising initiatives as indicated in the following excerpts from social media posts:

- "Thank you to the community members from Kahnawà:ke and Kanehsatà:ke for inviting us to celebrate with them at the Pow Wow this Wednesday."
- "Welcome Back Lunch on Thursday January 26th catered by Messy Kitchen Catering in Kahnawake."
- "Elders from the Mohawk community shared their teachings about our responsibilities to the earth and the wisdom of past generations."
- "As part of suicide prevention week, [College C] and Kativik Ilisarniliriniq (the Nunavik school board) will be hosting a cycle-thon to bring awareness to the alarming number of suicides that are taking place in many Inuit communities up north. This event will take place on Tuesday February 4, 2020, in the Agora, from 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m."
- "Collaboration with Native Friendship Center of Montreal: This semester we are working in collaboration with the Native Friendship Centre of Montreal (NFCM). They have been generously donating 80 frozen meals per week for our students at the Indigenous Student Resource Centre. This year we are donating 3208$, which are the proceeds from the sale of our orange shirts to their organization, specifically to their Food Security program."

The theme of Indigenous Community Collaboration was developed primarily to address the research question concerning initiatives in the English-language network to collaborate with Indigenous communities on reconciliation efforts. Data indicates that institutions engage with local Indigenous communities at the administrative level though it is unclear from this data how much influence communities have when it comes to institutional decision making. Data also shows collaboration on educational, cultural, and Consciousness-raising initiatives.

Theme 2: Indigenous Student Support

This theme includes initiatives that are aimed at promoting the overall academic and social wellbeing of Indigenous students on campuses. These efforts are designed to respond to Indigenous students' academic needs while creating campus environments that feel welcoming and relevant. The codes associated with this theme are: Transition Support, Academic Support, Mentorship, and Indigenous Student Wellbeing. This theme addresses the research question regarding reconciliation initiatives in the English-language CÉGEP network. It is supported by data from institutional documents, social media, and interviews.

Transition Programs

Information about transition programs is featured primarily in institutional documents. Transition programs for Indigenous students are considered important to Indigenous student recruitment, retention, and success (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). One institutional document provides the following description of a transition program as "a one-year bridging pathway to provide First nations, Inuit and Métis students with a welcoming, supportive and culturally relevant environment for learning at the post- secondary level," boasting, "smaller class sizes and a supportive learning community, Indigenous content, and dedicated faculty." Another document says the school's transition program offers, "a culturally relevant program, a close-knit

community that provides stability through shared Indigenous cultural spaces and practices. The program offers students an environment in which to ease into college life, acquire the pre-requisites and develop the necessary academic skills to enter their program of choice."

The institutions researched in this study have designed their transition programs in consultation with the Indigenous communities they serve. One college says they, "set up the structures for the new Iyeskuwiiu (IK) transition program under the leadership of the Cree School Board (CSB)," another explains in reference to their transition program, "this innovative pilot program is being developed in collaboration with Indigenous communities and is expected to be offered as of fall 2016."

Transition programs typically last one academic year and are designed to help students bridge gaps and overcome barriers as they begin their post-secondary studies. These programs strive to create welcoming, supportive, and culturally relevant learning environments for Indigenous students. They often have designated classrooms and classes are taught by teachers who have some training in Indigenous pedagogies and who are culturally aware and sensitive to Indigenous students' needs. Students in transition programs can work on prerequisites and are offered support in developing study skills and learning strategies in order to succeed in the system. They can access one-on-one, group, and peer tutoring services, as well as help with research and writing skills. Some of the colleges have well-established transition programs while others are in the process of developing such programs.

Academic Support

There is a specific focus on facilitating access to and supporting Indigenous students in certain fields including STEM-related programs; Social Sciences; Arts, Literature and Communications; Nursing; Special Education Techniques; and Early Childhood Education. One

institutional document describes the following goal, “Increase access of Indigenous students to college studies and to STEM programs in particular.” Another document describes the allocation of resources for the following academic support initiatives,

- “Provide one-on-one and small group tutoring support for Indigenous students in science or planning to study science.”
- “Develop teaching and learning materials aimed specifically at Indigenous students who have parental responsibilities.”
- “To support students enrolled in math and science pre-requisite courses for STEM DEC programs and identify the challenges they face in these courses.”

Schools also offer tutoring and study skills workshops, as described in this excerpt from an institutional document, “we offer workshops and one-on-one assistance that focuses on foundational writing and research skills,” as well as resources that students need to complete their work, such as “a study space and computer lab. Students can work alone or collaboratively with other students on projects, and use one of our computers to work on assignments. We also offer students the ability to print their assignments (within guidelines) and important documents.”

Schools recognize the additional academic support that all students, including Indigenous students, will require in light of Law 14 and have committed to providing additional French language support as indicated in the following excerpts,

- “As an English college in largely French-speaking Québec, we have an important role in supporting English and French, as well as other languages (for Indigenous students and students studying in Arts, Literature and Communication, for example).”

- "Additional resources that support teaching and learning in French will be necessary to ensure retention and academic success. We will ensure support for student achievement with targeted measures in French language learning that reach all students: certificate holders, non-certificate holders and Indigenous students."

All three schools also actively circulated a video on social media and on their websites in which Indigenous students explain how the law affects them and why it is unjust.

Student Wellbeing on Campus

Student wellbeing on campus is important to student success and retention. Wellbeing in the context of this study focuses on activities and initiatives that make campuses feel like welcoming and supportive environments.

Institutional documents refer to the importance of offering holistic services that provide academic, mental, and spiritual support, and emphasize the importance of campuses as culturally-sensitive environments, as in the following excerpt, "One of the primary goals of [College A, Group 2] is to support all Indigenous students in terms of their personal well-being and academic goals while at the college. This can include…providing a safe social network for students to get together, meet members of other Indigenous communities and share their stories and experiences." Another document emphasizes wellbeing in terms of establishing relationships with Elders, it says, "Elder involvement is an important aspect of student success. The First Peoples' Centre works with Elders from a variety of nations and cultural backgrounds to build connections to support learning and growth."

Indigenous student centers are key to Indigenous students' feelings of wellbeing on campuses. One institutional document describes the following services offered by the Indigenous student center, "A study area with computers and printers, Indigenous Studies Library, Guidance

with registration and school system procedures, Help with course assignments, Tutoring, Study skills workshops, Life skills workshops, Social activities, Help with personal concerns, and Communication with sponsoring school boards." Another institutional document describes the Indigenous student center in the following way, "The Centre offers a peaceful, culturally sensitive environment where students can learn, study, socialize, and find community." Data from social media posts indicates that these centers are also hubs of activity—providing mentorship, organizing social events, and recognizing the achievements of Indigenous students.

The role of mentorship was prominent in the data and contributes to student wellbeing by providing guidance and support to students in their pursuit of new opportunities in a new environment. Social media posts reveal that Indigenous student centers actively post a range of opportunities that are specifically for Indigenous students, including job and internship listings, information about career fairs and conferences, university summer program details, information about available scholarships and bursaries, and offer support in writing university applications. Some examples of these kinds of posts include:

- "There are 19 jobs available in Northern Québec, 9 in Cree communities and 10 in Nunivak. The Frontier College is looking for Summer Literacy Camp Counselors. Looks like an excellent opportunity to work in your home community and make a few thousand dollars during the summer."
- "For our students from Kahnawake. If ANYONE would like assistance with their university application, please come see me. I will gladly help you through the process."
- "2017 Summit on Aboriginal Urban Youth Leadership Development. Those interested in attending this leadership event can talk to…"

- "The Indigenous Students Alliance at McGill has reserved tickets for indigenous students who are interested in attending this conference: The Power of Indigenous Arts: Resistance and Revitalization. Please send an email to…"
- "Interested in a university degree from Concordia University? Interested in the John Molson School of Business at Concordia University? JMSB is offering a summer program for Indigenous students to get a feel for the University. See the picture for details."

These centers also organize social events to help connect students and make them feel welcome. There are posts offering free lunches, open mic events, Halloween parties, graduation dinners and parties, apple picking outings, end of year cookie giveaways, holiday parties, and welcome back gatherings. Some examples of posts include

- "New and Returning Aboriginal Student Welcome Gathering, Wednesday, August 26, 2015 12:30 to 13:30 pm."
- "FREE Two Spirit LGBTQ nature retreat for youth 15 - 26 in the Laurentians. Coordinated by Native Montreal. Sign up at using the link below."

Institutional documents and social media posts also often highlight the accomplishments of Indigenous students. Their art work has been showcased in campus exhibits and displays, and students have been recognized for their leadership and services to community, athletic achievements, and academic successes.

- "The work of ten graduating students, including two indigenous students were exhibited throughout the College as part of the Art Around the College initiative."

One interview participant spoke to student wellbeing in terms of students seeing themselves reflected in the curriculum, this participant explained,

> We were focusing more on…making the curriculum reflect Indigenous perspectives and we put together all these documents that we've recycled over the years in terms of making these arguments that having more faculty who are trained to teach this stuff in a way that's respectful, that centers Indigenous perspectives is going to help Indigenous students to make things more accessible for them because they will see themselves in the curriculum.

The theme of Indigenous Student Support focuses on strategies aimed promoting the retention and academic success of Indigenous students. The data shows that the colleges focus primarily on helping Indigenous students transition to college life, ensuring they have the academic support they need—this includes culturally relevant course content, tutoring and study skills workshops, and French language support—and creating welcoming campus environments in which students feel a sense of belonging and see themselves reflected in the curriculum and campus life.

Theme 3: Indigenous Life on Campus

This theme emerged from a focus on the ways in which colonial histories, Indigenous knowledges, cultures, and realities are presented in the curriculum and on campuses. It includes initiatives to decolonize the curriculum as well as campus activities that help create a visible and interactive presence for Indigenous Peoples and cultures on campuses. These initiatives are aimed at and available to all members of campus. The codes associated with this theme are Decolonizing the Curriculum, Cultural Initiatives, Consciousness-raising, and Indigenous Guest Speakers. This them is supported by all three data sources—institutional documents, social media, and interviews—and addresses the primary research question about reconciliation initiatives on campuses.

Decolonizing the Curriculum

In their institutional documents, the colleges commit to revising curricula to include colonial histories and content related to Indigenous knowledges and cultures. They state that they will "honour the intellectual and cultural traditions of Indigenous peoples through curricular and learning approaches relevant to learners and communities…[by incorporating] intellectual and cultural approaches in the curriculum," and that they will "engage students in decolonization and Indigenization through teaching, curriculum development and campus activities…[through]... opportunities for exposure to Indigenous cultures…existing courses with Indigenous content and pedagogies…[and]…expansion of number of Indigenous cultural activities on campus."

In support of these goals, all of the schools offer the option to all students to complete a certificate in Indigenous Studies. The certificate programs, as one document explains, are "available for all [College B] students from all disciplines, in both pre-university programs and career programs." Another document describes the certificate in the following way, "The Indigenous Studies Certificate offers both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous students an excellent general-knowledge base which will focus on the history, languages, art, cultural traditions, philosophy, spirituality, as well as present-day political and social conditions of Indigenous Peoples." Institutional documents indicate that certificate programs were designed in collaboration with local Indigenous communities, as in the following excerpt, "we acknowledge the wisdom and knowledge shared with us by collaborators and advisors from local Indigenous communities such as the urban Indigenous community of Montreal and the communities of Kahnawà:ke and Kanehsatà:ke," though as one participant who was involved in the creation of a certificate program explained,

> From 2013 to 2016 we were working with a couple of staff members who are Indigenous and…we did get some Indigenous voices and we did consult some people, but not from the beginning. It was kind of like, look, this is what we want to do. What do you think? If I could go back in time, I would really drastically change that, but it's a slow process that people go through, definitely in those years.

The aim of the certificate programs, as indicated in the excerpts below, is to teach students about Indigenous cultures, knowledges, and worldviews; to inspire them to think critically about the history between settlers and First Nations, Inuit, and Metis communities; to contextualize the long-term effects and challenges that settler colonialism has imposed on Indigenous Peoples and Nations; and to provide context for the present-day lived experiences and realities of Indigenous communities. Institutional documents describe their certificate programs in the following ways:

- "Through a combination of courses and co-curricular activities, students learn to interact with indigenous populations in a conscious, professional and respectful manner. This major benefits both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students alike by fostering a more inclusive and just vision of Canadian society."
- "Core courses are devoted to an Indigenous topic in a way that centers Indigenous knowledges, worldviews, and pedagogies AND are taught by teachers who have completed training in Indigenous Education."
- "The Certificate…offers students the possibility of exploring Canada's settler-colonial relationship to the diverse Indigenous peoples who have been here for millennia. They will also learn about the many ways that Indigenous peoples have continued to strengthen their cultures amidst the challenges of settler colonialism."

Students are encouraged, and in some cases required, to participate in activities beyond the classroom that will help familiarize them with Indigenous cultures and communities. The certificates are described as a "value added" option, that is, students are not required to take additional courses to complete the certificate, they just need to select courses that qualify for certificate credit. Across all three institutions, the certificate programs offer over 100 courses in a variety of disciplines. Some examples of course titles include: "Indigenous Film and Art," "Introduction to Indigenous Ethics," "Worldviews of Indigenous Peoples," "Power, Identity and the Settler State: Rethinking Canada in the Age of Decolonization," "Colonization by Knowledge," and language courses "Inuktitut I and II."

Depending on the institution, completing the certificate requires students to take between three and six eligible courses, participate in activities and/or workshops led by Indigenous presenters, and, in some cases, complete a special project.

Cultural Initiatives

There is a concerted effort across all three institutions to increase the visibility of Indigenous cultures and cultural practices on campuses and to raise awareness of Indigenous experiences and realities. Indigenous student centers play a central role in this work by organizing a wide range of cultural activities, workshops, and consciousness-raising events. Workshops allow students to participate in traditional practices such as hand drum, medicine pouch, and dream catcher making; beading and soap stone carving; as well as opportunities to partake in traditional performances such as hoop dancing demonstrations. Some cultural rituals held on campuses include smudging ceremonies, drum circles, and powwows. Some examples of social media posts promoting cultural activities include:

- "Winter 2016 Events: More cultural and social activities will be organized throughout the coming term…Our Indigenous Awareness Days are in the planning stages—you'll see announcements on [College B's] website and around the college closer to the date. And look out for stimulating First Peoples sessions during Social Science Week!"
- "Come learn the basics of Native American dancing with Barbara Diabo. She will start with a demonstration dance, briefly explain the tradition, and teach basic hoop dancing steps. FREE!"
- "Rock Your Mocs on Friday, Nov 15"
- "Interested in learning about Indigenous cultures and traditions? [College A, Group 2] is hosting an Indigenous Awareness Week from May 1st to 5th. Come out and join us. Inuit Games and Carving, Dream Catcher Workshop & Beading, Hoop Dancing and Mini Pow Wow Demo, Beading and Drumming, Film Screening."

All of the schools also have established outdoor spaces that are dedicated to Indigenous learning activities and incorporate Indigenous landscaping elements. In some cases, the institutions point out that their gardens were developed in consultation with Indigenous community members, reflecting efforts to create culturally meaningful spaces. One institutional document explains that their outdoor Indigenous classroom was "created in consultation with local Indigenous community members of Kahnawá:ke and Kanehsatá:ke...The turtle-shaped amphitheater that includes a fire pit to be used for Indigenous ceremonies, gatherings, and teachings, will also be used for academic classes that focus on Indigenous content and culture."

Consciousness-raising Activities

Institutional documents and social media platforms promote a variety of on and off campus consciousness-raising activities that are aimed at developing awareness among the

student body about colonial histories, the legacy of colonization, and the present-day realities of Indigenous communities. These activities include workshops such as the KAIROS Blanket Exercise, which is an experiential exercise "that explores the historic and contemporary relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in the land we now know as Canada" (KAIROS, 2025); as well as events focused on environmental issues and climate change, promotion of the rights of Indigenous Peoples, and awareness campaigns around suicide and its prevention. Important commemorative activities include Orange Shirt Day which honours residential school victims and survivors as part of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation and the Red Dress Project for the National Day for Awareness and Action for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit people (MMIWG2S). Some examples of social media posts promoting these activities are as follows:

- "Orange Shirt Day is an annual day to commemorate and honour the people who went through the Residential School Experience. It is an opportunity to show solidarity and to commit to reconciliation and reparations. At noon, we will gather by the [College A's] Gardens where Timothy Armstrong will share some thoughts about the importance of this day. Timothy is Bear Clan from the Brokenhead Ojibway Nation and a political and environmental activist and musician."
- "Starting September 23, [College B] will host a series of on-campus activities highlighting the lasting impacts of colonization, the importance of decolonization, and the celebration of Indigenous joy in honor of Orange Shirt Day."
- "September 13 is a very special day as we are celebrating the 10th anniversary of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. To celebrate this historic event, there will be festivities in the Old Port of Montreal, featuring Inuit and

First Nations artists, and native foods. It is a rare opportunity to be part of the celebration and learn about Montreal at the same time."

- Law 14, formerly Bill 96 in Québec, aims to strengthen French language laws, but how does it affect Indigenous communities?
- "Indigenous students are raising their voices to share the challenges of pursuing CÉGEP studies. Law 14 is a new and major obstacle to the many existing barriers they face. Discover their reality with the full video in the link in bio. Listen. Share. Make a difference."

Indigenous student centers also collaborate with local organizations such as the Native Friendship Centre and Native Women's Centre to support fundraising activities and food drives.

Indigenous Guest Speakers

Institutions provide funds to teachers to invite Indigenous guest speakers and to host events that highlight Indigenous voices. One institutional document recognizes, "[College A, Group 1's] efforts to indigenize their course content through sponsorship of Indigenous related speakers and events that bring in personal voices and/or traditional knowledge to the college community through a special funding envelope."

Social media posts describe one-off talks as well as semester-long series in which they invite Indigenous authors, artists, filmmakers, academics, educators, and activists to speak. Some notable guest speakers that have participated in events across the network have included the late TRC Commissioner and Senator Murray Sinclair; TRC Commissioner Dr. Marie Wilson; Filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin; artist, writer, and scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson; athlete Waneek Horn-Miller; and author, educator, and activist Taiaike Gerald Alfred. Some examples of posts promoting such events include:

- “There will be a screening of Alanis Obomsawin's latest film We Can't Make the Same Mistake Twice at JAC on April 13th. One week later, on April 19th, Obomsawin will be the keynote speaker at [College C’s] Indigenous Peoples Awareness Day in which we will celebrate the achievements of Indigenous women.”
- “On Tuesday, September 19…at 2:30 p.m. come and see Aronhiaies Herne, a Kanienkehaka educator from Akwesasne talk about traditional teachings. The event is open to the whole college community. The title of his talk on Tuesday will be ‘Iroquois Prophecy and Thanks Giving.’”
- “Monday March 6, 2:30-3:30 pm, Anishinaabe advocate Marie-Josée Parent will speak about Colonization, Indigenous youth and contemporary self-governance for international women’s week.”

The theme of Indigenous Life on Campus focuses on initiatives to decolonize the curriculum and introduce members of campus to Indigenous cultures, histories, and present-day realities through participation in cultural activities and consciousness-raising events.

Theme 4: Faculty Engagement

This theme focuses on reconciliation-related efforts initiated by faculty. Codes associated with this theme include Grassroots Efforts and Faculty Commitment. These findings are supported primarily by interviews and only marginally by institutional documents. This theme responds to the research question about existing reconciliation initiatives in the English-language CÉGEP network.

Grassroots Initiatives

This section relies primarily on data from one participant who was instrumental in developing reconciliation-related work at one of the colleges in this study. This participant

reported that teacher-led communities of practice that focus on Indigenous education have developed over many years and have grown especially since the release of the TRC's final report in 2015. These communities of practice started out as small informal grassroots initiatives that were led by a few faculty members who sought to raise awareness among their colleagues in order to provide better support to Indigenous students. Early activities included visits for employees to local communities as well as talks and workshops led by Indigenous presenters. The participant recounted a memory of those early days,

> I think the first initiative would have been around 2005 or 2006. It was very informal, before we formed a group. We were just kind of organizing activities, organizing trips to Kanehsatà:ke, to the Pines, we were running around finding money to be able to pay speakers. It was all very informal and grassroots. We didn't really have any institutional backing other than an occasional benevolent Dean who would agree to fund one of our activities.

Another participant expanded on the informal nature of this early group, "It was informal in the sense that it was a small group of dedicated faculty, mainly faculty, who wanted to raise awareness. Their efforts were not so formal that they required motions at academic council, curriculum changes and implementation and so on. It was not the same as it is now."

The goal of these early activities was to get something started, to spark interest, and raise awareness among employees and students. As the participant remarked,

> It was really just fledgling…little sparks that we were trying to light…those activities were to raise awareness among everybody but trying to get it into the classroom so that the students who were going through here, most of them who were non-native, would

> have a clue…I was raising visibility among staff so that we could reach students and educate the students.

In 2013, on the advice of a dean, the group decided to formalize. The participant recounted the following story,

> It was the dean of General Education who said to us, 'you know, you should really think about making this more of a stable thing, you're doing important work, but if you organize officially, you'll have more of a voice than if you're just a loose group of people doing stuff on a casual basis.' So that's what he encouraged us to do and we were like, yeah, that's a good point. If we want to have more credibility, maybe we should have a name and be more systematic about what we do.

The group followed the dean's advice; they created a name which gave them a new kind of presence on campus. The participant explained, "We were just a bunch of employees who decided to give ourselves a name, but it did give us something to put on posters and submissions to the [College newsletter] and things like that." Around this time, new funding opportunities to support staff training started to become available and the group was granted funds to organize trainings that were available to faculty and staff college-wide. As the participant recounted,

> We started the first ever kind of big project, it was this three full days of learning over the year, so for example, there was a full day in the week after classes ended in December, then there was another day before classes started in January, and a third day in May after classes ended. We started with a blanket exercise on the first day. This was always between semesters so that people would be able to devote a full day without having classes, so blanket exercise in the morning, then lunch, and then we had speakers come in to talk about different things. One of the days we went to Kahnawà:ke and heard from

> people there for a full day…So day one being very 101, day two moving into more advanced, and then by day three moving into pedagogy with the hopes that by then they'd be able to share something they had started to implement.

The participant described feeling energized by the work they were doing, they also recognized, that with the recent release of the TRC's final report, they were in a moment of political favor, but that this momentum would probably not last forever. The participant explained,

> The energy came from feeling rushed to get this in, get this institutionalized while we had the chance because we knew that it wasn't going to be à la mode anymore in a few years, not that we felt it was a fashion thing, but we know how politics go. We know how the Zeitgeist changes, and in a few years, they'll go back to not caring about this anymore. So while they care, while they see the importance, we need to do as much as we can so that it becomes cemented as a way that we do things. So I think I'd say that it was those two factors, opportunity and political kind of overarching energies that were happening.

Other colleges were experiencing similar momentum. Faculty members from different institutions sought each other out to collaborate on reconciliation work at an intercollegiate level. Their goal was to effect change at the administrative and governmental levels. The participant described the impetus for their intercollegiate collaborative work.

> The idea was that we shouldn't be competing with each other…We're one big network and we should be working together and…also it energized us…the idea that we could mobilize to get our administrators and the government also to give more support and to institutionalize this stuff so that it would become not even questioned that there would always be funding for staff training and other things, of course.

Some faculty members were awarded a grant to develop the intercollegiate network and established a more formal group called the Intercollegiate Decolonization Network. Members of the group consulted with one another, shared knowledge and best practices, and developed a shared contact list of Indigenous speakers and workshop presenters who were interested in speaking at the colleges. The group also organized an intercollegiate conference that featured a keynote talk by Mi'kmaw educator, professor, and activist Marie Battiste, as well as a panel of Indigenous students from different colleges who spoke about their experiences in post-secondary education. According to the interview participant, "We had fantasized about having a yearly thing where people would have breakout groups according to their area of work and things like that, but the grant was only three years...and after it ran out, not much happened because nobody had any release time for anything." When funding for the intercollegiate network ended, faculty members sought support from their institutions to sustain the network, but the institutions did not acquiesce. The participant said, "We didn't have the oomph, I think, to push for it because we all got busier with our internal stuff." The intercollegiate relationships, however, remain, and faculty members report that they still consult with one another as needed.

Faculty Commitment

Interviews and institutional documents suggest that faculty commitment to reconciliation-related work at the colleges is ongoing. Two participants remarked that many faculty recognize their lack of knowledge when it comes to colonial histories and Indigenous realities and recognize that they need to learn. One participant said, "I think a lot of people were drawn to this work because they knew that they didn't know, so having a chance to learn more from Indigenous people themselves and right here in their workplace seemed to be a welcome opportunity for a lot of people." Another participant reflected, "none of us have training. You

know, these things didn't exist when we were doing our academic training so that's a huge reason why we need to do this. And then obviously also for reconciliation, for accountability to Indigenous communities…I mean, it's in the TRC's Calls to Action that all post-secondary institutions should be teaching our students differently."

According to interview participants, the number of faculty members who are interested in Indigenous education has increased over the years. One participant noted, "There are a lot more teachers now who are including readings by Indigenous authors or films by Indigenous filmmakers, centering Indigenous perspectives and moving away from the colonial gaze. It's not just a few of us anymore," and another one reflected, "I always see my work in two prongs, which, first and foremost is for Indigenous students, for their cultural safety, for their academic success, and to be accountable to their communities; the other one is the awareness raising among all students, and again, that is a way to be accountable to all Indigenous communities and students."

Institutional documents highlight efforts made by faculty to improve the educational experiences of Indigenous students, including securing research grants and participating in relevant conferences. Some titles of successful grant applications include:

- "Responsive Toolkit to Pave the Way for Positive and Successful Integration of Indigenous Students in Post-Secondary Classrooms"
- "Adaptation des cours et de la pédagogie pour permettre aux étudiants inuits de poursuivre des études au cégep"
- "Ressources culturellement adaptées à l'apprentissage du français langue seconde pour les étudiants autochtones"
- "The First Peoples' Postsecondary Storytelling Exchange"

Although, interest from faculty has increased over the years, as one participant noted, "We're definitely increasing the number of teachers who are involved," they also observed that, "definitely there is still resistance…I find most of the time, it's not enough time in their class, not enough time for them to do the learning…they don't feel comfortable or they don't think it is important. I'm sure there are those people too."

The theme of Faculty Engagement discusses the ways in which faculty have taken on the responsibility of reconciliation-related work. According to this data, the work that members of faculty took on in the early aughts was foundational to the initiatives that are in place today.

Theme 5: Institutional Commitment

This theme emerged from data that describes institutional commitments to reconciliation. Data supporting this theme comes from institutional documents and interview data. The codes associated with this theme are Institutional Commitment, Institutional Support, Employee Training, and Indigenous Employee Recruitment. This theme was developed to address the third research question in this study, which considers how institutional administrative bodies support reconciliation work.

Institutional Commitment to Reconciliation

In their commitments to reconciliation, all three institutions recognize recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Viens Commission, and have signed on to Colleges and Institutes Canada's (CICAN) Indigenous Education Protocol (IEP). The IEP, developed in consultation with Indigenous communities, is an aspirational document that outlines seven principles to "address Indigenous peoples' learning needs and support for self-determination and socio-economic development of Indigenous communities" (CICAN,

2025). One participant noted that the IEP provides a framework to guide colleges in implementing the TRC's calls to action.

Institutional documents reflect the colleges 'commitment to CICAN's principles. For example, one college states, "As a signatory of the CICAN Indigenous Education Protocol and informed by the Viens Commission Report, [College A] affirms these seven principles and is committed to the implementation of the Protocol and the exemplary practices outlined therein." Another institution describes its commitment to the TRC and CICAN's IEP through the development and implementation of a range of initiatives, including an "Indigenous student success plan; an Indigenous protocol; strategies for strengthening relationships with Indigenous communities; and approaches to honouring land and territory."

While all three schools express a commitment to the ongoing process of reconciliation in their institutional documents, the specificity with which this commitment is articulated varies. The following excerpt exemplifies a more detailed formulation of institutional responsibility:

> [College B] is committed to the process of Indigenization. Taking leadership from Indigenous students and employees, we seek to weave Indigenous knowledges and worldviews into the college's culture and practices. As an academic institution, it is our responsibility to uphold the truth and we are dedicated to confronting the ongoing harm committed by settler colonialism. We endeavour to nurture a more inclusive and culturally safe environment for all.

Some institutions also recognize the long-term nature of this work, as expressed in the following statement, "Our promises in the areas of equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility, as well as indigenization, will involve us in work stretching well beyond the timeframe of the next five years."

Institutional Support

While documents indicate that there is institutional commitment to reconciliation across all three schools, the initiative to do this work, according to interview participants, has come from the grassroots. As one participant explained, “I guess the short answer would be yes, there's institutional support, but the push has come from grassroots, obviously. It's been bottom-up.” Another participant, confirming this perception, remarked, “my perception was there was kind of a bottom-up movement from the faculty and staff to move forward on Indigenous education.” Participants also observed that institutional support has tended to shift with the sociopolitical climate. One participant reflected,

> When they were revising one of the Strat plans, some of us said we need to get something Indigenous in there [and the response was], we only have like what, 10 native students...I think at some point the people with power in the institution, and it's not to put anybody down, but they thought it was just an obsession of a few people. Oh, look at those zealots, you know. They thought it was just this personal passion that we were trying to push on everybody else. That's the impression I get. I don't want to ascribe intentions, but that’s how it felt. That's how it landed. But after Idle No more and then the TRC, it gained momentum, these conversations were more mainstream. I feel like a lot of people with decision making capacities were kind of like, oh okay, it's not just a personal obsession. This is a real serious thing, and even our government, the federal government, is taking this seriously now. I think that's when it shifted that’s when they started taking us more seriously because it wasn't just us anymore and they knew that pressure was going to be coming from the political level, whether they liked it or not, so they may as well encourage what we were already doing.

The significance of the sociopolitical climate was underscored by another participant who pointed to the importance of having backing from individuals in key leadership positions. Referring to the release of the TRC's final report, the participant reflected,

> People were seeing it more and more in the news. It was becoming a more important issue for everybody, so the ground was much more fertile to consider what actions we could take to really move reconciliation forward. We certainly found there was a stronger level of support, although perhaps not across the entire college. The energy and the commitment to move things forward really came from the bottom up…they were the folks who were really moving things forward and I believe they realized they had an ally in senior leadership.

While participants recognized the support that their institutions provide, they emphasized that this support is not straightforward. As one participant offered, "It's funny, when you asked me the question about institutional support, I thought, okay, I've been butting my heads with them the whole time. On the flip side, there has also been support from certain administrators, it's not black and white." Another participant reflected on the complications that have come with institutional support, they explained,

> The more institutional support we got, the more everything has to be bureaucratic. [Initiatives like the Indigenous studies certificate and the formation of committees dedicated to this work] are great, but this institution, like all other educational institutions, is inherently colonial, and the ways that we do things are inherently colonial...So having to answer to a colonial system while trying to decolonize feels, at this point, impossible to me.

Despite stated institutional commitments and demonstrations of support from administrative bodies, participants reported that the resources available to support and sustain this work are lacking, giving rise to feelings of frustration and even burnout. Time, in particular, is at a premium. Participants feel that the time they are given by the institution to do this work, and to do it well, is insufficient. Frustrations are compounded by the fact that grassroots actors find themselves having to take on the additional, often invisible, labour of negotiating for the resources that this work requires. As one participant pointed out, "Negotiating with the administration is part of the work that's not written in the official list of tasks…We have to constantly fight to maintain these things."

A persistent shortage of resources exacerbated by recent funding cuts along with the tension of trying to decolonize a colonial institution has contributed to feelings of discouragement for some participants. As one remarked, "Even though a lot of people are doing stuff in their classes. More voices are needed to step up and push for commitment of resources which is hard in a time where the government has cut funding, we can't even buy books anymore. We're at another pivotal moment where everything's being cut back. So I think unfortunately, we're going to lose a lot of the progress that we made. A lot of us burnt out as well."

Employee Training

Data from institutional documents illustrates that all of the institutions recognize the need for employee training—in areas such as Indigenous histories and current realities, Indigenous pedagogies and research methods, and strategies for creating culturally safe learning environments for Indigenous students—and provide opportunities for teachers and staff to engage in this work. There is a stated desire across the institutions to expand cultural safety

training, particularly for employees in key positions who interact directly with Indigenous students. An institutional commitment to employee training is illustrated in the following excerpts from institutional documents,

- “Provide training on decolonization and cultural safety to all college employees.”
- “Support all employees in acquiring knowledge in Indigenous history, contemporary realities, pedagogies, as well as strengths-based trauma-informed approaches to student support.”
- “Continual training of counsellors and some key employees on evolving issues related to stigma, diversity, racism, discrimination and decolonization.”

Training for teachers is evident in all three data sources. Institutional websites provide curated lists of online resources for teachers, as evidenced in this social media post,

- Teachers! [College B, Group 3] has compiled TONS of resources…to help Indigenize and Decolonize your pedagogy, such as Dr. Jo-Ann Archibald's (Q’um Xiiem; Sto:lo Nation) Indigenous storywork website. Dr Archibald's videos "provide introductory information about Indigenous stories, their structure or framework, and protocols for using these stories. The videos pose considerations and guiding questions to get educators ready to work with Indigenous stories and Indigenous storytellers.

Other online resources include information on writing land acknowledgments, suggested reading lists, videos of presentations by Indigenous speakers, and lists of local Indigenous organizations. As one college website indicates,

> These resources and links are offered as points of departure to reinforce our collective knowledge of Indigenous epistemologies and pedagogy and to support best practices for integrating Indigenous content in the classroom, engaging and encouraging students, and

> collaborating with colleagues to address the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action.

One institution even provides a list of teachers involved in this work and their area of expertise to facilitate connections between teachers. Colleges also indicate that there are Microsoft Teams spaces which teachers can access locally that provide resources and a forum for discussions and support.

Interviews pointed to grassroots efforts to provide teacher training. One early initiative involved, as one participant explained, “three full days of training over a year with the idea of beginner, intermediate, and advanced sessions. By the end of these sessions, the intention was that teachers would been able to Indigenize some aspect of a course.” Due to a lack of consistent attendance, however, the workshops failed to progress from basic to advanced as planned. According to the participant,

> I wasn't as insistent as I should have been that people do the workshops in sequence. People would say, oh, I can't make it to the first day, I'll come to the second. So things never built because people would miss the 101 and then come to the second or third day asking questions that had been covered the first day. I feel like I failed by not being diligent about attendance, but I wanted to be nice, I didn't want to exclude people.

Noting the lack of progression, another participant commented, “I was kind of getting frustrated with the workshops. I mean, I loved the fact that we had those workshops… but what I found frustrating, and many other teachers did too, is that we never got past an introductory level…And that's where the discussion group was born, the model for it was at [College C].” The mandate for the discussion group that followed is, as the participant explained, “to train teachers in Indigenizing their classes and incorporating Indigenous pedagogies and content.” These

discussion groups still exist and institutional documents point to the provision of teacher release time for the "weekly reading group on culturally relevant approaches to decolonizing and Indigenizing pedagogies."

Indigenous Employee Recruitment

Across all three colleges, there is a stated commitment to increasing the number of Indigenous employees. This commitment is associated with specific objectives including identifying and removing systemic barriers in hiring practices, developing recruitment strategies (including using strategic wording and placement of postings) to target Indigenous candidates, and developing measures aimed at improving the retention of Indigenous employees. Institutional documents describe initiatives concerning Indigenous employee recruitment in the following ways:

- "Commit to increasing the number of indigenous employees."
- "Identify and address systemic barriers in hiring practices that affect racialized and Indigenous communities."
- "Implement measures to increase, develop and retain Indigenous employees for all sectors of the college and at all levels."
- "Employing affirmative action in the area of Indigenous recruiting; the CDPDJ (Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse) was consulted in the preparation of a first-ever job posting clearly seeking an Indigenous candidate."

Reflecting on the barriers that hiring policies can present, one interview participant described a situation illustrating how their institution navigated these challenges to prioritize the hiring of an Indigenous candidate.

> We hired a professional, who, according to the collective agreement, should have had a bachelor's degree at the time of hiring. We knew that the person was in the process of obtaining a bachelor's degree. So, we worked closely with the unions to say, listen, we wish to move forward on hiring this person because they are experienced, otherwise fully qualified, and of Indigenous background and we want to hire them. They're the best person for the job, but they don't have that degree requirement yet. The union agreed and we hired the person. Then within a year or a year and a half or so, the person obtained their bachelor's degree. So, it worked very well. Those are the kinds of accommodations we need to make to both work within the system, but also to try to meet our aspirational goals.

One institution has further demonstrated its commitment by appointing an Indigenous Dean to oversee Indigenous Education—demonstrating not only its support for Indigenous education but also ensuring Indigenous representation in decision-making and leadership roles.

The theme of institutional commitment looks at the ways in which the institutions support reconciliation work. The colleges express their commitment through references to recommendations made by the TRC and the Viens Commission as well as their participation in CICAN's Indigenous Education Protocol. While the institutions declare their commitment and demonstrate definitive actions such as supporting employee training and recruiting Indigenous employees, interview data indicates that the push for these initiatives comes from grassroots initiatives.

The five themes presented in this section emerged from data collected from three types of sources including: institutional documents such as strategic plans, annual reports (where available), and websites; posts from institutional social media platforms including Facebook and

Instagram; and one-on-one semi-structured interviews with three participants from one of the institutions in this study. Institutional documents contributed primarily to the themes of *Institutional Commitment* and *Indigenous Community Collaboration.* These documents tended to reflect administrative priorities and initiatives which were expressed in terms of aspirational goals and commitments, as well as institutional achievements in areas related to reconciliation. Social media posts contributed primarily to the themes *Indigenous Student Support* and *Indigenous Life on Campus*, highlighting information about student-facing activities, consciousness-raising efforts, and campus life. These posts tended to have an uplifting and emancipatory tone. Finally, the one-on-one interviews conducted in this research focused primarily on the roles of faculty and administration, contributing most significantly to the themes *Faculty Engagement* and *Institutional Commitment,* providing a deeper and more critical understanding of the internal workings of reconciliation efforts on campuses.

Chapter 7: Discussion

The data gathered in this study revealed five themes, each corresponding to a different campus actor involved in or impacted by Indigenous education initiatives. This chapter considers how the activities and initiatives associated with these themes relate to processes of *unlearning, making space*, and *shared governance* in order to develop a better understanding of where we are at in terms of working towards an ethical trans-systemic education system in the English-language CÉGEP network.

Unlearning in the Context of Québec's English-language CÉGEP Network

Unlearning is a process that involves deconstructing the Eurocentric assumptions, values, and knowledge systems that dominate our education systems in Canada (Battiste, 2013; Ermine, 2007). It involves learning about colonial histories—histories that many of us are woefully unaware of (Battiste, 2013; Ermine, 2007)—and critically reflecting on the ways in which the legacy of those histories carries forward in our systems and institutions today. Through unlearning, we begin to see how we, as settlers, have benefited—and continue to benefit—from the colonial project (Battiste, 2013). The process of unlearning positions us to recognize and question our own knowledge systems and prepares us to make space for other knowledges and ways of knowing.

The institutions in this study express support for unlearning initiatives in their institutional documents. They emphasize the importance of providing decolonization training and supporting all employees in acquiring knowledge of 'Indigenous history, contemporary realities, and pedagogies." In practice, however, this support is not always readily available. Interview participants described having to negotiate with administration for resources to do this work and putting in extra time—for which they were not compensated— to navigate complicated

bureaucratic and administrative processes. One participant acknowledged that although there has been a lot of support, they have had to "butt heads" with the administration in order to carry out this work. Participants also report that although institutions now support this work, the initiative and momentum have come from the grassroots.

Grassroots reconciliation efforts were initiated by members of faculty long before the administration came on board. These processes began with activities related to unlearning. Having recognized gaps in their own education, members of faculty actively sought out opportunities to confront their own limited knowledge of colonial histories and Indigenous realities. Their activities, which have included visiting local Indigenous communities and inviting Indigenous speakers and workshop facilitators to present on college campuses, as well as participation in reading and discussion groups demonstrate an ongoing willingness among faculty to engage in processes of unlearning.

Institutional documents show that some members of faculty have pursued grants and funding for more in depth projects aimed at better understanding how to support Indigenous students. Interview participants report that many teachers have, because of their unlearning work, been able to integrate content regarding colonial histories and Indigenous knowledges, cultures, and pedagogies into their courses. This commitment from faculty presents somewhat of a paradox—their efforts are important in terms of developing course content in which Indigenous students feel represented and in terms of engaging all students in processes of unlearning, however, teaching Indigenous knowledges and worldviews is work that belongs to Indigenous teachers and communities (Corntassel, 2012; Simpson, 2014). There is, in this instance, also the additional tension of non-Indigenous teachers possibly making mistakes when incorporating Indigenous course content into classes in which Indigenous students are in attendance, leading to

potentially awkward situations for both students and teachers. Interview participants recognized some of the issues associated with non-Indigenous faculty teaching Indigenous content, but explained that, in a situation in which there are very few and, in some cases, no Indigenous faculty members, they felt they were doing the next best thing. Although participants said that there is still resistance to engage in processes of unlearning among some members of faculty, there appears to be strong commitment among those who are actively involved in this work and a solid foundation of people to continue to carry this work forward.

Many teachers who have engaged in the work of unlearning teach courses that are recognized by the Indigenous Studies Certificate programs. These certificate programs and certain consciousness-raising initiatives on campuses offer students, who choose to participate, opportunities for unlearning. These initiatives allow students to engage with Indigenous worldviews and learn about and reflect critically on the legacy of Canada's colonial histories. Experiential exercises on campuses like the KAIROS blanket exercise further invite students to engage both emotionally and intellectually with the harms caused by colonialism, while commemorative activities on campuses such as Orange Shirt Day educate and raise awareness about Indigenous realities and provide opportunities for reflection on the enduring impacts of colonization and systemic violence.

According to the data gathered in this study, the majority of unlearning work in the colleges is happening among willing faculty and students. In Diane Labelle's work with Indigenous students at another college (a college that is not part of this study), Diane noted that students submitted a report to the school's Indigenous Advisory Council in May 2025 expressing their concern that the administration is not doing enough to oblige or strongly encourage teachers and students to participate in events that would facilitate unlearning. According to the students,

in this particular CÉGEP, it is always the same people who participate in these activities (D. Labelle, personal communication, June 11, 2025). While institutional documents, such as strategic plans, show that institutions have committed to engaging in and providing opportunities for unlearning, and interview participants noted support from members of administrative bodies, participants also indicated that the resources to carry this work out are limited and not easily come by. Because of recent government cutbacks in education, this funding is becoming even more scarce (Plante, 2025).

Making Space in the Context of Québec's English-language CÉGEP Network

While *unlearning* involves critically examining and deconstructing colonial systems and assumptions, the process of *making space* goes further by decentering Eurocentric worldviews in order to shift Indigenous knowledges, ways of knowing, and being towards the center. *Making space* is about sharing the center—that is, allowing different worldviews to coexist and inform one another, rather than positioning one as superior. It requires recognizing that Indigenous and Western knowledge systems are fundamentally different (Bartlett et al, 2012; Ermine, 1995; Simpson, 2014), and most importantly, that Indigenous knowledges belong to Indigenous communities and are best conveyed by people from the communities from which the knowledge comes (Corntassel, 2012; Simpson, 2004). Put simply, *making space* is not about non-Indigenous teachers incorporating Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing into the curriculum—such practices align with an "additive approach" (Battiste, 2013, p. 6; also Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Kuokkanen, 2008)—rather, it is about Indigenous educators playing an active and participatory role in our institutions. Ultimately, making space is a transformative process that asks us to reimagine and reframe our educational systems.

Perhaps the most significant way in which making space has been addressed in the network, is with the hiring of an Indigenous dean who oversees Indigenous education, demonstrating an institutional commitment to ensuring Indigenous representation in a leadership and decision-making role. The fact that there is a faculty of Indigenous education is also indicative of moves towards making space though no specific data about this faculty was found in the research process.

Colleges report efforts to recruit Indigenous employees which could also indicate a move towards making space. Most of the data regarding recruitment efforts was found in institutional documents which tend to frame these efforts as aspirational objectives rather than established practices. Based on the data gathered in this study, it would be hard to know to what degree these goals have been put into practice. One interview participant explained that accommodations were made to hire an Indigenous candidate for a professional position and another school reported the hiring of an Indigenous pedagogical counsellor; both of these actions represent moves towards making space. In order to continue such efforts to make space, schools need to implement HR policies to ensure efforts are being made to attract and retain Indigenous hires and that these positions have a pathway to permanence (D. Labelle, personal communication, June 13, 2025).

Inviting Indigenous guests to campus—whether artists, scholars, or community leaders—are acts of both unlearning and making space. These events center Indigenous voices and challenge the dominance of the Eurocentric worldviews that continue to shape educational institutions. Such activities support unlearning by fostering empathy, deepening awareness, and contributing to an improved understanding of Indigenous realities. These activities might also be thought of as a way of making space in educational institutions for the voices of Indigenous

community members—though it should be noted that these activities only temporarily make space, are not a permanent part of the system, and always depend on available funding.

While transition programs, academic support, and cultural initiatives help make Indigenous students feel welcomed on campuses and have been shown to contribute postively to student retention and graduation (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018), they align with an additive approach (Battiste, 2013) rather than a process of making space. Such initiatives signal a willingness to accommodate Indigenous students as well as Indigenous knowledges and worldviews, but they also serve an unspoken expectation that Indigenous students adapt to the framework of a colonial institution, and in this way, bear resemblance to assimilation (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Kuokkanen, 2008). They do not signal the kind of institutional transformation that is required to create an ethical trans-systemic educational system nor a willingness to meet Indigenous students on their own terms.

The data gathered in this study reveals that processes of making space in the English-language CÉGEP network are minimal; there is evidence of acts of making space in some hiring and recruitment efforts, as well as in the presence of invited guest speakers and presenters to campus, but overall the inclination to truly make space for Indigenous Peoples on their own terms appears to be limited.

Shared Governance in the Context of Québec's English-language CÉGEP Network

Shared governance refers to the transformation of administrative structures in educational institutions. It requires a redistribution of power that is grounded in mutual respect for sovereignty and self-determination with the aim of ensuring that Indigenous knowledges and worldviews are not only present, but also respected, protected, and centered (Bartlett et al., 2012; Battiste, 2013; Ermine, 2007; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). An important aspect of shared

governance is a principle derived from an Indigenous understanding of treaties, which is that agreements of shared governance can and should change over time to accommodate evolving relationships, circumstances, and needs; in other words, shared governance should adhere to "an active relational process" (Ermine, 2007, p. 111) that "draws upon individuals both from within the educational institutions and within Aboriginal communities" (Bartlett et al., 2012, p. 334).

Based on the data that has been gathered, there is limited evidence of shared governance in the English-language CÉGEP network. At best, there are steps being taken by individual institutions towards shared governance. The most notable example is the hiring of an Indigenous dean of Indigenous education. Putting an Indigenous leader in a senior administrative role where they hold influence and decision-making power, represents a definitive commitment on behalf of the institution to include Indigenous voices and perspectives, and increases the potential for systemic change. While the faculty of Indigenous education is situated within a colonial institution, and its establishment may, therefore, be seen as part of an "additive approach" (Battiste, 2013), it nevertheless represents "a vital component of improving the experiences of Indigenous people on campus," (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018, p.220) and may, over time, have a more significant impact.

Another move towards shared governance is the establishment of Indigenous advisory committees in all of the institutions included in this study. In their institutional documents, the schools emphasize the importance of the participation of Indigenous communities in decision-making processes, and to this end, report having Indigenous advisory committees or councils. The degree of influence that communities have via these councils and committees is not clearly articulated in the documents gathered in this study; influence may vary from school to school, and even from issue to issue. Indigenous pedagogical consultant, Diane Labelle, who works

closely with one of the institutions in the English-language network (an institution that is not part of this study), reported in a personal communication on June 7th, 2025, that a newly established Indigenous advisory council in this particular institution has had significant influence so far. Diane explained that the council, just recently established in April 2025,

> is composed of an elder, two Indigenous students, the Indigenous post-secondary counsellor (who is not Indigenous), two Indigenous community members, the Academic Dean, and the Dean of Student Services. The purpose of the council is to provide the college with direction in making space for Indigenous ways of knowing and being. To date, all recommendations from both meetings held in the community of Kahnawà:ke, have been implemented.

While this consultation committee has, so far, been successful, one interview participant provided an example in which things did not go as they should have. The participant explained that the Indigenous advisory committee was not adequately consulted in the development of the school's Indigenous Studies certificate program, and reflected that in hindsight, collaboration with Indigenous consultants should have started earlier and been more inclusive from the outset. The participant noted, "if I could go back in time, I would really drastically change that, but it's a slow process that people go through, definitely in those years." Their experience highlights two things: first, although an advisory committee may be in place, processes do not necessarily always align with principles of shared governance; and second, that limited involvement from advisory committees is not always the result of deliberate exclusion—ignorance and inexperience can also be contributing factors. This is not to excuse such shortcomings but rather to emphasize the importance of the unlearning process in laying an appropriate foundation for the successful implementation of systems of shared governance.

These instances of shared governance at the institutional level are encouraging, but there is still a long way to go. All of the participants interviewed for this study pointed out that institutional initiatives are a result of pressure from grassroots actors alongside the dedication of certain individuals in administrative positions—both are needed. While there are some resources to support this work in CÉGEPs, the availability of these resources, according to participants, is insufficient. Bartlett et al.'s (2012) experience with the demise of the Integrative Science program at Cape Breton University because of "inconsistencies and insufficiencies at the administrative, faculty, budgetary and recruitment levels" (p. 333) serves as a reminder of the precarity of this work without sustained and committed backing, particularly from our governments. Québec has a long history of marginalizing Indigenous educational needs, from the overhaul of the provincial education system in the 1960s, to the cursory nod to the TRC in the 2021 teacher competency framework, to the recent legislation of Law 14 in 2023 without consultation with Indigenous communities or affected CÉGEPs. In light of this history, and in the absence of sustained and committed government backing, true reform of the system seems distant.

Processes of unlearning, making space, and shared governance are foundational to reconciliation; without these processes true reconciliation cannot be achieved. While there is evidence of instances of these processes at work in the English CÉGEP network, they remain sporadic, under-resourced, and rely heavily on the free labour and dedication of grassroots actors.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Reconciliation in education requires a fundamental transformation of our systems and institutions through a multi-step process of *unlearning* colonial practices; *making space* to center Indigenous voices, worldviews, and ways of knowing; and developing systems of s*hared governance* under which Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge systems can come together collaborate, protect, and maintain a transformed system (Allard-Gray, 2024; Bartlett et al., 2012; Battiste, 2013). It is through these processes that we will create educational spaces that support Indigenous resurgence in education (Battiste, 2013) and achieve an ethical trans-systemic education system that serves us all. Once we have gone through this process, then we can address reconciliation.

The goal of this study has been to explore reconciliation efforts in the English-language CÉGEP network. As someone working in the network who wants to contribute to this work—and who until recently had limited knowledge of colonial history and no interaction with Indigenous communities—I knew I needed to develop a better understanding of what reconciliation in education means and what we are doing to get there. To this end, I came up with the following three research questions:

- What reconciliation initiatives exist in Québec's English-language CÉGEP network?
- How do these CÉGEPs work in collaboration with local Indigenous groups on reconciliation initiatives?
- How do the institutions' administrative bodies support reconciliation work?

I posed the first question because I wanted to get an overview of what was happening in the network; I raised the second question because I knew, as the adage "nothing about us without us" explains, that it is important to do this work in collaboration with Indigenous communities and I

wanted to understand if and how collaboration is happening; the third question addresses the role that administrative bodies have or have not assumed in this work.

Before responding to the first research question, I needed to improve my understanding of reconciliation and what it means in the context of education. Mi'kmaw educator and scholar Marie Battiste's concept of an ethical trans-systemic educational space offers a vision. Battiste's work draws on Willie Ermine's (2007) idea of an ethical space of engagement in the realm of law and is very similar to Bartlett et al. 's (2012) model of Two-Eyed Seeing in education. These scholars describe a new kind of educational space, one that does not yet exist and cannot exist within the confines of a colonial institution. In order to create an ethical trans-systemic educational space, we need to break down colonial educational institutions as we know them and build educational systems in a new way. As a model for this new way, we could consider the Two Row Wampum (D. Labelle, personal communication, June 13, 2025). Known as *Teiohate Kaswenta* in Kanien'kéha (the Mohawk language), the Two Row Wampum depicts an agreement between the Haudenosaunee and Dutch colonizers (Duhamel, 2018). It is an image of

> two boats each navigating the river of life without steering the other. Each boat contains the life, laws and people of each culture. The agreement is to last 'as long as the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, as long as the rivers run downhill, and as long as the grass grows green' (Duhamel, 2018, para 6).

In other words, as Diane explained, the Two Row Wampum describes "two co-existing systems within the same river, neither dominating the other, but fully supportive and respectful of each other's way of being" (personal communication, June 11, 2025). When—and only when—we have dismantled the colonial system and are prepared to build a new system and way of doing things, then we can begin to create a space of ethical engagement in education. It is in this space

that true reconciliation in education can occur. As Coulthard points out, the government and our institutions need to transition to a new form of governance in order to lay a foundation upon which to repair relationships. Until then, reconciliation serves settler interests (Coulthard, 2014; Simpson, 2014) in that it "[relieves] settler feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 10).

Transforming our institutions in order to create a foundation for an ethical trans-systemic educational space is a massive undertaking that requires a multi-step process of unlearning colonial practices; making space in order to center Indigenous voices, worldviews, and ways of knowing; and developing systems of shared governance under which Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge systems can come together (Allard-Gray, 2024; Bartlett et al., 2012; Battiste, 2013).

These processes interact with one another and are mutually dependent. Unlearning is about changing our colonial mindset, and for settlers, is the first step in working towards an ethical trans-systemic educational system. Unlearning facilitates the process of making space which is about decentering dominant Eurocentric values and perspectives, and allowing Indigenous worldviews to move towards the center. Developing mutually agreed upon systems of shared governance that can evolve as circumstances and needs require, is essential to protecting and maintaining a space in which an ethical trans-systemic education system can thrive. (Bartlett et al., 2012; Battiste, 2013).

This study employs a two-eyed seeing approach in that it brings together Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives on reconciliation in order to develop an understanding of where we stand in the process of reconciliation in the English-language CÉGEP network in Québec. Analyzing non-Indigenous approaches to reconciliation in education in light of the processes of

unlearning, making space, and developing systems of shared governance, as proposed by Indigenous scholars, has been akin to fitting a square peg into a round hole—the two do not align. One might even say, the two approaches are irreconcilable, giving way to the following two observations: first, that there is not enough collaboration between Indigenous communities and non-Indigenous institutions when it comes to this work; and second, that reconciliation from an Indigenous perspective without the transformation of colonial institutions is impossible.

Effective responses to reconciliation in the English-language CÉGEP network are still limited and much more work is required; but they have also come a long way, and that is heartening. There is a strong core of individuals at all levels—student, faculty, staff, and administration—who have shown commitment to doing this work with respect and integrity. We have more Indigenous partners and staff working in the network than ever before, and the key is to keep pushing forward, break out of our silos, and all work together to change the system and make space. I felt encouraged when, at the 2025 annual conference for the Association québécoise de pédagogie collégiale (Québec Association of College Pedagogy), Xavier Watso, a media figure and member of the Abenaki Nation from Odenak, delivered the conference's keynote address, titled "Respect - Reparation - Reconciliation," to a room full of hundreds of educators from across the province.

Doing this research in collaboration with an Indigenous advisor has been of paramount importance to me. I could not have done this on my own. Throughout this process of research and writing, Diane Labelle has provided valuable knowledge, insight, and reassurance. Diane's vast knowledge of Indigenous education in Québec has provided depth and nuance to this study. Diane's reassurance enabled me to keep pushing forward. When I felt stuck, Diane encouraged me to follow my intuition in pursuing lines of inquiry. As the writing of this thesis has taken

shape, Diane has supplemented this work with additional detail and insight that has helped push it to where it is today. Diane has suggested, that in a gesture of reciprocity, I share this work with the Indigenous Advisory Councils and key administrators in the English-language CÉGEP network, and has requested my permission “to use [this] thesis as an instrument to push change…at the colleges and other educational institutions” (D. Labelle, personal communication, June, 11, 2025). It would be my honour.

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APPENDIX A

Participant Consent Form

INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Study Title: Proposal for a Qualitative Research Study on Indigenization Initiatives in Quebec's English-language CÉGEP Network

Researcher: Juliet Lammers

Researcher's Contact Information: lammers.juliet@gmail.com

Faculty Supervisor: Giuliana Cucinelli

Faculty Supervisor's Contact Information: giuliana.cucinelli@concordia.ca

Source of funding for the study: N/A

You are being invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what participating would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want to participate or not. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

A. PURPOSE

The purpose of the research is *to understand what kinds of reconciliation initiatives are happening at three major English-language CÉGEPs in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. This is not an evaluation of the initiatives that are taking place, but rather, in the absence of tracking efforts, this research seeks to understand what initiatives exist and how they are currently supported.*

B. PROCEDURES

If you participate, you will be asked to participate in one 30 to 60-minute interview. Following the interview, you will receive a transcript of the interview and will be asked to verify that the transcript accurately reflects your comments in the interview. In total, participating in this study will take 60 to 120 minutes.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

You might face certain risks by participating in this research. These risks could include (but may not be limited to):

Fatigue during an interview

Psychological discomfort and/or stress during an interview

Concern about portraying your institution/employer in an unfavorable light

I would like to discuss these risks with you in advance of an interview to get an understanding of what your concerns might be and to make sure that you feel comfortable proceeding. I will also check in with you periodically during the interview to make sure you feel comfortable to proceed. If at any time, you feel uncomfortable or uncertain about how the interview is proceeding, I encourage you to let me know. You can withdraw your participation at any time during the interview.

I am also providing a list of publicly accessible mental health and counselling services that you can access should you feel the need. This list will be provided to all participants.

This research is not intended to benefit you personally.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY

We will gather the following information as part of this research: information found online about the indigenization initiatives at the CÉGEPs in this study and interviews regarding indigenization efforts at the CÉGEPs in this study.

We will not allow anyone to access the information, except people directly involved in conducting the research. We will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form.

The information gathered will be coded. That means that the information will be identified by a code. The researcher will have a list that links the code to your name. We intend to publish the results of the research. However, it will not be possible to identify you in the published results. We will protect the information by storing it on an external hard drive that is designated for this research project and will destroy the information five years after the end of the study.

F. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

You do not have to participate in this research. It is purely your decision. If you do participate, you can stop at any time. You can also ask that the information you provided not be used, and your choice will be respected. If you decide that you don't want us to use your information, you must tell the researcher before two weeks following your interview (interview date_____, information withdrawal deadline_____.)There are no negative consequences for not participating, stopping in the middle, or asking us not to use your information.

G. RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This interview could take place on campus or online or in another location. We will discuss and mutually agree upon an appropriate location.

This interview will be recorded. Please indicate the method of recording that you consent to by checking one of the boxes below.

☐ Video & audio recording

☐ Audio recording

☐ Written notes taken by the researcher

H. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered. I agree to participate in this research under the conditions described.

NAME (please print)

_____

SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact the researcher. Their contact information is on page 1. You may also contact their faculty supervisor.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or oor.ethics@concordia.ca.

APPENDIX B

Participant Recruitment Email

Hello, My name is Juliet Lammers. I am a MA student in the department of Education at Concordia University currently working on my thesis. I am also a pedagogical counsellor at Vanier College.

My research focuses on indigenization initiatives at the three major colleges in Montreal's English-language CÉGEP network.

I am looking for potential participants to interview for my research and am wondering if you would be interested in an initial meeting to discuss your possible participation. We could meet online or on the phone. In this initial meeting, I would describe the project to you, ask you a few preliminary questions about your work, and answer any questions that you might have.

If we agree to move forward, I would ask you to participate in one interview that would last 30 to 60 minutes. Your identity would remain known only to me. I will not use names of people or institutions in my final report.

Below is a brief description of my research. If this interests you, you can contact me at lammers.juliet@gmail.com.

Description of Research

June 2025 will mark the ten-year anniversary of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) publication of its final report and 94 Calls to Action (CTA). It is widely agreed upon that progress on the implementation of the CTAs has been exceedingly slow.

This research is a qualitative study that seeks to understand what kinds of reconciliation initiatives are happening at three major English-language CÉGEPs in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. This is not an evaluation of the initiatives that are taking place, but rather, in the absence of

tracking efforts, this research seeks to understand what initiatives exist and how they are currently supported.

The goal of this research is not to criticize or point fingers at institutions and/or their initiatives or lack thereof. Rather, the goal of this research is to develop an understanding of where we are at in the present moment within a specific sector of education. The hope is that this research might serve as a foundation from which CÉGEP administrators, faculty, and staff can develop possible next steps in the ongoing process of decolonizing and indigenizing the English-language CÉGEP system; next steps that should be developed in consultation with local Indigenous partners.

APPENDIX C

Unstructured Interview Guide

Appendix E: Semi-structured Interview Guide

Reconciliation Initiatives

- How does your institution include Indigenous histories and knowledge in the curriculum?
- How does your institution include Indigenous teaching methods in the curriculum?
- What kind of training does your institution provide to teachers
    - on Indigenous and colonial histories
    - Indigenous pedagogies/teaching methods
- How does your institution build "student capacity for understanding, empathy, and mutual respect" (TRC, 2015b, p.7) towards Indigenous people and issues?
- What other kinds of reconciliationinitiatives exist at your institution?

Institutional Support for Indigenization

- Which of these initiatives are supported by management and which are grassroots?
- How does your institution support these efforts?
    - Part of institutional policy?
    - Is funding available?
    - Is release time available?
- Describe the impact of these various initiatives.

- What barriers stand in the way of indigenization initiatives at your institution?
- What kind of plan or policy is in place at your institution to ensure the longevity of current efforts?
- How would you describe the attitudes towards these efforts in your institution?
    - Among management
    - Among faculty and staff
    - Among students

Collaborating with local Indigenous groups

- Describe the relationships that your institution maintains with local Indigenous groups.
- What role do Indigenous advisors play at your institution?
- How do Indigenous advisors participate or contribute to indigenization efforts at your institution?