

Review of Inclusive and Special Education Interim Update

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I have been honored and privileged to be invited to do this work on the traditional and ancestral territories of the 14 Yukon First Nations. I wish to recognize the tremendous opportunity we have to learn from the important perspectives of diverse people, including people with diverse abilities, talents, and gifts, and people with perspectives that represent diverse cultures, genders, linguistic backgrounds, and communities.

May we build on the strength of diversity to find a good way forward, together.

Introduction

In June of 2019, the Office of the Auditor General of Canada released a report called *Kindergarten Through Grade 12 Education in Yukon – Department of Education*. In this report, the Auditor General outlined some key concerns with the Yukon Department of Education, including:

- a lack of measurements for the effectiveness of inclusive and special education programs and practices;
- poor services and outcomes for Indigenous students; and
- gaps in student outcomes between urban and rural communities (2019).

As a partial response to these concerns, in January 2020 I was hired as an external consultant to support the Department of Education in their inquiry process examining how learners, communities, and staff experience or facilitate inclusive and special education in Yukon. Given this focus on inclusivity, discussions have tended to overlap with the other areas of concern identified by the Auditor General.

Although I started the review in January 2020, community engagement had to be temporarily suspended due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. The restrictions around travel and group meetings have now lasted beyond the original timeline for this project. However, since I did not have the opportunity to meet with many community members, I am not able to provide a complete report at this time. In response, this interim update is being released to allow for reflection on the process so far and to give the public a sense of how the review is unfolding. Specifically, the purposes of this document are to:

- outline the **community engagement approach** being used to conduct this review, and show where we are in this process
- describe **understandings and practices of inclusive and special education** currently used in Yukon and provide questions to serve as a springboard for future consideration and engagement
- describe the general **strengths and concerns** that have surfaced so far and offer some **guiding questions and resources for thinking**.

Community Engagement Approach

Spirals of Inquiry

The Department of Education has chosen to adopt a “spiral of inquiry” to shape their overall approach to examining and strengthening inclusive and special education in the Yukon. The spiral of inquiry defines how educators engage together in ongoing cycles of learning and development, to improve outcomes for students (Halbert & Kaser, 2013). This approach to inquiry has been used by The Network of Innovation and Indigenous Education (NOIIE) throughout British Columbia, and the world, to “create equity and quality outcomes for all learners” (Halbert & Kaser, 2013, p. 47).

The spiral process is being used by the Department of Education as a framework for supporting collaboration with their diverse partners, which include Yukon First Nations, and the Advisory Committee for Yukon Education, which also includes representation from Yukon First Nations, as well as:

- Commission Scolaire Francophone du Yukon
- the Yukon Teachers’ Association
- the Association of Yukon School Administrators
- Yukon educators
- the Association for Yukon School Councils, Boards and Committees
- the Catholic Education Association of Yukon

The spiral of inquiry will help the Department of Education and their partners address their shared goal of supporting diverse Yukon learners through inclusive and special education services. Adapted for this context, the spiral of inquiry involves the following processes:

1. Scanning

What's going on for learners, families, communities, educators, administrators, support personnel, and other staff? What are some strengths already in the system that can be built upon? What's creating a challenge?

2. Focusing

Where will attention be focused first? How will the challenges be prioritized?

3. Developing a hunch

What do staff, communities, and students see as leading to this challenge? What aspects of the system might need to change?

4. New learning

What can be learned from the expertise already present in the system or in communities? What additional information might be needed?

5. Taking action

What could be done differently across diverse contexts? How can educators, parents and other team members be brought into this transformative process?

6. Checking

Have changes made a big enough difference?

Although this depiction of the spiral of inquiry appears to be a linear step-by-step progression, it is meant to be cyclical and recursive, working between and among steps in the inquiry process to co-construct meaningful change.

Research suggests that the spirals of inquiry have been used successfully in diverse contexts to create meaningful local (i.e., school level), and systemic (i.e., district and province-wide) change (Jeroski, 2015; McGregor, 2019). As Timperley, Kaser, and Halbert (2014) suggest, "innovation floats on a sea of inquiry and ... curiosity is a driver for change" (p. 4). In the context of educational change in Yukon, the spirals of inquiry offer great potential for supporting innovative and meaningful transformation in and through relationship with partners, while at the same time building a culture of equity and inclusion from the strengths and passion of people involved with education in Yukon.

Within this spiral of inquiry being undertaken by the Department of Education and their partners, the role of this review is to provide support in *scanning* to determine what is going on for learners, especially, but not exclusively, in relation to the concerns about inclusive and special education raised by the Auditor General. My role is to both gather perspectives, but also to provide prompts and resources for further thinking. Through these actions, I will be able to surface what is happening within Yukon's inclusive and special education system, and highlight some possibilities that could open further potential.

The Department of Education and their partners will use the information gathered during the review to inform how they engage together in the spiral of inquiry. For example, the scanning done here may inform where they choose to *focus* their attention. They can then begin *developing a hunch* based on the perspectives of learners, communities, and educators. If *new learning* is required, the group may draw on community expertise or find outside resources to inform their thinking. From this point they can begin co-constructing possible courses of *action*. After a pre-determined timeframe, they will likely *check* back again with learners, communities, and educators to see if the actions they have taken resulted in significant changes. As such, this review is just one piece of a much larger process that is meant to foster positive growth and development within the educational system, for the benefit of all children.

Review Processes

To support the first key step in the inquiry spiral, “scanning” for what is happening currently in Yukon, this review of Inclusive and Special Education will unfold in three phases, as shown in Figure 1. The first will seek input from Department of Education personnel and the community through focus groups and meetings. In the second phase, this information will be complemented with opportunities for individuals to provide input through an online tool. In the final phase, I will interpret the information gathered to produce a final report. This report can then serve as a springboard for the inquiry process described above.

Initially, the review had been scheduled to run from January until June 2020. Figure 1 shows how I was only able to begin the public engagement process before it was disrupted by COVID-19 travel and meeting restrictions. This pause in information gathering provided a good opportunity for this interim update to be shared with the public. Further plans for engagement are expected to take place in the fall and winter of 2020.

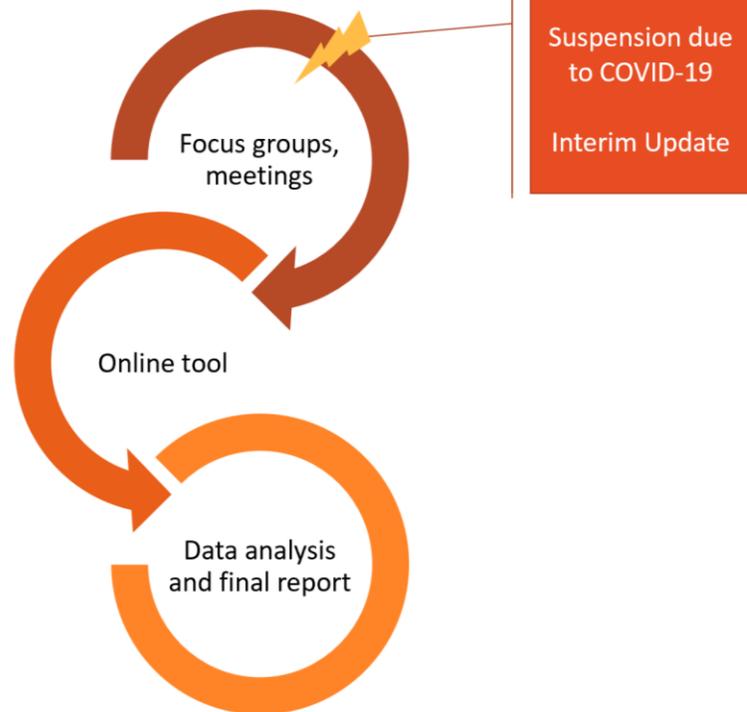


Figure 1. Major components of review

Focus Groups and Meetings

Focus groups and meetings are meant to provide an opportunity for people to discuss their ideas and experiences with inclusive and special education in Yukon. People can build from the synergy of the group to emphasize specific concerns and co-construct innovative suggestions for moving forward. These focus group meetings play a central role in the public engagement process that began in January and will continue throughout the fall and winter. Through the focus groups, my objective is to gather the perspectives of the following groups:

- Yukon First Nations;
- education partners represented on the Advisory Committee for Yukon Education (as listed above);
- other agencies and Yukon government departments, such as Child and Youth Advocate, and the Yukon Department of Health and Social Services;
- non-governmental organizations, such as the Learning Disability Association of Yukon and Autism Yukon;
- School Councils, whose representatives will be asked to provide insights from families in their school communities;
- school-based teams, including teachers and school staff, but may include students and parents.
- School-based Administrators
- Central Administration

These voices will enrich the review by offering a diversity of perspectives on inclusive and special education in Yukon.

Online Engagement

The second approach to public engagement will involve one or more online tools to gather peoples' perspectives and experiences, opening in November 2020. These tools will give individuals an opportunity to share their stories in relation to inclusive and special education. These stories are essential for understanding what is going on for learners and their support systems. The survey will be open to everyone in Yukon, but is especially intended for

- students,
- parents and families,
- Yukon First Nations,
- School Councils and associations,
- Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon,
- Yukon Teachers' Association,
- Educational Assistants,
- school and central administration staff,
- other professions that work with children and youth, and
- those who are unable to attend focus group meetings, or who wish to add to contributions they made in meetings.

I want to encourage everyone who has a story to share about their experiences with inclusive and special education in Yukon to complete the appropriate online tool, including the section that asks some basic demographic questions about yourself. This information will help in understanding how diverse people may be experiencing inclusive and special education differently. If you are not sure about how you could participate, or have questions about the survey, please contact the Yukon Department of Education.

Data Analysis and Final Report

After hearing the perspectives of community members through focus groups, meetings, and online tools, I will conduct an analysis of the information gathered. I will draw out the themes that were talked about most often, and/or those themes that offer unique perspectives on the way inclusive and special education is working in Yukon. From this kind of analysis, it may be possible to see, for example, if Indigenous students with special needs are experiencing school in a different way than other children, or if parents of children with the most intense special education needs feel their children are getting the support that they need. These findings can then be used by the Department of Education and their partners to co-construct a vision going forward.

Understanding and Practicing Inclusive and Special Education

Before getting into the specifics of what emerged from my discussions with respondents so far, I provide an overview of what I have heard about the context of inclusive and special education in Yukon. Based on that, I offer some questions and provide resources that might prompt further thinking about possible ways forward.

The first question to address in this update, and in the review as a whole, is about the way inclusive and special education is defined in the context of Yukon. What is Yukon's vision of inclusive and special education, building from definitions set out in policy documents and legislation? What ideas are people referencing when they talk about inclusive and special education? What supports are students and families to expect from the education system? To answer these questions, I examined three documents: The *Education Act* (2002), *Communicating Student Learning* (Yukon Department of Education, 2019), and the *Student Support Services Manual* (Yukon Department of Education, 2015). In addition, I considered how the people I met with talked about inclusive and special education generally.

What is inclusive and special education?

To determine how the Yukon Department of Education envisioned inclusive and special education, I scanned documents for a definition of terms, or any explanations of what inclusive and special education might mean in that context. The Student Support Services Manual (Yukon Department of Education, 2015) defines *inclusion* as

the principle that all students are entitled to equitable access to learning, achievement and the pursuit of excellence in all aspects of their education. The practice of inclusion provides students with the most enabling and least restrictive environment to meet their individual learning needs, including meaningful participation and interaction with others. Inclusion refers not merely to setting but to specific instruction and support for students with special needs in classrooms. (p. A-4)

This definition seems to be consistent with other areas of the Manual that talk about environments where “every student feels accepted, valued and safe” (p. B-2). It also aligns with the vision of education described in the *Education Act* (2002) that focuses on equality of opportunity for students’ holistic development, supported in partnership with parents. Together, these documents suggest that inclusion in Yukon may be understood as an education that helps all students reach their holistic potential in the least restrictive environment (ideally the classroom) where they feel a sense of safety and belonging.

Given this understanding of inclusion, what is special education and how does it fit with inclusive contexts? Documents and several respondents seemed to avoid the term special education, perhaps as a way to more fully embrace inclusive philosophies. Instead, both the *Education Act*, and the Student Support Services Manual describe a process through which a student may be identified as having *special educational needs*. These needs may be addressed through an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) created by a school based team, which also includes parents, and in some cases, the student (Yukon Department of Education, 2015). Perhaps the infrastructure surrounding this identification process, and subsequent educational programming, may be described as special education services.

These definitions have the potential to create confusion among school staff, students, and families. For example, several respondents stated that they were not really sure about the definition of inclusion, and how it fit with special education across various contexts. Furthermore, some of the processes required to access special education services (e.g., formalized assessment) seem inconsistent with inclusive education approaches (Yukon Department of Education, 2015). This disconnect between the philosophical understanding of inclusion and the more concrete implementation, which contains remnants of more traditional special education models of support, has been observed elsewhere (Hall, 2015; Richardson & Powell, 2011). Thus, a key question is how the Department of Education can work to establish and deepen inclusive educational practices, while ensuring students have access to specialized services to equitably access learning opportunities.

The kind of learning environments described by the Department of Education likely require both inclusive spaces and specialized educational services that build from and highlight the contributions of diversity. It might be useful to sharpen the Department’s definition of inclusion, and provide a little more concrete guidance on how inclusion could be enacted in the classroom. Once this vision is established, special education services can be aligned with specific aspects of inclusion, or may be positioned as supports all students can access, as needed, at different points in their educational journeys. Co-constructing a clear understanding of how special education services fit together with the Department’s vision of inclusion would create a coherent view of education that could help structure student learning supports.

Moving forward, the Department of Education and their partners could develop a vision of inclusive and special education that brings as many perspectives into the conversation as possible. In addition to

diversity in terms of ability and learning needs, recent statistics suggest that the Yukon's population is highly diverse in terms of culture, language, and experiences of the world (Statistics Canada, 2018; Yukon Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Educators, students, and communities could be invited to reflect on whether or how diversity is valued in classrooms and schools, and then consider how a vision of inclusive and special education might highlight the contributions of diversity. In this vision, what aspects of inclusive and special education should be emphasized, prioritized, and resourced? How can legislation, policies, and practices align to support inclusive and special education? From here they might consider what is needed in order for schools and communities to be able to enact a vision of inclusive and special education in day to day practice. Other jurisdictions, such as New Brunswick, offer a very clear vision of inclusion that could be used as an inspirational example (New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2013). Additional philosophical orientations to inclusion could be considered (Bevan-Brown, 2013; Moore, 2016; Nunavut Department of Education, 2008). In particular, Rix and colleagues (2013) look at an intriguing model of inclusive and special education they describe as a "community of provision", which may be a springboard for further thinking or imagination. However, a clear vision of inclusive education, drawing on the expertise of diverse, local people with different abilities, cultures, genders, classes, and Yukon First Nations, would likely best serve the needs of students in Yukon.

Questions to Consider:

How is diversity valued in classrooms or schools?

What is a clear vision of inclusive and special education that highlights the contributions of diversity?

What aspects of inclusive and special education should be emphasized, prioritized, and supported?

How can legislation, policies, and practices align to support inclusive and special education?

A Framework for Supporting Inclusion and Special Education

A **Response to Intervention (RTI) framework**, or the Pyramid of Intervention (Yukon Department of Education, 2015) was a model of inclusive and special education that many of the respondents referenced, and is explicitly set out in policy documents (Yukon Department of Education, 2015). The RTI model is used in inclusive and special education in many North American jurisdictions because research seems to agree that it is effective in helping students learn, and, in theory, it can minimize barriers to accessing learning supports (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; McIntosh et al., 2011; Preston, Wood, & Stecker, 2016). Ideally, RTI is a model of education that can help create flexible school environments where students learn using supports from educators and specialists that are available at the right time and place. Specific information about how the Yukon Department of Education has interpreted the RTI model in their Pyramid of Interventions can be found in their Student Services Manual (Yukon Department of Education, 2015). For the purposes of this review, I briefly outline key aspects of the model, with a focus on how the RTI model is being enacted, as well as potential areas for reflection/growth, based on what I've heard so far.

Tier 1

RTI is typically arranged in three tiers (see Figure 2), as reflected in the Pyramid of Interventions adopted by the Yukon Department of Education. Most students, often 80% or more, will have all of their learning needs met in Tier 1, through effective and inclusive instruction provided by the classroom

teacher (McIntosh et al., 2011). My examination of documents and discussions with respondents suggests that in Yukon, classroom teachers can access professional development and supports to help them in creating an effective Tier 1 learning environment through a number of different avenues. The Curriculum and Assessment Unit in the Department of Education can support professional growth through direct consultation or their Learning Networks, which build from the spirals of inquiry model described earlier. This unit is also home to the Reading Recovery program, which builds capacity for this one to one, pull-out intervention among a small group of teachers. The First Nations Initiatives Branch collaborates with teachers to develop understandings and curricular supports for working with Yukon First Nations' students, cultures, and languages. The Student Support Services Unit also provides support for a range of classroom interventions. In addition, school-based administrators may decide on locally relevant professional development for school staff. Together, these structures are meant to support high quality Tier 1 education.

In these environments, teachers assess each student's learning. Documents suggest that these assessments are shared with students and parents (Yukon Department of Education, 2015; 2019). Classroom teachers may collaborate with Learning Assistance Teachers or access some of the Department of Education supports listed above if students do not seem to be growing and developing as expected, in response to classroom instruction (Yukon Department of Education, 2015). These assessments and a record of instructional changes made serve as a basis for decisions about further supports that may be needed.

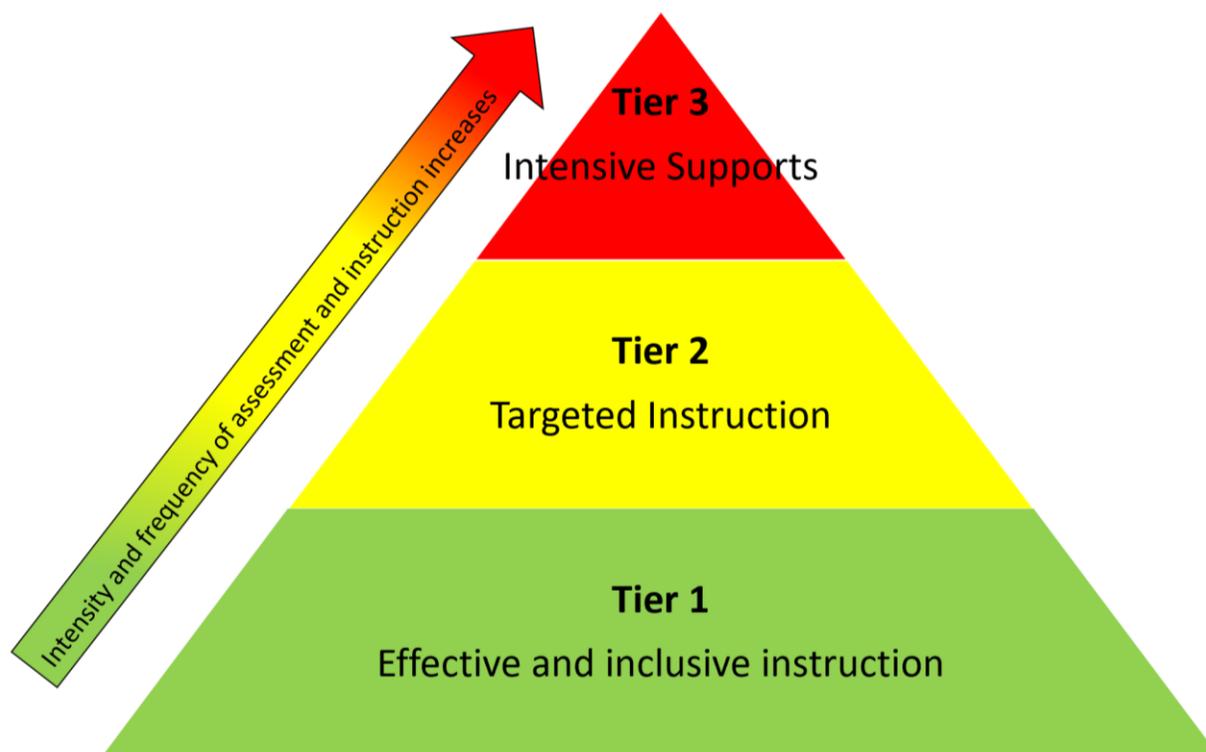


Figure 2 RTI Model

Tier 2

If the assessments suggest that students are struggling after the teacher has tried several different ways of teaching important skills, Tier 2 supports may be needed. Educators might expect that approximately 15% of students may benefit from Tier 2 teaching strategies (McIntosh et al., 2011). In Tier 2, the intensity of instruction available to students increases so they are able to develop important

skills and strategies for learning. Instruction may become more intense if, for example, a specialized teacher provides more individualized attention to build up key skills that may be missing, and/or works with students in a small group. Tier 2 instruction can occur in class where students might access additional help from a teacher, Educational Assistant, or peer, or from tools that might support their learning (such as laptops, specialized software, FM Systems, or noise cancelling headphones). However, often Tier 2 support is understood as small groups of students that are removed from their regular classes to build up areas of weakness through intervention programs (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

Documents and discussions with respondents suggest that in Yukon, students' challenges are discussed in a School Based Team. The Student Support Services Manual describes the School Based Team as consisting of the school administrator (or designate), the Learning Assistance Teacher, a school counsellor, the classroom teacher, parents, and other specialists who may be invited from time to time (Yukon Department of Education, 2015). School Based Teams are meant to come together in support of students who are struggling, to brainstorm different instructional strategies and allocate special education services (e.g., time with the Learning Assistance Teacher, or access to Reading Recovery). At this time, a formal standardized assessment may be requested to gain a better sense of the kind of instruction that would be most beneficial to specific students. A Student Learning Plan may be drawn up to outline some of the adaptations taking place (Yukon Department of Education, 2015). Teachers may more closely monitor the progress of students receiving Tier 2 services, using multiple forms of assessment (Yukon Department of Education, 2019).

Tier 3

Students may require Tier 3 supports if they continue to experience very limited development and growth after receiving supports at the Tier 1 and Tier 2 levels. When other parts of the RTI model are working well, these students likely represent about 3-5% of the school population (McIntosh et al., 2011). Generally, students requiring Tier 3 supports have profound learning needs, and may require an IEP, although many argue that all students still can and should be accessing regular curricula in the classroom (Breitenbach, Armstrong, & Bryson, 2013; Olson, Leko, & Roberts, 2016). Regardless of the learning environment, students likely require intensive supports, such as one-to-one Educational Assistants, and purposeful planning by the teacher as part of the School Based Team.

In Yukon, students may be thought of as receiving Tier 3 supports if they have modified curricular goals, as outlined in an IEP. There are formal processes in the *Education Act* (2002) that describe how an IEP is created through a collaboration within the School Based Team, and involve not only school personnel, but parents and sometimes students as well. A more comprehensive process is outlined in the Student Support Services Manual (Yukon Department of Education, 2015). Importantly, students on an IEP may not qualify for a regular Dogwood graduation diploma, but will be given a school completion certificate to honour their learning and development (Yukon Department of Education, 2015).

Reflections on RTI and Ways Forward. Although the RTI model provides some benefits and a common structure for inclusive and special education (McIntosh et al., 2011), this is not the only model available, and the Department of Education and their partners may wish to consider how well RTI is serving the needs of students. Does the RTI model address the needs of students the way it is described in Departmental documents? What are the limitations of this model that led to the Auditor-General's critique? Does the RTI model support the vision of inclusive and special education Yukon sees as a priority, or can it be adapted? Educators and community members may wish to consider other models

of inclusive and special education such as Universal Design for Learning that build in multiple access points for students to learn in diverse ways (BC Ministry of Education, 2010), or they may wish to co-construct their own model of inclusive and special education based on local cultural and educational perspectives. Many of these questions are likely to be addressed in future opportunities for public engagement.

Indigenous Learners and Inclusive and Special Education

Conversations and documents I've reviewed so far also referenced the importance of considering how inclusive and special education needs to be considered in relation to cultural diversity, and in particular the perspectives of Yukon First Nations. According to the 2016 census, 23.7% of people in Yukon identified as Indigenous, while 9.6% of people were fluent in Indigenous languages (Statistics Canada, 2018; Yukon Bureau of Statistics, 2017). The documents I examined recognize the importance of culture and language to First Nations learners (Yukon Department of Education, 2015; Yukon Department of Education, 2019), and some of the respondents acknowledged that many of the students receiving special education services come from First Nations communities. Given the nationwide research that suggests First Nations students are disproportionately represented in special education programming (see also Auerbach, 2007; BC Ministry of Education, 2018; Michell, 2012), and the high population of First Nations in Yukon, it may be prudent to consider how and why colonial contexts may be shaping inclusive and special education services for Indigenous learners.

First Nations (and all) students experience significant educational challenges in Canadian contexts shaped by colonial ideas. Colonialism can be defined as an ongoing, culturally embedded way of thinking that uses physical and psychological violence against First Nations to take over their lands (Cote-Meek, 2014; Manuel, 2017; Pidgeon, 2009). Colonialism is so deeply embedded in Canadian ways of living that it is largely invisible to people within that culture (Wolfe, 2006). However, colonial influences continue to shape the educational experience of First Nations learners in Canada, who report racist encounters with peers and educators, curricula, and school policies (Directions Evidence and Policy Research Group, 2016; Hare & Pidgeon, 2011). Similarly, some respondents described instances of individual and systemic racism in classrooms, schools, and communities in Yukon. Colonialism also impacts special education services, perhaps to an even greater degree than regular classroom instruction (Mallett, 2008; Yee & Butler, In press). As such, a consideration of colonial narratives in inclusive and special education is critical (Bailey & Betts, 2009), especially in a highly diverse jurisdiction like Yukon. In addition to the trauma colonial policies bring to First Nations, colonialism impacts non-Indigenous communities by dividing people according to race, ability, gender, and class (Deloria, 1970; Willinsky, 1998). These kinds of colonial influences make it challenging for educators to meet the needs of all learners in a cohesive and inclusive way that brings people together in community with one another.

Questions to Consider:

How does the RTI model address the needs of students?

What are the limitations of this model that led to the Auditor-General's critique?

Does the RTI model support the vision of inclusive and special education Yukon sees as a priority, if not, can it be adapted?

Questions to Consider:

How do Yukon First Nations think about inclusion?

To what extent do Yukon First Nations students with special needs experience racism or colonialism in schools?

How has the system responded to these concerns?

This colonial context opens questions about how Yukon First Nations students, families and communities are experiencing inclusive and special education. To begin with, it is worth considering how Yukon First Nations think about inclusion, diversity, and special education, and how differences might be impacting students and families. Furthermore, to what extent do Yukon First Nations students with special needs experience racism or colonialism in schools? How are other students also impacted by colonial narratives or by witnessing racism in schools? How has the system responded to these concerns? Is it making a difference? Again, these are questions that need to be addressed with further public engagement, and carefully considered by educators and administrators within the system.

To move forward, it is also critical to consider decolonizing possibilities by surfacing areas that may be (re)imagined in partnership with First Nations. Since colonialism may be difficult to detect, a critical reflection on social systems, such as the education system, can reveal how colonialism may be a part of seemingly normal routines and practices (Battiste, 2013; Cote-Meek, 2014). This critical reflection can be used to help people come together to (re)imagine new possibilities based on respectful relationships and healthy communities for all people (Donald, 2009; Smith, 2000). In particular, people may begin to consider how inclusive and special education systems might be purposefully designed to transcend colonial limitations and connect with the worldviews of Yukon First Nations. How might educational systems build from Indigenous and diverse perspectives in a way that brings people together in a community of difference? First Nations Peoples and perspectives are key to these processes because they can share insights emerging from resilience and resistance to colonial policies, and surface ideas based on cultures with intimate connections to local lands.

I understand that the Department of Education and Yukon First Nations are currently co-constructing an engagement protocol which may help support respectful collaborations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples. Dwayne Donald, a descendent of the Papaschase Cree, offers some big picture ideas about how relationships might be understood in terms of 'ethical relationality' (2016). Agreements signed between the North Vancouver school district and the Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation) may also provide ideas for establishing collaborative relationships in education (North Vancouver School District, 2016; Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw & North Vancouver School District, 2019). School-based ideas to support Indigenous learners through transitions have been enacted by teachers throughout British Columbia using the spirals of inquiry (McGregor, 2019). Using these kinds of resources to (re)imagine special education processes together with Indigenous communities could help address some of the local challenges inherent in the education system.

Question to Consider:

How can inclusive and special education systems be purposefully designed to transcend colonial limitations?

Summary

In this section I have attempted to pull together an understanding of the philosophical orientations of inclusive and special education in Yukon. I have outlined a definition of inclusion used by the Department of Education, and surfaced some tensions in how inclusion and special education services

are being discussed in government documents. In addition, I have described the RTI model and how Student Support Services in Yukon seem to fit within this model. In addition, I have looked at some of the potential impacts of colonialism and suggested some prompts and resources to use as a springboard for imagining a culturally and contextually based vision of inclusive and special education. Now I turn to a discussion of the more specific strengths and concerns surfaced by respondents in meetings, and some prompts to open new directions for future engagement.

Respondent Views and Prompts for Thinking

In January/February 2020, I began community engagement. Respondents thus far had some lively discussions about how they understand inclusive and special education, what they saw happening, and what they would like to happen. Table 1 provides an overview for this section. In it, I have summarized what respondents had to say about the strengths and needs of the Yukon educational system, according to four overlapping and interconnected themes: equity and inclusion, relationships, building capacity, and systemic processes. These themes overlap with the ideas in the previous section, but here I go further into the perspectives that respondents brought, as represented in the first three columns of Table 1. I have listed ideas that either occurred most frequently among respondents, or seemed important in the context of inclusive and special education. In column 4, I have listed some key questions that seemed to emerge from the ideas that respondents shared. In the final column of Table 1, I have provided a sample of resources to support further thinking. These citations refer to research articles, books, or curricular documents that might inspire people to see how they can use the strengths listed to address the needs within Yukon inclusive and special education.

Table 1 Summary of Respondent views and prompts for thinking

Theme	Strengths identified	Needs identified	Questions to consider	Resources to thinking
Equity and Inclusion	Inclusion is currently understood as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning • Belonging • Differentiation • Student engagement • Flexibility • Student access to resources/ collaboration Strong models for inclusion exist among Yukon First Nations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A localized vision of inclusion and special education that emphasizes the perspectives of people with exceptionalities, Yukon First Nations, & diverse language learners, in rural & urban contexts • Department of Education needs to create an inclusive and equitable workplace culture • Special attention to students with intense needs 	What is inclusion and special education in Yukon communities as informed by people with exceptional needs and Yukon First Nations? How can the Department of Education enact and exemplify this? What are the specific roles of different personnel within this vision, especially in relation to students with intense needs?	(BC Ministry of Education, 2016; Lyons, Thompson, & Timmons, 2016; New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2013; Nunavut Department of Education, 2008; Phillips, 2010)
Relationships	Positive outcomes have been noted for:	Top priorities:	What constitutes a strong relationship	(Ajodhia-Andrews, 2016;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Several school-based teams • Small scale relationships or collaborations <p>All central administrative staff work towards strong relationships with students and families, and among colleagues.</p> <p>First Nations Initiatives Branch works from an expanded notion of relationships</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborations with inter-governmental agencies • Relationships between/among students, teachers, families, communities, Department of Education, NGOs. • Collaborations require communication, time, travel, consistency, sensitivity, trust 	<p>across diverse experiences of the world? How can people build relationships that have tangible outcomes for kids? How can administration facilitate collaborations or relationships?</p>	<p>Archibald, 2008; Donald, 2016; Palmer & Scribner, 2017)</p>
Building Capacity	<p>Expertise in Department of Education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with students with exceptionalities • Knowledge about First Nations languages & cultures • Supporting development through learning networks <p>Elders and knowledge keepers as collaborators</p> <p>Ideas for models of Professional Development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring • Coaching • Practical learning • Learning networks 	<p>Top priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intensive and ongoing Professional Development across levels of support, in context • Support self-efficacy for educators and school staff • Address educator fatigue or stress • Capacity needed in: inclusivity; Yukon First Nations' ways of knowing, doing, being; supporting mental health; prevention of violence or extreme behaviours. 	<p>How can professional growth for teachers as 'deliberative intellectuals' be optimized to improve instruction for children? What approaches might cultivate inclusion, without increasing demands on teachers? How can people expand their 'heart' learning, in tandem with their 'head' learning?</p>	<p>(Butler, Schnellert, & Perry, 2017; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Davidson & Davidson, 2018; Halbert & Kaser, 2013; McGregor, 2019; Newhouse, 2008)</p>
Systemic Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some processes facilitate networks of support for students, and responsibility for students' learning 	<p>Further inquiry into:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistency across system • Clarification of roles 	<p>How could specific procedures, structures, and systems support a vision of inclusive</p>	<p>(Mallett, 2008; New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development,</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum provides a strong basis for inclusive education • Acknowledgement that change is needed to improve how the system operates. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systematic collection of data related to students' responses to instructional approaches • Staffing • Required resources 	<p>and special education? How might roles be clarified to support this vision? What kind of central reporting tool could help facilitate supports for students?</p>	<p>2013; Olson et al., 2016; Rix et al., 2013)</p>
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Equity and Inclusion

Although I have already discussed an overall orientation to inclusive and special education, here I focus more closely on ideas and concerns raised by respondents. These ideas may be used as a concrete starting point for the development of a broad vision of inclusive and special education described in the previous section. For example, in response to my question about what might constitute an ideal inclusive education environment, respondents described a nuanced view of classrooms where all students would be interested and engaged with learning, and feel a sense of belonging. Ideally, students would be able to access resources they need to support their learning, and collaborate with one another and knowledgeable adults. In this context, educators would provide differentiated instruction and flexibility in how they addressed students' diverse learning needs. These ideas could form a strong basis for future discussions around inclusion; many respondents described a vision of inclusive education that is humanizing and similar to that described in research (Foley et al., 2012; e.g., Olson et al., 2016).

Consistent with many of these ideas, some of the First Nations respondents told me that their linguistic and cultural practices suggest a view of education that includes and values the contributions and perspectives of every unique individual. This perspective is much like Indigenous views of inclusion from across Canada, and around the world (Bevan-Brown, 2013; Lovern, 2008; Phillips, 2010). Thus, building on Yukon First Nations' ways of knowing, doing, and being could help strengthen inclusive learning for all students, and especially address the intersectional needs of students who are both First Nations, and identified as having exceptional learning needs.

As discussed earlier, respondents suggested that it might be important to create a unified and inviting vision of inclusive and special education that not only creates a sense of belonging for all children within schools, but extends to students who may have left school prior to graduation. Despite areas of commonality, there did not appear to be a clear consensus on the elements of inclusion that should be included, or emphasized. Furthermore, respondents thought this vision should be adaptable to diverse contexts, and informed by people who have exceptional needs and Yukon First Nations.

Respondents identified several additional areas where work needs to be done. Importantly, they talked about the need for the Department of Education itself to provide strong leadership by scrutinizing their own practices of inclusion and equity. They suggested that the central administration may need to critically examine their physical layout, practices, and staffing allocations across the department to consider if they are communicating a message of inclusion to diverse staff, students, parents, and community members, including people with diverse abilities, cultures, languages, and experiences. Respondents described how shifts within the workplace culture of central administration could be created through actions such as adopting longer wait times in serious discussions, facilitating the participation of diverse peoples throughout meetings, and creating Department of Education priorities based on collaborations with diverse peoples. Further communication and collaboration could open more opportunities to build on the strengths of unique and valuable perspectives and ideas.

In schools, respondents noted that staff should focus more attention on students who have the most significant learning needs. They suggested that educational services to these students may be lacking, and a greater concerted effort should be made to strengthen programming in this area. These initial meetings suggested that there is an urgent need to ensure that Yukon's most vulnerable students are being supported in their learning and development.

Based on these ideas, there are several questions that could be taken up as this review continues. School staff and community members might begin to consider how inclusive and special education could be defined within their own contexts. This kind of localized understanding could help shape a broader vision within Yukon, and determine what elements might be common across contexts and which may require flexibility. How might this definition build from the expertise and experiences of people with special needs? How could Yukon First Nations' worldviews and understandings of education shape the definition of inclusion in Yukon? There are several definitions of inclusive and/or special education services across Canada that could be drawn upon to determine key components of policy or definitions that could be helpful to students, educators, and administrators (BC Ministry of Education, 2016; New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2013; Nunavut Department of Education, 2008).

In addition, educators, administrators, and communities may wish to come together to support students with significant needs. How can staff and systems address the needs of the most vulnerable learners? I have recommended several resources for people who wish to extend their knowledge in inclusive philosophies and environments (Lyons et al., 2016; Nunavut Department of Education, 2008; Phillips, 2010), especially from the perspective of students with exceptionalities (Ajodhia-Andrews, 2016; Foley et al., 2012). Thinking and reading about these kinds of topics might support future inquiry and discussions around inclusive and special education.

Another potentially powerful next step, as suggested by respondents' perspectives, would be for the Department of Education to consider how they might amplify their leadership for equity and inclusion *in relationship with people with exceptionalities and Indigenous Peoples*. How could the Department of Education build on and build up the expertise of their central administration and school-based staff to address the challenges and explore the possibilities of equity and inclusion, especially and most urgently in response to the needs of the most vulnerable learners? How could inclusion extend beyond specific programs to become integrated into the culture of the Department of Education? Facing these kinds of challenging questions may help create a strong context for inclusion in Yukon. To support this effort, examples from other Provincial or Territorial Departments of Education that have addressed equity and inclusion in their own contexts might be particularly helpful (e.g., Ontario Ministry of Education, 2019).

Relationships

The second theme that emerged from conversations with respondents was about the importance of strong positive relationships and collaborations in order to support the needs of all students. Collaborations were noted to be especially important for those children who have very complex needs, particularly when schools and teachers are not equipped to address all family, medical, and mental health concerns. Fortunately, respondents reported that within the Yukon educational system, there are some school communities that have built strong collaborations with families and community members, different units within central administration, and external agencies. In addition, respondents identified several schools that had highly effective School-Based Teams. Some respondents thought that strong relationships seemed to create a climate where feedback and professional growth was possible, leading to positive outcomes for students.

Respondents across diverse roles saw positive potential for strong relationships. Personnel within central administration often identified strong relationships within their unit as critical to their ability to support students and school-based staff. Members of the First Nations Initiatives Branch seemed to

extend the notion of relationship described by others. They talked about closely collaborating across projects and responsibilities, and described how they and other First Nations educators fostered close relationships with students, families, and communities by, for example, making home visits after school hours when they are able to go to communities. They also talked about how these relationships created a sense of responsibility towards community members and Elders, in particular. These kinds of relationships can also be encouraged and built upon to bolster supports for students and families accessing inclusive and special education supports.

Despite these strengths, the majority of respondents suggested that relationships and collaborations could be improved. To meet the holistic needs of children, respondents identified a need for ‘wrap around services’ that bring together multiple systems of care to support students and families (Yohannan, Carlson, Shepherd, & Batsche-McKenzie, 2017). As such, respondents’ top priority was for collaborations with intergovernmental departments such as the Department of Health and Social Services. Respondents thought that stronger relationships in this area could help improve service delivery and accountability while addressing the mental health challenges many children encounter. They also thought that relationships between and among students, teachers, families, communities, central administration staff, and non-governmental organizations could be developed to create more supportive, inclusive environments in classrooms and schools. In order to cultivate stronger relationships and collaborations, respondents felt that adequate communication, time, travel, consistency, sensitivity, and trust are necessary. Respondents suggested that Elders, mental health workers, and Student Support Services personnel be invited to become school-based supports for children as one way of extending possibilities for inclusive and special education.

Respondents’ identification of relationships and collaboration as a key concern in inclusive and special education echoes research findings that emphasize the importance of multiple and varied relationships across contexts as being key for children’s achievement and well-being (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Foley et al., 2012; McGregor, 2019). Consistent with that literature, this group of respondents described how important relationships are in education, and furthermore, offered some generative ideas about what is needed to create and maintain them.

To deepen and extend relationships, educators and personnel throughout the system might also continue to contemplate how they might personally expand their own understandings of diverse perspectives. This does not have to be an onerous task, but one that fosters community, connection, and opens hearts and minds to possibilities. A radio documentary like *Rethinking Disability* <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/tapestry/rethinking-disability-1.4726131> or Stó:lō educator Jo-ann Archibald’s (2008) book, *Indigenous Storywork*, could be good places to start. Books that amplify diverse and intersectional voices, like Amanda Ajodhia-Andrews’s work (2016), would also be helpful. Engaging with resources like these can expand people’s capacity for hearing and understanding the perspectives of people with diverse experiences of culture and life.

Another powerful approach to building relationships is for people to come together to develop an understanding of what constitutes a strong relationship across their diverse experiences of the world. For example, everyone might agree that we all want to be respectful, but how people experience or conceptualize respect may differ widely. For example, for some people ‘respectful’ might mean going for a home visit, while for others this same action might be regarded as disrespectful. It might be especially useful to focus on how to create meaningful professional collaborations that will produce tangible outcomes for students. How can collaborations be facilitated to build community across diversity? Dwayne Donald’s conception of ethical relationality (2016), referenced above, is helpful for thinking about more personal relationships as well. Other authors provide concrete suggestions about setting up and facilitating discussions across potentially tense divisions (Palmer & Scribner, 2017). Engaging with these kinds of resources might support people to further build meaningful relationships that can lead to supports for students.

Building Capacity

The third theme respondents discussed was around building capacity for inclusive and special education. Specifically, they talked about what kind of capacity needs to be built, and how it might be built in a meaningful way. Even in these initial engagements with the community, it became clear that there is a lot of expertise available within Yukon, and that people are enthusiastic about sharing their knowledge with others to build capacity throughout the system. For example, there are many individuals and organizations with expertise in supporting diverse learning needs, languages, and cultures within the community, in central administration, and in schools. There are also many people who have developed expertise in specific teaching approaches that could support diverse students to develop their skills and abilities. Furthermore, respondents suggested innovative professional development models like mentoring, coaching, and practicums could be effective for creating meaningful change. Respondents suggested that the Yukon education system already has professional development structures like learning networks or professional support for Reading Recovery teachers in place. These structures could be adapted or expanded to meet the needs of a larger number of teachers and students.

These strengths could be used to address some of the concerns around professional capacity building. In particular, respondents thought that additional learning might be helpful in the areas of inclusivity; supporting mental health; and the prevention of extreme behaviours, including violence. Developing professional expertise in Yukon First Nations' ways of knowing, doing, and being may also help support inclusion, given the connections to inclusive education noted earlier. Commitment, interest, and a heart-centred understanding was seen as critical for addressing some of the more challenging behaviours. Building capacity in the identified areas would help school-based staff to see themselves as capable of competently handling difficult situations with compassion. Instead of presenting professional development through lectures, respondents thought that on-going learning, based in classroom contexts, could support educators to implement adaptive instruction across the three tiers of the RTI model. Importantly, respondents were sensitive to the stress and fatigue of educators and other support personnel. Thus, this professional learning would need to increase instructional proficiency in ways that also reduced stress on educators.

Several important questions arise from the profile of strengths and concerns in relation to capacity building. Mainly, what educational approaches can cultivate inclusion, without significantly increasing instructional demands? To get there, what models of professional development most effectively increase proficiency while motivating and energizing educators? In many of the discussions, the focus was often on how to support teachers or educational assistants in working directly with students, however, some administrators also identified their own curiosities or inquiries. There could be real value in having people in diverse roles across the education system identify learning needs and building capacity in relationship with one another.

For those who wish to explore classroom approaches to inclusive and special education, practices based on self-regulated learning (SRL) and Indigenous perspectives hold much promise. SRL is an inclusive teaching approach that can provide support for learners across diversity, while freeing teachers to focus on supporting students who most need their expertise. Self-regulated learning happens when learners coordinate their metacognition (thinking about their own thinking), motivation and emotion, and strategic action in order to meet their own learning goals (Greene, 2018; Zimmerman, 2002). Although an in-depth description of SRL falls outside the purpose of this document, I suggest it as a jumping off point for educators interested in creating supportive, inclusive environments that address the learning needs of diverse students. Butler et al's (2017) book is a great practical resource for learning more about this inclusive classroom approach (see also Perry, Mazabel, & Yee, 2020 for an in-depth classroom example). In addition to SRL, there are numerous approaches to education suggested

by Indigenous scholars, which may be considered as inclusive (e.g., Archibald, 2008; Davidson & Davidson, 2018) that may be taken up by educators as a starting point for deeper inquiry. However, these approaches are culturally based, so ideally, teaching approaches would be developed in collaboration with local First Nations (e.g., Lipka et al., 2005). In particular, the First Nations Initiatives Branch fosters connections to Elders and knowledge keepers in partnership with the Yukon First Nations Education Directorate and Yukon First Nations. These connections could be built upon to help develop locally-relevant, inclusive, culturally sustaining approaches that have the potential to address the intersectional needs of diverse Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. In addition, relying on local Elders and knowledge keepers could bring in local communities and parents as educational collaborators.

To address respondents' concerns around how professional development might be implemented, people may wish to explore collaborative inquiry models (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Timperley et al., 2014). Collaborative inquiry has been shown to be an effective way of providing ongoing professional development for teachers, that builds from their own classroom and school contexts, and from their own questions and challenges (e.g., McGregor, 2019). Collaborative inquiry fits with the notion of SRL, described above, and helps develop a sense of agency and self-efficacy among educators (Butler, Schnellert, & MacNeil, 2015). Framing teachers as *deliberative intellectuals* with the capability and agency to support student learning is thought to be more effective in facilitating professional development than the particular content of sessions (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Kennedy, 2016). Thus, it may be useful for central administration and their partners to consider how their own spiral of inquiry might be broadly replicated with school-based staff to support educators to likewise engage with their educational practices and routines.

Systemic Processes

The final theme emerging from my initial engagement with respondents has to do with the systemic processes that are meant to support inclusive and special education in Yukon. These processes are critical to consider because they can serve to enact the larger understandings and philosophies of inclusion. Respondents identified some very specific aspects of the system that seem to be working well. For example, they talked about the ability of Student Support Services to work with educational assistants, teachers, and families. The curriculum was seen as offering enough space for differentiated instruction to occur. Some administrators took responsibility for supporting or creating contexts that would facilitate inclusion for all students. Over and above these specific examples, individuals across roles were enthusiastic and eager to meet the needs of all students. This kind of passion is a real strength that can be built upon.

Perhaps another important strength was the acknowledgement across groups that change is needed to improve the consistency and effectiveness of inclusive and special education within the system. In particular, respondents thought that a clarification of roles throughout the education system and a systematic collection of data could help to streamline the effectiveness of work being done with students. Teams of people with specialized knowledge could be maximally productive in providing supports and services to students if each person was clear about what they and the other individuals within the team were responsible for contributing, and how their own pieces fit into the larger picture of supports. For example, there seems to be some confusion as to which unit is supporting educators in developing Tier 1, 2, and 3 supports, or how Student Support Services operates in terms of handling high caseloads, prioritizing assessments, or delivering reports. Other questions surfaced about how approaches or interventions are being implemented with students, and how students are responding. Coordinating these processes and making them more transparent would likely improve communication and collaborative efforts to effectively address students' needs. Many of these concerns echo the findings of the Auditor General.

Staffing was also a significant issue identified that impacts the possibilities for inclusive and special education, and overlaps with all the other themes mentioned previously. For example, a lack of substitute teachers prevents educators from participating in important learning opportunities, collaborations, or meetings that are meant to improve services to diverse students. High turnover was also cited as a challenging problem that impacted the ability of school staff to create relationships and build capacity within school contexts. Flexible staffing allocations were suggested by some respondents as a way to address the diverse needs of school communities. In some cases, respondents seemed to favor shifting resources away from paraprofessionals to fund more specialized positions such as Learning Assistance Teachers, Community Support Workers, or in-school Behavioural Support Teachers. A large number of respondents noted that more staff was needed. Shifts in staffing were seen as one way to improve services to students in inclusive and special education.

This theme offers some good starting points for discussion and inquiry. Overall, the Department of Education and their partners could begin to consider how systems and processes might be assessed and (re)imagined in relationship with people with exceptionalities and Yukon First Nations. Examining systemic processes from other jurisdictions may suggest the level of detail, consistency and the kinds of structures needed to enact a vision of inclusive and special education (BC Ministry of Education, 2016; New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2013; Rix et al., 2013). More specifically, the Department of Education and their partners may consider how different roles within the system might be clearly set out so that each person has a strong understanding of their responsibilities, and what they might expect from others on the team. Research describing how exemplary teams came together might be helpful for thinking about how roles might be structured to facilitate inclusive and special education (Mallett, 2008; Olson et al., 2016; Webster, Webster, & Blatchford, 2019). A careful consideration of the responsibilities of each team member may help prioritize workload, or demonstrate how additional staff may or may not be required in some cases. In addition, implementing a central reporting process, accessible by all members of a School-Based Team, would likely help to improve how supports are provided, and enable administrators at various levels to gain a good understanding of the students' and teachers' needs within classrooms and schools. Addressing these kinds of questions can help the education system to become better equipped to meet the needs of students in inclusive and special education environments.

I wish to acknowledge that many of the ideas presented here do not get into practical guidelines for day-to-day operations. In part, this is due to the incomplete nature of this update. Furthermore, as per the inquiry stance outlined above, my role is to provide the Department of Education and their partners with a snapshot of what is going on within Yukon, and some jumping off points for thinking. Following the completion of this review, the Department of Education and the Yukon educational community will shape contextualized responses and recommendations that can fully account for the unique context of Yukon schools and communities. In the spirit of collaborative inquiry and learning, this kind of approach could be valuable in bringing together diverse peoples to co-construct recommendations that truly resonate with local communities.

Concluding Comments

It has so far been a real honour and privilege to visit Yukon and listen to the ideas and concerns of people there. Due to the challenging circumstances of a global pandemic, I was not able to complete the Review of Inclusive and Special Education according to the timeline originally proposed. However, the public may be interested to know about how the review is unfolding, what has been heard so far, and how their opportunities for participation might emerge in the future. As such, I have provided an outline of how further community engagement is expected to occur, barring further unforeseen events. I have described some of the important pieces that currently create a foundation for inclusive and special

education in Yukon and have posed questions and provided resources that may help build from these pieces to clarify a vision of inclusive and special education. I hope that these general understandings will help students, families, community members, educators and support staff see how their personal experiences could inform the development of a broader picture of inclusive and special education, and help people (re)imagine how structures may work to better serve students.

A key objective of this update was to give Yukon residents an idea of what has been discussed in meetings so far, and some of the issues that have surfaced. Overall, input fell into four categories: equity and inclusion, relationships, building capacity, and systemic processes. I have briefly described the responses that surfaced often, or that were particularly relevant to this discussion. In addition, I have posed some questions and offered resources to those who wish to begin exploring possibilities in these different areas. If readers are to take away just one question from this interim update, I recommend starting by considering how greater supports might be created, in collaboration with diverse perspectives, for students with more intense needs. These are the most vulnerable students that have the greatest challenges, but seem to be at risk for being underserved. It is critical and urgent that educational systems and communities begin to come together in support of these students.

Importantly, this review is not yet complete. To gain a full picture of what is happening in inclusive and special education, I require the stories and perspectives of students with exceptionalities, families, communities, Yukon First Nations, educators, and other parties. I encourage all interested people to complete the online tool, coming out in fall 2020. Your challenges and triumphs in relation to inclusive and special education in the Yukon can help create a framework for positive transformation in the future.

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