

TOTÍ:LTHOMETEL:  
WEAVING EDUCATORS' PERSPECTIVES INTO A TEACHER EVALUATION TOOL AT  
SEABIRD ISLAND COMMUNITY SCHOOL

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## Abstract

Totí:lthometel: Weaving Educators' Perspectives Into a Teacher Evaluation Tool at Seabird Island Community School

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This study aimed to develop a culturally responsive teacher framework and evaluation tool for educators at Seabird Island Community School (SICS) and other Stó:lō First Nations community schools in British Columbia. Drawing from the perspectives of educators at SICS, the research sought to provide direction for wise pedagogical practices and establish effective evaluation methods rooted in best practices from the literature (Calliou & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2015). Employing qualitative methods, the study was informed by Wilson's concept of relational accountability (2008) and Ermine's notion of ethical space (2007). The research included interviews with nineteen educators, unveiling a range of opinions on what constitutes effective teaching at SICS. While educators widely recognized the importance of integrating Stó:lō culture into their practice, there was uncertainty about how to deeply embed it as a core element of the day-to-day educational experience. The data revealed four key themes that are essential to promoting effective evaluation: (1) fostering a growth mindset and commitment to lifelong learning, (2) creating supportive and transparent evaluation processes, (3) effective instruction, classroom management, and holistic assessment, and (4) cultural responsiveness, community engagement, and family communication. Moreover, the study highlights that an effective teacher evaluation framework at SICS must prioritize meaningful community engagement and foster solid relationships with students and their families. This suggests that the educator's role in community schools is deeply interwoven with the broader social ecosystem.

**Keywords:** culturally responsive teaching, teacher evaluation, Stó:lō, Indigenous education, community engagement, ethical space, holistic assessment.

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My heartfelt thanks go to the Indigenous Studies department at Trent University for profoundly shaping my academic path. The emphasis on ensuring that my work was grounded in a good way has been invaluable. The lessons of humility, accountability, and reciprocity that I learned there have laid the foundation for my research, guiding me to thoughtfully consider what it takes to have a meaningful impact within community. This grounding helped me prioritize not just the academic process but also the relational and ethical dimensions of the work.

I am grateful to my supervisory committee for their steadfast support and meticulous reviews. Don McCaskill, your guidance and mentorship since my undergraduate days at Trent have powerfully shaped my academic journey and personal growth. I have a deep sense of respect for the way you always made time for me and kept the process moving forward. Leisa Desmoulins, who stepped in late in the project and on short notice, seamlessly provided prompt and insightful revisions that shaped my work profoundly. Through his truthful critique, Kevin Fitzmaurice encouraged me to dig deeper and produce the quality of work I always knew I was capable of.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

**ACE** – Adverse Childhood Experience

**AESN** – Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network

**AFN** – Assembly of First Nations

**BC** – British Columbia

**CRT** – Culturally Responsive Teaching

**FNMI** – First Nations, Métis, and Inuit

**FNSA** – First Nations Schools Association

**IEP** – Individual Education Plan

**IK** – Indigenous Knowledge

**MOE** – Ministry of Education

**PTSD** – Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

**SEC** – Social and Emotional Competence

**SEL** – Social and Emotional Learning

**SIB** – Seabird Island Band

**SICS** – Seabird Island Community School

**TEP** – Teacher Education Program

**TCPS** – Tri-Council Policy Statement

**TRC** – Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

**UbD** – Understanding by Design

## Chapter 1: Introduction

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*“Rather than asking about validity or reliability, you are asking how am I fulfilling my role in this relationship? What are my obligations in this relationship?” (Wilson, 2001, p. 177)*

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### Self-Location and Positionality

Drawing on the work of Absolon and Willett (2005), I recognize that locating myself within this research is essential to establish accountability, transparency, and trust. I am a cisgender male with a mixed racial background. My father is Cape Coloured from South Africa, and my mother is Macedonian. This diverse lineage shapes my identity and informs my worldview in significant ways. As a non-First Nations ally working within Indigenous communities, I recognize that my educational background, access to opportunities, and professional standing as a certified educator position me in ways that influence how I engage with research. These factors shape my worldview, methodologies, and the way I interpret the experiences of others. As Absolon and Willett (2005) emphasize,

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*“Each time we locate ourselves, our representations change and, depending on the context in which we locate, we may or may not emphasize certain aspects of our realities. Yet, as we locate, we must still account for the relative aspects of who we are and thus represent ourselves accordingly and distinctly” (p. 110).*

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This understanding requires me to continually reflect on my role in the research process and to remain open to learning from the community, not merely about it. In this way, I strive to resist colonial modes of knowledge extraction and instead emphasize relational accountability, as emphasized by Wilson (2008).

## **Personal Journey in Relational Accountability**

Our first year in the Indigenous Studies Ph.D. program at Trent University was designed to immerse us deeply in Indigenous research methodologies before we began shaping our research projects. In retrospect, I do not think I fully understood the program's intention at the time, but I can now see how profoundly it impacted my work and learning journey. One of the most influential texts from that period was Wilson's *Research is Ceremony* (2008). His work helped me ground my research in relational accountability, prompting deeper reflection on my research responsibilities. I wrestled with how my work could be grounded in these concepts, knowing I had yet to immerse myself in any Indigenous context beyond the academic realm.

As a certified teacher who spent the year before my Ph.D. teaching at an international school in Bangkok, I saw teaching as a natural way to engage with these principles. This experience led me to believe that an Indigenous community school would be the most logical way to engage with community. Still, I put off this idea and was unsure of how to make it a reality, especially since I needed to participate in coursework during my second year of the Ph.D. program. However, as I entered my second year, the inner conflict grew, and I realized my experiences were too limited to proceed confidently with my dissertation. I committed to this path, firmly deciding to step away from the program to pursue my teaching career in a First Nations community school. While this decision might have seemed abrupt to others, for me, it was a deliberate and necessary step to build the experiential foundation from which my research would emerge. Initially, I thought this would mean taking a hiatus from the program, but to my surprise, the program accommodated my departure, allowing me to participate remotely.

I packed up my life—buying my first car, renting a U-Haul, and moving nearly 4,000 kilometres northwest to begin a transformative experience at Blueberry River First Nations

School. In a chance conversation with the person taking over my apartment lease, I discovered he was retiring from a career as a First Nations police officer who had worked on reserve. That conversation proved pivotal, as he strongly encouraged me to live on-reserve rather than in the neighbouring town, emphasizing that it would provide the full experience. Taking his advice, I decided to live in the community and informed the education manager of my decision.

Before arriving, I had read about the challenges of working in under-resourced community schools and anticipated some of the realities I might face. However, experiencing them firsthand was an entirely different matter. I arrived to find that my home had no hot water, laundry, or internet. The community had only a band office, the school, and a gas station, meaning I was more than an hour away from a Tim Hortons, grocery store, gym, post office, or medical facility. While this was a temporary challenge for me, I was deeply aware that these conditions were part of the community's lived experience. I remained grateful for their resilience and efforts in navigating these ongoing realities. Over time, I was able to get satellite internet installed, and maintenance fixed the hot water and laundry, as the community did everything they could to ensure I felt well-supported. I was also incredibly grateful to the community for providing me with housing, which meant I would not have to make an hour-long commute daily to and from school.

While this experience was vastly different from anything I had known, I tried to remain self-aware of how my presence as an outsider might have made students and community members feel. Living in one of the first trailers visible upon entering the community, I was aware of how unusual it must have been for them to have me there—an outsider in a place where everyone was either from the community or connected through family ties. I was quite literally the only exception. I do not want to overemphasize the foreignness of my own experience. Still, I

felt it was important to articulate the challenges that new teachers may have to account for when living in community.

At the school, I initially worked alongside another teacher, Alex. I taught Grades 4-6, while Alex handled K-3. When I arrived, we were the only two educators, with no principal or vice-principal to assist. Alex helped me navigate the challenges of being new to a community school, reassuring me that many of the difficulties I faced were part of the expected transition for new teachers. However, due to personal reasons, Alex left halfway through the year, and I found myself teaching a K-6 class independently—a challenge, as one can imagine. Balancing the varying needs of such a wide age range was incredibly difficult, and the experience profoundly shaped my understanding of the unique struggles faced by students and educators in under-resourced First Nations community schools.

Despite these challenges, it was the students who made the experience unforgettable. Their energy, resilience, and connection to the community filled each day with meaning—whether it was their laughter in the classroom, seeing them around the community, or youth pulling up on quads to make sure I would be there to facilitate the sport and recreation nights I organized every week. I will never forget prepping for my first day of class, glancing out the window and seeing wild horses wandering by, a stark reminder that I was no longer in Toronto. That is not to say there was no steep learning curve and plenty of challenges, but that is not what I will remember most about this experience. What stands out are the incredible students and the special moments we shared.

However, the school eventually closed due to low enrollment, which led me to seek my next teaching opportunity. That opportunity came at Seabird Island Community School (SICS), which would ultimately become the site for my research. While my research is not situated in

Blueberry River First Nations, I often reflect on that experience as fundamental to my understanding that community work can only happen when you are thoroughly grounded in community. This grounding helped me better understand the community's lived experiences and dynamics, ensuring that future research would be deeply connected to and informed by that experience.

### **The Research Site: Lalme' Iwesawtexw**

Nestled within the breathtaking landscapes of British Columbia's Fraser Valley, surrounded by towering mountains and winding rivers, SICS—known in Halq'eméylem as Lalme' Iwesawtexw—stands as a vital educational hub and guardian of Stó:lō culture (Stó:lō Nation, 2018). The school's establishment in 1978 marked a pivotal moment for the community, driven by concerns from Seabird Island Band (SIB) members regarding the challenges their children faced in public schools (Gardner, 1986). With the school's creation came the need for a guiding vision reflecting the community's values, traditions, and aspirations. To fulfill this need, the Seabird Island School Board (SISB) began formalizing its policies in 1981, ensuring that the school's development would remain closely tied to Stó:lō culture, academic excellence, and community involvement. The SISB's objectives stated that the school would:

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*"1) Ensure that the Stó:lō history, culture, and language are taught, 2) ensure that the highly honoured values of self-reliance, generosity, honesty, and respect are taught" (Gardner, 1985, p. 25).*

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Furthermore, the SISB policy stated that:

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*"The development of the individual child is seen as a partnership between home, school, and community. The Board will seek to ensure that communication between home and school is open, honest, and positive, and*

*that appropriate opportunities are provided for participation by parents and the whole community in the education process" (Gardner, 1985, p. 26).*

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In addition, the SISB emphasized a holistic view of education, recognizing its role in preparing students for all aspects of life. As stated in their policy:

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*“Education is preparation for total living. It encompasses the physical, social, psychological, spiritual, and academic achievement of each person. Education should provide the student with the knowledge and skills to live in a multicultural society. Our education system should raise the academic achievement and increase the number of Indian high school graduates. The School Board will ensure that our students have the opportunity to choose the best in a multicultural society. The School Board will ensure that our students have mastered the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic” (Gardner, 1985, p. 26 & 27).*

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This comprehensive vision for education reflects the Board’s commitment to cultural identity and academic achievement, aiming to equip students to succeed in a multicultural world. Today, SICS is home to 185 students, divided between the main K-8 school building and a high school just a stone’s throw away (SICS, 2023). The school serves students from the Seabird Island Band (SIB) and neighbouring Stó:lō communities and remains committed to providing an education that bridges traditional Stó:lō values and culture with contemporary learning. Through its enduring vision, SICS continues to foster a learning environment where cultural identity and academic achievement are interwoven, ensuring that the community and future generations remain connected to their roots while navigating the modern world. This deep connection to cultural identity and community and the school’s welcoming atmosphere made my time at SICS truly unforgettable. I loved everything about my experience there. I see SICS as the most

impactful community I have ever been a part of, something I never felt growing up in a siloed residential neighbourhood in Toronto. Each day, I was greeted with warmth and countless hugs from students and teachers, an experience unlike anything I had encountered while attending or teaching in public schools. The relationships I formed at SICS were incredibly meaningful and profound, many of which I still cherish and maintain.

I thoroughly enjoyed my commitments during and after school hours. After nearly every school day, I could be found coaching high school basketball or facilitating community fitness sessions with school staff and students. I was grateful for the opportunity to give back through these initiatives, as it meant a lot to me and allowed me to reciprocate the support and kindness I received. As I reflected on relational accountability in the research process, grounding my research in the Seabird Island community became a natural choice. SICS allowed me to fully immerse myself in the community, reinforcing the importance of reciprocity and connection within community-based work. It deepened my appreciation for the importance of fostering relationships rooted in trust and respect, which are essential to creating a meaningful and ethical foundation for research.

### **Guardians of Halq'eméylem and Stó:lō Culture**

At SICS, the integration of Stó:lō culture and the Halq'eméylem language into the school experience was primarily the result of the dedicated efforts of a group of cultural guardians. These individuals—Dianna "Daughter" Kay, Shxwax̄e, Mam̄xa, and Yummo—played an instrumental role in ensuring that the school remained a living embodiment of Stó:lō cultural identity. Their collective contributions ensured that students, educators, and staff were exposed to Stó:lō language and culture from the moment the day began.

Each day opened with grounding—morning prayer in Halq'eméylem, accompanied by drumming, which brought the entire school community together. This was led by Daughter Kay, whose voice carried the language and spirit of the community through the school. In addition to the daily prayer, weekly Halq'eméylem classes allowed students to engage with their language. Cultural events and activities, including feasts and naming ceremonies, were also held regularly throughout the year, further immersing the entire school in Stó:lō traditions. Together, these efforts cultivated a resilient and nurturing environment where cultural identity, language, and tradition were integral to the learning experience, fostering a deep sense of pride and belonging throughout the school community.

Daughter Kay's role as a Language Curriculum Developer was critical to the school's commitment to preserving and revitalizing Halq'eméylem. Beyond leading the daily morning prayer, Daughter spearheaded efforts to integrate Halq'eméylem into the broader curriculum. Her initiatives, such as organizing Halq'eméylem language contests, were strategic efforts to ignite a competitive yet collaborative spirit among students, driving them to embrace their language. Daughter's influence also extended to the school's staff, as she played a crucial role in bringing language training for teachers and educational assistants through a partnership with the University of the Fraser Valley (UFV), further embedding the language into the daily practices of the school. She led cultural events and feasts, transforming school gatherings into a celebration of Stó:lō traditions and ensuring students' educational journey was infused with a sense of cultural identity and pride. I will never forget the community feasts Daughter Kay organized, where local foods like salmon were sourced, and students wore regalia she helped source and create. Traditional protocols were honoured as students respectfully served their

Elders. It was truly remarkable to be part of events that brought the school and community together meaningfully.

Shxwax̄e extended her teaching career into retirement as an artist and an Elder, showing her unwavering commitment to the students and the school. With her art cart, a rolling cart stocked with all the materials she needed, she brought her mobile studio to every class, engaging students in hands-on learning experiences. What stood out most was how students naturally gravitated and circled around her, eager and genuinely interested in learning. I can always recall the students creating heartfelt pieces to express appreciation for their families. Shxwax̄e's presence at SICS left a lasting impact through the students' artwork, inspiring them to express themselves confidently.

As the Elder-in-residence and a survivor of the Kamloops Indian Residential School, Yummo brought an irreplaceable depth to the community's understanding of the residential school era. His soft-spoken and gentle presence was felt throughout the school, and when he was not teaching, he could often be found in the hallway, quietly and thoughtfully drawing the pieces he would later use to guide his students in the classroom. His lessons, often rooted in teachings about animals, offered profound life lessons that encouraged reflection, resilience, and personal growth.

Mamxa, with her caring nature, played a significant role in creating a comforting atmosphere at SICS. Alongside Yummo, she taught language in my class, bringing a sense of warmth and familiarity. Both were soft-spoken yet commanded immense respect, rarely needing to reprimand students. Mamxa's involvement in the school spanned generations, with her grandson Warren working as an educational assistant (EA) and her daughter Charlene teaching language. This multigenerational presence brought a sense of continuity and connection, further

enriching the school community. Together, Yummo and Mamxa formed a nurturing team, fostering a supportive environment for students as they taught the Indigenous language with care and dedication.

The efforts of these cultural guardians—Daughter Kay, Shxwaxe, Yummo, and Mamxa—were not just about preserving the language and traditions of the Stó:lō people but about cultivating a resilient and caring educational environment. They encouraged students to explore and embrace their Stó:lō identity, ensuring that the seeds of cultural wisdom and pride were planted for future generations. Their collective dedication left a lasting legacy within the community and fortified SICS as a cornerstone of Stó:lō education.

### **Developing a Culturally Responsive Teacher Evaluation Framework**

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*Indigenous students deserve assessment systems—linked to culturally-responsive curriculum and instruction— that are fair and equitable. Much is known about how to carry out the task. What remains is the will to act on that knowledge (Trumbull & Nelson-Barber, 2019, pp. 8-9).*

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In the early stages of my PhD, I immersed myself in the literature on Indigenous education, which became the foundation of my research focus. One of the essential tasks during this phase was creating a comprehensive literature review in my area of interest—Indigenous education. This process illuminated how mainstream education systems often fall short in providing culturally responsive learning environments for Indigenous students. These systems tend to prioritize standardized practices that fail to address the specific needs of Indigenous students. Reflecting on my time at SICS, I noticed that professional development for teachers was heavily focused on a standardized approach to literacy and numeracy. Meanwhile, the

language and culture team took on most of the responsibility for delivering language instruction and cultural experiences.

Additionally, I observed a lack of consensus among educators on what defines an effective educator. This observation sparked my desire to explore educators' perspectives on effective teaching at SICS. It became clear that a unified understanding was necessary to guide and support teachers in a consistent, culturally responsive way. Recognizing the need for this shared vision, I realized that it could serve as the foundation for something more tangible—a tool for teacher evaluation. Not only could we establish a shared understanding of what it means to be an effective educator, but we could also make it the basis for evaluating and supporting teachers. This approach would honour educators' insights by grounding the evaluation tool in their perspectives and establish a meaningful foundation for measuring effectiveness. By transparently presenting the criteria, educators are clearly informed of the expectations required for success at SICS. This clarity empowers teachers to understand and align with the standards, promoting their professional growth and effectiveness.

While grounding the tool in best practices from the literature provided a solid foundation, exploring the lived experiences and insights of educators at SICS was essential. Best practices are often decontextualized, making universal application difficult. As Calliou and Wesley-Esquimaux (2015) state, “wise practices recognize the wisdom in each Indigenous community and in the community’s own stories of achieving success. The concept of wise practices recognizes that culture matters” (p. 43). Thus, the primary aim of my study became developing a culturally responsive teacher evaluation tool explicitly tailored for educators at SICS and other Stó:lō community schools. My central research question guided this goal: *How can the teacher*

*evaluation process at Seabird Island Community School reflect an understanding of the wise pedagogical perspectives and practices valued by its educators?*

With this objective in mind, I reached out to the Seabird Island Band (SIB) to seek formal permission to conduct research with educators at SICS. The SIB granted approval by issuing a Seabird Island Research Review certificate (Appendix B), ensuring that my research design aligned with community protocols. Invitations to participate in the study were extended to all educators at SICS with at least one year of teaching experience. In the winter of 2021, I conducted 19 interviews focusing on three key areas: (1) Assessment, Pedagogy, and Relationship Building; (2) Experiences with Teacher Evaluation at SICS; and (3) Developing an Effective, Culturally and Community-Based Teacher Evaluation Tool. Having worked at SICS for two years, I developed strong relationships with many participants, allowing for open and meaningful dialogue. These conversations revealed critical insights, shaping the development of the framework that led to the creation of the teacher evaluation tool. The primary aim of the tool is to empower teachers to align with the culturally responsive teaching standards established for SICS, thereby enhancing their ability to meet the holistic needs of Stó:lō students.

### **Dissertation Structure**

The dissertation is organized into six chapters, each contributing to a comprehensive exploration of key themes related to culturally responsive teacher evaluation at SICS. Chapter One, the Introduction, lays the foundation for the study by exploring the research landscape and contextualizing the educational setting at SICS. It reflects on my journey, including my experiences with community school education and my time at SICS, where I became deeply immersed in the community. The chapter introduces the central research question and outlines the development of a teacher evaluation framework informed by the insights of educators at

SICS. It also highlights the crucial role played by cultural guardians in embedding Stó:lō culture and the Halq'eméylem language into the daily school experience. The purpose of this chapter is to set the stage for the research, outlining the motivations, goals, and contextual factors that shape the study.

Chapter Two, the Literature Review, critically examines Indigenous education within the context of First Nations community schools. It begins by addressing the challenges Indigenous students face in British Columbia, including systemic funding disparities, teacher shortages, and the enduring impact of intergenerational trauma. The chapter also explores the importance of trust and well-being as essential foundations for fostering student engagement, teacher effectiveness, and community collaboration, alongside the need for culturally responsive education and trauma-informed approaches. It highlights the importance of adapting teacher evaluation processes to reflect these values, focusing on how culturally responsive curricula can support student well-being. This chapter sets the foundation for the theoretical framework from which the interview guide emerges.

Chapter Three, Methods, outlines the research methods used in this study, focusing on relationality and Merriam's case study framework. It begins with an introduction to the theoretical framework, followed by an overview of the interview guide and key themes. The chapter emphasizes critical reflexivity, reciprocity, and ethical commitments in community-engaged research. The educational case study on teacher evaluation at SICS is discussed, including participant selection criteria through purposive sampling of educators with at least one year of experience. The chapter details the consent process, data collection, and thematic analysis used to interpret the findings. The goal is to ensure that the research captures the voices of the SICS community in a culturally respectful and academically rigorous way.

Chapter Four, Findings, presents the data collected from the study, primarily focusing on weaving together educator insights to tell a cohesive story. These insights are organized into key thematic categories that emphasize the importance of strong connections between educators, students, and the community while highlighting the need for teacher evaluations that promote personal and professional growth. The chapter brings forward participants' perspectives, offering a deeper understanding of the educational and cultural dynamics at SICS that will inform the development of the teacher evaluation framework.

Chapter Five, Analysis, distills the key findings from Chapter Four, focusing on how educator insights, combined with the themes from the literature review, collectively inform the development of the teacher evaluation framework at SICS. Using the *wise practices* model (Calliou & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2015) as a guiding framework, the analysis examines the role of cultural responsiveness, community engagement, and effective instructional strategies in shaping a meaningful evaluation process. This chapter ties the findings to broader academic discussions, illustrating how best practices can be tailored to meet the unique needs of SICS.

Chapter Six, the Conclusion, summarizes the key findings and their implications for teacher evaluation at SICS. The discussion of implications highlights the need for a teacher evaluation process that prioritizes time for mentorship, classroom presence, and post-evaluation discussions. Recommendations for future research include exploring ways to engage a broader range of educational stakeholders, such as community members and knowledge keepers, to ensure evaluations are more reflective of Stó:lō values. In the final thoughts, the study emphasizes the interconnectedness of education at SICS, where both teachers and students are learners. The conclusion highlights the importance of a supportive and holistic evaluation process, rejecting simplistic 'checkbox' approaches.

Together, these chapters address the central research question and contribute to the creation of a culturally responsive teacher evaluation tool. The appendices provide supplementary resources and documentation that support the research process.

### **Chapter Overview**

This chapter introduces the personal, academic, and cultural contexts that have shaped my research journey. Drawing on Wilson's (2008) concept of relational accountability, I reflect on how this principle guided my engagement with Indigenous communities. It outlines my decision to work at SICS and its impact on my understanding of culturally responsive education. I also highlight the role of vital cultural guardians who played a central role in vitalizing Stó:lō culture and language within the school. Additionally, I discuss the interviews conducted with educators and how their insights informed the development of a culturally responsive teacher evaluation framework. This chapter sets the foundation for the dissertation, emphasizing the importance of a culturally responsive and community-driven teacher evaluation at SICS.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This literature review explores several interrelated themes critical to understanding and improving the educational experiences and success outcomes of Indigenous students in British Columbia (BC). It begins by addressing the context of Indigenous education in BC, identifying historical and ongoing challenges such as the intergenerational impact of colonialism, systemic underfunding, and the continued presence of Eurocentric curricula. These factors form the backdrop for other crucial themes, such as effective teacher evaluation, community engagement and trauma-informed approaches, ultimately underscoring the importance of culturally responsive education for Indigenous students. Additionally, this review covers culturally responsive evaluations and how they help articulate what it means to be an effective culturally responsive educator, as well as the critical role that faculties of education play in preparing teachers to engage meaningfully with Indigenous students and communities.

### **Operationalizing Trust and Well-Being**

Given the prominence of the terms trust and well-being throughout the dissertation, it is essential to operationalize these concepts within the context of this research. Both play a significant role in shaping the educational experiences of Indigenous students and provide insight into how educators can create environments that nurture academic success and holistic development. Trust forms the foundation for fostering student engagement, teacher performance, and community involvement. It is the foundation upon which students feel secure enough to take intellectual risks, deeply engage in learning, and develop meaningful relationships with their teachers (Mueller et al., 2013). Trust between students and educators cultivates a supportive environment, enabling learners to focus on their academic work and reducing the need to remain in survival mode (Mueller et al., 2013).

However, trust-building must extend beyond the student-teacher relationship. As Voerman et al. (2015) note, ongoing interactions among educators cultivate trust and foster a collective sense of responsibility. Later sections of this dissertation will also demonstrate the essential role of trust between administrators and educators in promoting accountability and establishing a supportive culture. Building trust with families and communities is equally critical, especially since many have historically felt alienated from the educational system (Klump and McNeir, 2005). Central to the educational experience is well-being, which encompasses not only physical health but also students' spiritual, mental, and emotional dimensions (Bell, 2014). This holistic approach to well-being aligns with the medicine wheel framework, underscoring the balance of these interconnected aspects as crucial for individual health and learning (Bell, 2014; Mashford-Pringle & Shawanda, 2023; Toulouse, 2016). In this context, well-being is both a foundation and an outcome of learning. For Indigenous students, well-being is profoundly linked to cultural identity, making it essential to foster this connection for their success (Castagno and Brayboy, 2008). Programs that integrate identity-building and cultural pride play a crucial role in enhancing Indigenous learners' well-being and academic outcomes (Louie and Prince, 2023).

Thus, trust and well-being are deeply interwoven with broader themes of effective teacher evaluation, culturally responsive education, and trauma-informed approaches. These concepts ground the educational practices discussed in this review, ensuring that educators focus not only on academic achievement but also on affirming students' cultural identities and supporting their overall well-being. Trust and well-being, when understood as central to the educational experience, offer a pathway to creating environments that genuinely meet the holistic needs of Indigenous students.

## **Understanding the Context of Indigenous Education in BC**

The educational experiences of First Nations students in BC are shaped by a combination of historical and systemic challenges that create barriers to academic success (NCCIH, 2017). These obstacles, shared by Indigenous students across Canada, include the intergenerational effects of colonialism, socioeconomic marginalization, and a school system that often fails to incorporate Indigenous Knowledge (IK). The Eurocentric nature of the curriculum alienates Indigenous students, who rarely see their cultures, languages, or histories reflected in their learning. Furthermore, racism and discrimination within the school environment create unwelcoming and hostile conditions for many Indigenous learners (NCCIH, 2017).

Chronic underfunding of First Nations schools exacerbates the educational inequities faced by Indigenous students, limiting access to infrastructure, instructional resources, technology, and transportation (NCCIH, 2017; Drummond & Rosenbluth, 2013). According to the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Chiefs Assembly on Education, “chronic underfunding of First Nations schools has created a First Nations education funding shortfall of \$747 million in 2010-2011, and a cumulative funding shortfall of over \$3 billion since 1996” (Drummond & Rosenbluth, 2013, p.13). Underfunding directly impacts teacher salaries and benefits, creating disparities that affect schools of all sizes (Mueller et al., 2013). This financial instability hampers teacher retention, making it challenging to maintain a stable teaching workforce. It also contributes to higher teacher attrition rates, where educators leave their roles in First Nations schools, disrupting classroom continuity and weakening the relationships essential for student success.

The cumulative impact of these systemic and financial barriers significantly weakens First Nations schools' ability to provide effective and consistent education. This results in

disproportionately low educational outcomes and highlights the urgent need for reforms that prioritize systemic equity (NCCIH, 2017). Despite these hurdles, there has been a notable improvement in educational outcomes for Indigenous students in BC’s public schools. The six-year completion rate—the percentage of students who graduate with a Certificate of Graduation or an Adult Graduation Diploma within six years of enrolling in Grade 8—has risen significantly. Indigenous students’ completion rate was 51% in 2010 but has since climbed to 74% in 2023 (Student Success BC, 2023). This is a promising sign of progress; however, this rate remains 18% lower than the provincial average of 92% for all BC students, highlighting the ongoing systemic barriers Indigenous students face.

While the academic progress for Indigenous students in BC is encouraging, focusing solely on graduation rates does not provide a complete picture of student success. Public school initiatives like the Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network (AESN), established in 2009, have contributed to this success through culturally responsive teaching initiatives. By 2013, the AESN involved around 75 schools and approximately 400 educators, fostering collaboration and promoting culturally responsive practices (McGregor, 2013). The AESN has had a sustained overall impact on teachers, schools, and districts, creating a shift toward more inclusive learning environments. Additionally, it has empowered educators to implement culturally responsive teaching practices and has played a significant role in shaping Indigenous education policies and programs (McGregor, 2013). By focusing on these areas, AESN has also improved Indigenous student learning outcomes and initiated a deeper understanding of education as a community-based partnership. Through its continued efforts, the AESN is beginning to address and disrupt colonial narratives within the school system, further supporting long-term, meaningful change for Indigenous learners in BC (McGregor, 2013).

Building on these efforts, schools have increasingly recognized the importance of holistic healthcare programs integrating physical and mental well-being. Such programs highlight the interconnectedness of these dimensions and their essential role in student wellness. Successful programs have concentrated on identity, capacity building, and establishing supportive community networks (Louie & Prince, 2023). The *Action Schools! BC* initiative exemplifies this approach, particularly in its work with remote First Nations communities (Naylor et al., 2010). Given the higher rates of childhood obesity and type 2 diabetes among Indigenous children, early intervention programs become increasingly vital. This program aimed to enhance physical activity and healthy eating habits through a whole-school model, with teachers playing a pivotal role by adapting activities to reflect local traditions. One example is teachers incorporating traditional foods into lessons, making the program culturally resonant for students (Naylor et al., 2010). By fostering engagement and cultural relevance, the program improved students' understanding of healthy dietary choices, representing a step in the right direction toward improving long-term health outcomes.

This focus on health and well-being, alongside culturally responsive education, reflects a broader understanding that student success is not just about academic outcomes but about creating supportive, inclusive environments that nurture the whole student. To address these diverse needs, initiatives like AESN and Action Schools! BC are laying the groundwork for long-term, meaningful change in the overall well-being and success of Indigenous students in BC.

### **The Importance of an Effective Teacher Evaluation Process**

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*“Strong teacher evaluation systems, when paired with supports and incentives, are designed to do the following: 1) Provide a more valid measure of teacher*

*quality by distinguishing between teachers at different performance levels; 2) Recognize strong teachers and keep them in the classroom; 3) Encourage consistently less effective teachers to leave the classroom; 4) Help all teachers improve; 5) Recruit more effective new teachers; and 6) Achieve gains in student learning and other positive student outcomes” (Putman et al., 2018, p.2)*

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Teacher evaluation plays a crucial role in identifying teacher quality, which research shows is a key determinant of student success and long-term economic outcomes (Hanushek, 2011). The teacher evaluation process in BC focuses on assessing various aspects of teaching practice, as outlined in the *Assessment Form* (Province of BC, 2023). This includes evaluating a teacher's planning and preparation, classroom environment, instructional effectiveness, professionalism, and collaboration. Key elements such as the ability to manage the classroom, design coherent instruction, demonstrate subject knowledge, and engage students in meaningful learning activities are integral to this process. Additionally, the evaluation considers how teachers adapt lessons to meet diverse student needs (Province of BC, 2023).

Teachers with higher performance ratings in evaluations report greater job satisfaction, while those with lower ratings often experience decreased satisfaction (Koedel et al., 2017). Given that job satisfaction directly impacts retention (Koedel et al., 2017), it becomes essential to ensure that evaluations fairly and accurately measure effective teaching. Providing teachers with clear evaluation criteria in advance promotes transparency, boosting confidence in the evaluation process and fostering a sense of fairness (Brookhart, 2004). While fairness is vital, other components also contribute to a comprehensive evaluation. For example, subject matter expertise remains crucial in evaluating teaching effectiveness, as a teacher's deep understanding of their subject is a prerequisite to effective instruction (Shulman, 1986). This underscores the

importance of evaluating teachers across multiple subjects to ensure they have the necessary depth of knowledge in each subject they teach. However, even with expertise, defining what constitutes effective teaching is complex. This complexity is compounded by the subjective nature of evaluations, which often lack consistent standards (Phillips et al., 2014).

As Phillips et al. (2014) outline, evaluations are a cornerstone of quality assurance within educational institutions, ensuring that educators meet established performance criteria and adhere to teaching standards. Teacher evaluation can enhance teaching practices and facilitate enriched student learning (Phillips et al., 2014). However, it is important to stress that simply using evaluation tools does not ensure an adequate assessment of teaching. Effective teacher evaluations are inherently growth-oriented rather than punitive (Papay, 2012). As Putman et al. (2018) point out, these tools must be applied thoughtfully, with an evaluation process designed to assess performance, provide meaningful support and promote continuous growth for educators. Evaluation systems can be used to craft individualized professional development plans based on teachers' unique needs (Mathers & Oliva, 2008).

Studies suggest that formative assessments that offer ongoing feedback provide a more effective approach to fostering teacher growth (Goe et al., 2012). Targeted feedback that is specific, manageable, and focused on critical areas for improvement is more likely to lead to meaningful changes in teaching practices (William, 2011). Providing immediate feedback following evaluations can enhance teacher effectiveness by facilitating the real-time adoption of targeted teaching behaviours. It is most effective when administrators actively engage during lessons rather than remaining passive observers (Scheeler et al., 2004). However, this may not always be practical in scenarios where they are present specifically to evaluate.

Involving teachers in the evaluation process allows for reflection and goal-setting that directly supports their professional growth (Voerman et al., 2015; Phillips et al., 2014). Engaging in discussion around feedback fosters collaboration, enhancing teaching quality by building trust and openness to constructive criticism. Open dialogue and post-observation reflection are crucial for professional growth, encouraging deeper insights into teaching practices and fostering an environment for continuous improvement (Danielson, 2012). By engaging in this reflective process, teachers enhance their understanding of instructional strategies and build a deeper awareness of their teaching styles, identifying specific areas for growth and development (Shandomo, 2010).

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*“Evaluation is a process of deep reflection and contemplation, a process of looking back and seeing what worked, what did not and then determining the path ahead ... [it] does not employ an external set of indicators upon these questions of where you ‘should’ be. Rather, this creates space for people to learn from their experiences, reflect on what has worked for them, celebrate the journey, and take that learning into their future” (Rowe, 2020, p.5).*

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Evaluations stimulate professional growth when conducted to nurture and enhance teachers' capabilities. They serve as a vital tool, providing targeted, constructive feedback and fostering a culture of continuous improvement. This approach encourages educators to reflect on their practices, pinpoint areas for development, and implement the necessary adjustments.

### **Culturally Responsive Teaching: Honoring Equity, Identity, and Inclusion**

Ladson-Billings (1995) critiques terms like culturally appropriate or culturally congruent, which imply that student cultures should be adapted to fit mainstream norms. Instead, she advocates for the term culturally responsive, suggesting that schools should proactively adjust to students' diverse cultural backgrounds. Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) ensures that

educational environments are inclusive, meaningful, and effective for diverse student populations. A culturally responsive approach leverages students' cultural wealth by integrating their experiences into the curriculum and creating meaningful connections with academic learning to enhance engagement (Muñiz, 2020). This approach makes learning more relevant and accessible, which can contribute to better academic outcomes (Gay, 2002). Muñiz (2020) identifies eight key competencies for culturally responsive teaching, which are critical to creating inclusive and equitable learning environments. These competencies, presented in no particular order, are drawn from her infographic:

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*“(1) reflecting on one’s cultural lens, (2) recognizing and addressing bias within the system, (3) drawing on students' cultural backgrounds to shape curriculum and instruction, (4) incorporating real-world issues into the classroom, (5) modelling high expectations for all students, (6) promoting respect for student differences, (7) collaborating with families and the local community, and (8) communicating in linguistically and culturally responsive ways” (Muñiz, 2019, p.12).*

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By developing these competencies, educators can shape learning environments that validate and reflect students’ cultural identities. For First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) students, CRT has been identified as a particularly effective strategy for addressing biases and creating equitable learning environments (Oskineegish, 2014). Studies consistently demonstrate that aligning instructional methodologies with students' cultural norms through Indigenous language and cultural programs leads to improved academic performance, higher attendance rates, decreased dropout rates, and enhanced personal well-being (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). Cranston (2014) underscores the need to recruit and retain educators who demonstrate strong cultural competence, especially in understanding First Nations history, culture, traditions,

languages, and relationships with the land. He emphasizes that hiring decisions in First Nations schools should prioritize teachers capable of fostering positive relationships with students, families, and the broader community, contributing to a culturally inclusive and supportive school environment. Cranston (2014) highlights this as a significant challenge but essential for creating educational spaces that genuinely support and reflect Indigenous cultural values.

Oskineegish (2014) emphasizes the dual responsibility of First Nations schools to foster both academic achievement and cultural proficiency. To achieve this, teachers must cover mainstream learning objectives while incorporating culturally relevant content in the curriculum, ensuring students succeed academically while preserving and strengthening their cultural identities. The need to integrate students' cultural backgrounds into curriculum and instruction is reinforced by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC). In their *Calls to Action* document, the TRC addresses the colonial nature of Canada's past and current education system, calling:

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*“Upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples’ historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students” (TRC, 2015, p. 7).*

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Teachers are encouraged to develop culturally responsive lessons that reflect their students' backgrounds, particularly by including Indigenous languages and land-based learning in their curriculum (Oskineegish, 2014). Battiste (2013) asserts that this creates learning environments that are intellectually, socially, and emotionally affirming for Indigenous students. This could involve embedding Indigenous perspectives throughout the curriculum, using

traditional storytelling as a pedagogical tool, and creating culturally safe spaces that visibly honour Indigenous languages and identities. Educators must also cultivate strong relationships with Elders, families, and community members, deepening their understanding of how to effectively implement culturally responsive educational practices (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). This helps bridge the gap between educators' experiences and the cultural realities of the communities they serve, enriching the educational landscape (Oskineegish, 2014).

CRT empowers educators to create inclusive learning environments that promote social justice, equity, and respect for cultural differences (Krasnoff, 2016). It acknowledges the historical legacy of forced assimilative education and addresses the continued suppression of IK and perspectives. Teachers must be equipped to facilitate discussions about colonial history in a way that is not only educational but also sensitive to the lived experiences and historical trauma of Indigenous students. When teachers are professionally developed to nurture cultural pride and identity, they can significantly contribute to the success and well-being of Indigenous youth (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). Ladson-Billings (1998) argues that culturally relevant pedagogy must challenge dominant educational practices and legitimize diverse cultural knowledge to foster educational equity. The increasing focus on standardized testing is a prime example of such dominant practices and poses a risk to culturally responsive teaching (Trumbull & Nelson-Barber, 2019). Focusing predominantly on test preparation at the expense of culturally relevant instruction diminishes the opportunity for Indigenous students to make meaningful connections to their cultural identities.

Moreover, Preston and Claypool (2021) emphasize that current assessment practices often neglect the holistic aspects of Indigenous education, such as emotional, spiritual, and social development. They advocate for more inclusive assessments like hands-on, project-based

learning, peer evaluations, and community involvement. Self-reflection is a vital component of student assessment, particularly for Indigenous students, as it brings emotional and spiritual dimensions into the learning process. Preston and Claypool (2021) note that self-assessment encourages students to engage with their education holistically, relying “on messages emanating from body, heart, and soul” (2021, p. 6). The inclusion of emotional and spiritual growth in assessment ensures that Indigenous ways of knowing are honoured.

Similarly, Andrade (2019) emphasizes how self-assessment fosters student autonomy and encourages meaningful revisions and improvements. By incorporating self-assessment into the learning process, Indigenous students can become active participants in their education, furthering their sense of ownership and engagement while promoting holistic growth. While these classroom-level shifts are vital, Castagno and Brayboy (2008) advocate for comprehensive, systemic reforms at school and district levels. They emphasize that redefining faculty roles, status, and compensation, consistent program evaluation, and secure funding are essential to fostering an environment where culturally responsive education takes precedence. Such actions are critical for dismantling hierarchies and ensuring that local cultures and languages are valued and respected across the educational system (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008).

Creating culturally safe schools is essential for fostering inclusivity and mutual respect. This process begins with teachers developing a deep understanding of their students' diverse backgrounds and histories, enabling them to challenge their biases and assumptions (Lin & Bates, 2014). Beyond inclusivity, culturally responsive education validates Indigenous students' cultural wealth, directly supporting their self-esteem and academic success. By integrating IK, language, and culture into the curriculum, schools help strengthen students' self-identity and promote cultural pride and continuity (Morcom, 2017b). Educators must actively work to better

understand and reinforce cultural identity, ensuring the long-term success and well-being of Indigenous students and their communities.

### **Trauma-Informed Approaches and Social-Emotional Learning in Indigenous Education**

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*“A large-scale community survey found 1.0% of the general population had been diagnosed with PTSD, while an investigation into the mental health status of 127 former Canadian Aboriginal residential school students in British Columbia found that 64.2% met the diagnostic criteria for PTSD” (Bellamy & Hardy, 2015, p.20).*

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A culturally responsive education undoubtedly considers students' socioemotional needs, recognizing that emotional well-being is intricately tied to academic success. This is particularly important for Indigenous students, who are impacted by the effects of intergenerational trauma. Teachers with high socioemotional competence (SEC) are better equipped to create supportive, low-conflict environments conducive to learning. Teachers' abilities to recognize and manage their emotions, understand their students' emotions, and respond empathetically are central to trauma-informed practice (Johnson, 2014). A trauma-informed approach to education highlights the importance of providing educators and school staff with ongoing training to deepen their understanding of the historical and current trauma experienced by Indigenous children. This training should equip them to respond with greater compassion and awareness, particularly in recognizing the intergenerational impacts of trauma that contribute to high dropout rates and disengagement from school (Johnson, 2014).

A trauma-informed classroom emphasizes the importance of understanding and addressing the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) on students' cognitive, social, and emotional development. Research shows that students affected by trauma often struggle with

concentration, relational difficulties, and behavioural issues, which can significantly hinder their educational progress (Sweetman, 2022). To effectively support these students, trauma-informed practices prioritize safety and trust, ensuring that the learning environment adapts to meet the unique needs of each student. This approach reduces behavioural issues and fosters a more positive and connected classroom climate where students feel heard and supported. Additionally, integrating Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programs into classrooms strengthens students' emotional resilience and communication skills, allowing them to better manage their trauma (Sweetman, 2022). However, the successful implementation of these practices requires ongoing teacher training and institutional support, as educators working with trauma-impacted students are at risk of secondary trauma and compassion fatigue (Sweetman, 2022).

Given that ACEs increase the likelihood of developing conditions like PTSD, early intervention is crucial, with schools playing a pivotal role in offering mental health services and trauma-informed programs to students and their families. Early intervention has been shown to reduce the risk of PTSD, making it less likely that students will develop more severe mental health disorders (Bellamy & Hardy, 2015). Schools and educators must be aware of the signs of PTSD and understand how it affects learning and behaviour. Providing trauma-sensitive interventions, such as counselling, safe learning environments, and flexibility in academic expectations, is critical for supporting students who have experienced trauma (Bellamy & Hardy, 2015).

However, it is essential to recognize that Western approaches to counselling for Indigenous peoples have often been less effective, overlooking the historical context of trauma (Bellamy & Hardy, 2015). Traditional healing methods are critical components in addressing intergenerational trauma among Indigenous peoples. Traditional healing practices such as

smudging, sweat ceremonies, and the guidance of Elders are rooted in Indigenous spirituality, emphasizing the balance between the physical, spiritual, emotional, and social realms of life (Marsh et al., 2015). In addition to traditional healing methods, revitalizing Indigenous languages is essential in the healing process. Indigenous languages are deeply tied to cultural identity, and the loss of these languages due to colonial policies has significantly led to a weakened sense of identity. Language revitalization efforts are essential in reconnecting individuals and communities with culture and fostering emotional and spiritual healing (McKenzie, 2022). Blending traditional healing methods with language revitalization provides a comprehensive approach to addressing trauma. Both methods work together to support the recovery of cultural identity and well-being, emphasizing the importance of IK and practices in healing intergenerational wounds.

The impact of trauma on learning and development is profound, particularly for Indigenous children and adolescents. Those affected by PTSD often display symptoms such as losing interest in academic activities, difficulty concentrating, emotional withdrawal, and aggressive behaviours, all of which interfere with their educational outcomes (Bellamy & Hardy, 2015). These children frequently struggle in school due to the emotional and psychological challenges stemming from trauma. PTSD can also result in avoidance behaviours, where students actively avoid places or situations, including school, that remind them of traumatic events (Bellamy & Hardy, 2015). In addition to PTSD, Indigenous children exposed to trauma may develop mental health issues like depression and anxiety, which further complicate their educational success (Bellamy & Hardy, 2015).

A significant symptom of PTSD is a lack of trust, which can manifest in students' reluctance to engage with educators or classmates, creating additional barriers to learning

(Bellamy & Hardy, 2015). Establishing trust and creating partnerships with families, especially those who have felt marginalized by schools, is crucial for building a supportive educational environment. Schools achieve the best outcomes when they actively engage with families and the wider community, encouraging their involvement in decisions impacting their children's education. "Actively inviting families to the school, visiting families in their communities, soliciting their input and taking their concerns seriously, and treating families with respect will all go a long way toward developing trust" (Klump & McNeir, 2005, p. 11). Trust is crucial in fostering a positive school culture that promotes optimal student learning (Mueller et al., 2013).

Maynard et al. (2019) argue that despite the widespread promotion and implementation of trauma-informed approaches, there is insufficient rigorous evidence to demonstrate their effectiveness. This lack of evidence largely stems from the reliance on traditional research designs like Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs) and Quasi-Experimental Designs (QEDs), which were required for inclusion in their review. However, these research designs can marginalize Indigenous approaches to education by prioritizing standardized, quantitative metrics over relational, cultural, and community-based practices. Indigenous pedagogies, which emphasize collective well-being, storytelling, and relationships, do not easily fit within the confines of RCTs and QEDs that seek to measure outcomes in a detached, decontextualized manner. By relying solely on these methods, we risk overlooking the richness and effectiveness of trauma-informed approaches rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing and being. In doing so, we perpetuate the very systemic barriers that these approaches aim to address, further marginalizing Indigenous pedagogical practices and knowledge systems.

A trauma-informed classroom is primarily one where teachers display high social and emotional competence (SEC). Teachers with strong SEC are better able to create environments

where students feel emotionally safe, a critical factor in supporting trauma-impacted students. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) emphasize that teachers with solid SEC are more adept at managing classrooms effectively and building strong teacher-student relationships. In this way, SEC is central to trauma-informed practices, creating a learning environment that nurtures emotional resilience and promotes student well-being.

### **Evaluating Culturally Responsive Teaching**

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*Indigenous students deserve assessment systems—linked to culturally-responsive curriculum and instruction— that are fair and equitable. Much is known about how to carry out the task. What remains is the will to act on that knowledge (Trumbull & Nelson-Barber, 2019, pp. 8-9).*

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Newcomer et al. (2015) emphasize that culturally responsive evaluation (CRE) is grounded in the inclusion of cultural values and community contexts, ensuring that the knowledge, beliefs, practices, experiences, and languages of the communities being served are respected in the evaluation process. This approach leads to accurate and equitable assessments, particularly for marginalized groups, by challenging traditional methods and advocating for culturally situated approaches that align with the lived realities of those evaluated. Castagno et al. (2021) build on this by stressing that generic diversity and inclusion tools often fail to address Indigenous communities' unique cultural, historical, and political contexts. Therefore, customizing evaluation tools to reflect these contexts ensures that evaluative practices align with Indigenous lived realities, reinforcing principles of cultural responsiveness and equity.

One example of a culturally responsive framework is the Hawaiian Indigenous Education Rubric (HIER), developed through a project focused on aligning educational strategies with Hawaiian cultural values, language, and practices (Kanaʻiaupuni & Kawaiʻaeʻa, 2008). It

offers a holistic and dynamic approach to evaluating the teaching practices of educators working with Native Hawaiian students. Kanaïaupuni and Kawaiyaeÿa (2008) outline five essential elements that form the foundation of HIER, which I have taken verbatim from their *Key Components of Cultural Education* figure:

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*“(1) Recognizing and using native or heritage language, (2) Actively involving family and community in the development of curricula, everyday learning, and leadership, (3) Making learning meaningful and relevant through culturally grounded content and assessment, (4) Structuring school, classroom, and other learning interactions in culturally appropriate ways, and (5) Gathering and maintaining data using various methods to ensure student progress in culturally responsible ways” (p.75).*

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While this culturally responsive teacher evaluation rubric offers valuable insights, it only partially applies to SICS’ unique context. This rubric further highlights the importance of adopting wise practices grounded in the experiences of educators working within the context being evaluated. One example is the emphasis placed on teaching and communicating with students in the Hawaiian language and incorporating Hawaiian language materials across subjects. However, not only is it an entirely different language spoken in Stó:lō communities, but Seabird Island has no fluent Halq'eméylem speakers. Educators are also unlikely to have access to Halq'eméylem materials beyond language instruction. Nevertheless, ongoing revitalization efforts are critical in preserving Stó:lō cultural identity, reinforcing the need to adapt evaluations to account for the local context.

The HIER framework implicitly acknowledges the need for culturally responsive classroom management (CRCM) by emphasizing the need to structure learning interactions in culturally appropriate ways. This recognition underscores the importance of creating an

environment that fosters positive relationships and student engagement through culturally aligned practices. As Llewellyn and Boon (2015) explain:

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*“There are five essential components of CRCM: recognition of one’s own ethnocentrism; knowledge of students’ cultural backgrounds; an understanding of the broader social, economic and political context; an ability and willingness to use culturally responsive management strategies and a commitment to building caring classrooms” (Llewellyn & Boon, 2015, p. 4).*

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Moreover, the need for CRCM is underscored by the disproportionate representation of Indigenous students in areas related to student behaviour, including suspensions, absenteeism, retention rates, and overall academic performance (Llewellyn & Boon, 2015). A key component of CRCM is recognizing self, cultural differences, and power relations without adopting a deficit view. Successful strategies must also emphasize the importance of building positive relationships through warmth, humour, and respect, which are critical for fostering trust and engagement (Llewellyn & Boon, 2015). This adaptation is essential because it requires a shift from traditional classroom management practices, which often prioritize maintaining order and discipline, to more culturally aligned approaches that recognize Indigenous students' cultural backgrounds and learning characteristics. As highlighted in the literature, teachers must employ behaviour management strategies that are culturally responsive and community-informed (Llewellyn & Boon, 2015).

Given its critical role, collaboration must be a central component of teacher evaluation. It has emerged as a key theme in the literature, positioning it as a vital element of effective teaching. As noted earlier, partnerships with community deepen educators' ability to implement culturally responsive practices (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). In addition, teacher-to-

teacher collaboration strengthens the school environment, fostering cohesion and improving student outcomes (Goddard et al., 2007). One often overlooked yet critical aspect of collaboration is the partnership between teachers and Indigenous support staff, such as liaison workers. Kanu (2005) highlights the importance of Indigenous liaison workers in bridging the gap between schools and families, helping community members better understand the curriculum and school policies. This approach ensures that families are better equipped to participate and engage with the educational process. Building these bridges could strengthen teachers' connection to families while equipping them with the insights needed to better support their students.

Nevertheless, meaningful change does not only come from external engagement—it also requires a deep commitment to internal work. Kanu (2005) highlights the need for educators to shift their perceptions and develop an appreciation for IK to foster culturally safe educational environments. These environments are characterized by respect for students' cultural identities and the absence of cultural oppression, allowing Indigenous students to thrive without needing to dissociate from their culture. However, creating such spaces requires more than just knowledge of Indigenous culture. It demands ongoing self-awareness and critical examination of one's beliefs and assumptions. This is where Oskineegish's (2018) emphasis on self-reflection and critical inquiry becomes crucial. By engaging in continuous self-reflection, teachers can challenge their biases and unearth hidden assumptions that might otherwise hinder the creation of culturally responsive classrooms.

Ongoing reflection can help teachers critically assess how effectively they incorporate IK into their teaching practices, allowing them to identify areas for improvement and better honour and respect students' identities. Kanu's (2005) and Oskineegish's (2018) insights underscore the

critical role of self-reflection in teacher evaluation processes. These perspectives suggest that ongoing reflection can play a pivotal role in teacher evaluations, as a tool for professional growth and a means to ensure cultural responsiveness. Incorporating self-reflection into the evaluation framework encourages educators to continuously assess their practices, biases, and understanding of IK.

Educators committed to culturally responsive teaching must take a holistic approach, combining collaboration with the community and a dedication to ongoing self-reflection. Alongside CRCM, this approach is essential for creating learning environments that align with Indigenous students' cultural identities and aspirations. The ongoing internal work teachers must engage in is crucial for helping them reflect on their assumptions and practices to ensure they create inclusive, culturally safe spaces. Together, these elements form the foundation for effective teaching practices that support Indigenous students' academic success and honour and respect their cultural backgrounds. Integrating these principles into teacher evaluations emphasizes the importance of accountability in fostering culturally responsive and inclusive learning environments.

### **Strengthening Cultural Responsiveness in Teacher Education Programs**

Teacher Education Programs (TEPs) offer the most proactive way to equip educators with the tools needed to deliver culturally responsive education for Indigenous students. Developing cultural competence through TEPs is essential for bridging the disconnect between schools and Indigenous communities, particularly by addressing the conflicting expectations contributing to this divide (Thaman, 2013). Teacher education programs must also prioritize equipping educators with teaching strategies and instructional materials that are contextually relevant to Indigenous students. There is a critical need for a holistic and culturally responsive

focus in TEPs to foster academic success and ensure the survival and continuity of Indigenous cultures (Thaman, 2013).

In response to this need, many TEPs now include mandatory courses on integrating Indigenous worldviews into the curriculum. These programs emphasize the importance of relationship-building with Indigenous communities and creating spaces where pre-service teachers can openly ask questions and engage in discussions. Webb and Mashford-Pringle (2022) outline how provincial and territorial Ministries of Education (MOEs) and post-secondary institutions support teachers in this process by offering courses, workshops, and policies focused on preparing pre-service teachers to engage with Indigenous content in a culturally safe manner. A key strategy highlighted is the emphasis on cultural safety in teacher education, encouraging educators to reflect on their cultural biases and understand how they impact their teaching practices (source for this broad claim needed here). As discussed in depth in the previous section, this reflective process is essential for addressing settler biases, racism, and harmful stereotypes, thereby fostering an increasingly supportive environment for Indigenous students.

An article by Oskineegish and Berger (2021) revealed that teacher candidates often enter Indigenous education courses with significant knowledge gaps. A Likert-scale survey administered to 45 candidates found that 39% of those surveyed reported feeling uninformed about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) histories and cultures. By the end of the 18-hour course, 85% felt more knowledgeable, though only 36% strongly agreed they would integrate FNMI content into their lessons, indicating that more training is needed. Instructors observed that candidates from northern Ontario showed greater awareness of Indigenous peoples living around them than those from southern Ontario. This reflects my own experience, having grown

up in Toronto with little exposure to Indigenous peoples. When I arrived at Lakehead University, it was eye-opening, as it was the first time I had seen the regular presence of Indigenous peoples in my day-to-day life. Ironically, this university is also where the study took place. The authors consider this 18-hour course a starting point, even when expanded to 36 hours in the new two-year program, emphasizing the need for ongoing professional development to prepare educators for culturally responsive teaching (Oskineegish & Berger, 2021).

Despite these positive outcomes, teacher candidates encountered challenges accessing resources and support for Indigenous education. A lack of instructional materials and inconsistent administrative support made it difficult to access resources that accurately reflect Indigenous cultures (Oskineegish & Berger, 2021). Participants emphasized the need for more holistic, culturally responsive teacher education. They appreciated opportunities for experiential learning, such as participating in sweat lodges, which helped deepen their understanding of Indigenous traditions and cultural practices. In addition to logistical challenges, many educators also struggled with the discomfort of addressing colonialism and its impacts on Indigenous education.

A common challenge remains the discomfort and fear among teachers of offending Indigenous peoples, particularly when confronting the assimilative and destructive impacts of colonialism within education (Webb & Mashford-Pringle, 2022). This discomfort is not unique, as Higgins et al. (2013) examine Dion's (2007) "perfect stranger" position, where an admitted lack of knowledge about Indigenous cultures creates a sense of detachment in educational settings. Rooted in Eurocentrism, this stance frames whiteness as the default, preventing authentic engagement with IK. Resistance to Indigenous education, they argue, allows

individuals to leave their privilege unchallenged, as it often reflects a refusal to engage with what one knows, does not know, and refuses to know (Higgins et al., 2013).

This discomfort often results in a tokenistic approach to Indigenous education, where Indigenous content is treated as an add-on rather than a core component of the curriculum. TEPs must do more to challenge this resistance by exposing the deep-seated impact of Eurocentrism and dismantling stereotypes. To address these challenges, there is a need for education systems to move beyond surface-level inclusion and foster a holistic integration of IK (Higgins et al., 2013). Recognizing Indigenous cultures as dynamic and evolving challenges static perceptions, allows educators to engage with Indigenous students in ways that honour their lived experiences. Limited exposure to Indigenous perspectives in teacher education often results in superficial understanding, which further widens the disconnect between educators and Indigenous students.

To address this, Desmoulins and Bell (2024) emphasize the need for Indigenous Initial Teacher Education (IITE) programs in Ontario to engage with Indigenous communities and ensure that local pedagogies and ways of knowing are authentically reflected in the curriculum. Another essential strategy involves collaborating with Indigenous communities to identify their educational needs and shaping practicum placements accordingly. Culturally responsive training and community-embedded practicum placements help future teachers build relationships and ease their transition into stable teaching roles (Tessaro et al., 2021). Ongoing support for newly employed Indigenous teachers is essential for promoting teacher retention. This support can come in the form of mentorship, professional development opportunities, and access to instructional resources, all of which are vital for helping teachers navigate the unique challenges of their roles (Tessaro et al., 2021). By focusing on these strategies, TEPs can address practical

challenges and contribute to broader reconciliation efforts, empowering Indigenous communities and improving educational outcomes (Tessaro et al., 2021).

In addition to addressing curriculum needs, TEPs are also focusing on revitalizing Indigenous languages and increasing the number of Indigenous educators (Desmoulins & Bell, 2024). A critical priority in this effort is the revitalization of Indigenous languages, with some faculties offering programs to teach these languages or train educators to instruct in them, addressing a significant gap in education and language preservation. Calls to Action 16 and 62(ii) “call upon universities to create degree and diploma programs in Indigenous languages, and to fund education for teachers to learn how to integrate Indigenous knowledges and teaching methods into their classrooms, respectively” (Desmoulins & Bell, 2024, p. 445). The authors argue that this transformation requires building capacity among faculty members and offering meaningful placements in Indigenous communities, providing teacher candidates with essential hands-on experience (Desmoulins & Bell, 2024).

Another key priority is increasing the number of Indigenous teachers in Indigenous communities, particularly in remote areas. Addressing chronic teacher shortages in communities is critical to maintaining consistent educational experiences for Indigenous students. Community-based Indigenous teacher education programs are emerging as a promising solution to this shortage. Kitchen et al. (2012) highlight a community-based Indigenous teacher education program in Northwestern Ontario that allows teacher candidates to stay close to their communities. This approach fosters cultural safety and belonging, helping to mitigate the dislocation often experienced in traditional TEPs. Developed in collaboration between Brock University and the Northern Nishnawbe Education Council (NNEC), the program equips Indigenous teachers to integrate Indigenous and Western educational principles. Although

participants face challenges such as balancing personal responsibilities and navigating remote learning issues, the program underscores the importance of culturally responsive teacher education. It emphasizes the role of Indigenous teachers in promoting relevant, meaningful education within their communities, addressing the critical need for cultural competence and integrating IK into education systems (Kitchen et al., 2012).

### **Chapter Overview**

This chapter explores the unique historical and contemporary challenges faced by Indigenous students in Canada, focusing on their educational needs and the critical role of teacher evaluation in improving outcomes. It examines how intergenerational trauma, socio-economic marginalization, and chronic underfunding continue to affect Indigenous education, while also highlighting initiatives like the Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network (AESN) that promote culturally responsive teaching. Teacher preparation programs and community-based initiatives are essential for fostering strong relationships between teacher candidates and Indigenous students and communities, helping to build this responsiveness. Additionally, the literature reviewed emphasizes the need for trauma-informed approaches and culturally responsive evaluations, outlining how these strategies can support ongoing professional development and foster positive educational experiences for Indigenous students.

### **Chapter 3: Methods**

The methods section begins by discussing the theoretical framework, which emerged naturally from the literature review. This framework highlights themes such as cultural responsiveness, trauma-informed practice, holistic assessment, and collaboration, among others. These themes are essential to addressing Indigenous communities' distinct educational challenges and inform the development of the interview guide used to gather data. This study employs Sharan B. Merriam's case study approach, providing an in-depth, holistic exploration of teacher evaluation practices at SICS. An interview guide was designed around three main areas of inquiry: (1) Assessment, Pedagogy & Relationship Building, (2) Experiences with Teacher Evaluation at SICS, and (3) Developing an Effective, Culturally & Community-Based Teacher Evaluation Tool. These areas were structured to explore how the teacher evaluation process could reflect the specific educational priorities of educators at SICS.

Grounding my work in Wilson's concept of relational accountability (2008) and Ermine's ethical space (2007), this study emphasizes the importance of respecting Indigenous ways of knowing. These frameworks focus on reciprocity, relationality, and the co-creation of knowledge, ensuring that the research is not extractive and contributes meaningfully to the community. The First Peoples Principles of Learning (FPPL) further guided reflexive practices throughout the study, fostering an approach prioritizing respect for cultural integrity and continuous self-reflection (FNESC, 2006). This approach demonstrates a commitment to producing a culturally responsive evaluation tool that is both effective and deeply embedded in the community's educational landscape. Subsequent sections of this chapter will detail the specifics of data collection and analysis.

## Introduction to Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework demonstrates how critical themes from the literature form the foundation of the evaluation process. These themes are grounded in best practices identified in the literature and include: (1) culturally responsive education, (2) trauma-informed approaches, (3) holistic, inclusive assessments, (4) community engagement and collaboration, and (5) professional growth and self-reflection. Educators' insights will be essential in contextualizing these themes to inform the evaluation process. By presenting this framework in *Table 1*, the aim is to highlight the key elements that support the development of a culturally responsive and effective evaluation process.

*Table 1: Theoretical Framework – Grounding Teacher Evaluation in Best Practices*

Theme	Connection to Literature
Culturally Responsive Education	Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) encourages teachers to account for students' diverse cultural backgrounds by integrating their cultural wealth and experiences into the curriculum, making learning inclusive and meaningful (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Muñiz, 2020). This approach can lead to improved academic outcomes, including higher attendance and lower dropout rates for FNMI students (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). In First Nations contexts, CRT aligns with the dual responsibility of fostering academic achievement and cultural proficiency (Oskineegish, 2014).
Trauma-Informed Approaches	Implementing trauma-informed strategies is essential for creating safe, supportive environments that promote student well-being (Bellamy & Hardy, 2015). Indigenous students often face the effects of historical trauma, making a trauma-informed approach crucial for their success. Teachers with high SEC are better able to create supportive learning environments where students feel emotionally safe (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). These practices foster student well-being, reduce behavioural issues, and improve classroom climates (Sweetman, 2022).
Holistic, Inclusive Assessments	Holistic assessments move beyond traditional academic metrics (Preston & Claypool, 2021). Inclusive assessments prioritize project-based, peer and self-assessments, allowing students to reflect on their learning in a way that integrates emotional and spiritual growth (Preston & Claypool, 2021; Andrade, 2019). These approaches ensure that Indigenous ways of knowing are respected and that students are empowered to engage with their education on a deeper level.
Community Engagement	Collaboration with families, Elders, and the broader community helps teachers ensure that education aligns with Indigenous students' cultural realities, enabling them to develop curricula that reflect students' lived experiences.

and Collaboration	These partnerships deepen educators' ability to implement culturally responsive practices, fostering a more inclusive and effective learning environment (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Oskineegish, 2018). Additionally, teacher-to-teacher collaboration strengthens the school environment, fostering cohesion and improving student outcomes (Goddard et al., 2007).
Professional Growth and Self-Reflection	Effective teacher evaluations should provide meaningful support and promote continuous growth (Putman et al., 2018). In Indigenous contexts, there is a recognized need for ongoing professional development to prepare teachers for culturally responsive teaching (Oskineegish & Berger, 2021). Evaluation systems can help teachers craft individualized development plans (Mathers & Oliva, 2008). Self-reflection enables teachers to challenge their assumptions and improve their cultural responsiveness. By emphasizing both self-reflection and targeted professional development, teacher evaluations become a tool for accountability and meaningful growth.

The themes outlined above served as the foundation for creating my interview guide (Appendix F). In addition to these themes, specific questions were incorporated to explore educators' experiences with the teacher evaluation process at SICS. The focus was on how evaluations were conducted, their perceived effectiveness, and areas where they could be enhanced. These questions also delved into what educators believe are the most important methods for evaluating teacher performance and how their views on evaluation have evolved since being evaluated. This approach aimed to identify the gap between how educators experience the evaluation process and their perceptions of what makes it effective. It sought to highlight areas where the current system may fail to support professional growth and culturally responsive teaching.

I would also like to mention that my interview questions could have further explored trauma-informed approaches and socioemotional learning. My work as a Learning Support Teacher and Mental Health Project Manager for Indspire—a national Indigenous-led organization focused on educational support for Indigenous students—further highlighted the need to explore these themes. Additionally, my role with Anishnawbe Health Toronto (AHT) as part of the Community Health Worker Training Program significantly underscored their

importance. Recognizing this, I revisited and expanded the *Trauma-Informed Approaches and Social-Emotional Learning* section of my literature review. Looking back, these areas could have been better explored in the interview questions, allowing for a deeper examination of how educators can adopt trauma-informed approaches to address the diverse needs of their students.

### **Overview of the Interview Guide**

The interview questions were condensed into three main sections within the interview guide—(1) Assessment, Pedagogy, and Relationship Building; (2) Experiences with Teacher Evaluation at SICS, and (3) Developing an Effective, and Culturally Community-Based Teacher Evaluation Tool. This streamlining was essential for maintaining a logical flow during the interviews. It allowed for a natural progression from discussing how educators assess student growth and build relationships to reflecting on their experiences with the teacher evaluation process and ultimately exploring how cultural knowledge and community involvement can shape a more effective evaluation framework. Organizing the questions in this way provided clarity and structure, ensuring that if the conversation veered off course, I could easily refer back to a specific section to guide the discussion and maintain focus.

The first section, *Assessment, Pedagogy & Relationship Building*, examined how educators at SICS assess student progress and understanding while supporting their overall growth. It focused on the approaches educators use to foster student success both inside and outside the classroom, highlighting how they engage with students and build meaningful relationships. Additionally, this section explored how educators interact with families and the community to create a supportive learning environment, ensuring that students are holistically supported in their educational journeys.

The second section, *Experiences with Teacher Evaluation at SICS*, focused on educators' reflections on the current evaluation process, how it has shaped their teaching practices, and its impact on their professional growth. It explored educators' perceptions of what makes an evaluation meaningful, particularly in the context of SICS, and examined the specific criteria they believe should be used to evaluate teacher performance. This section also highlighted how educators' views on evaluation have evolved, offering insights into how the process could be improved to better support teaching excellence.

The final section, *Developing an Effective, Culturally & Community-Based Teacher Evaluation Tool*, explored how educators believe cultural knowledge and community involvement should be integrated into the evaluation process. It focused on incorporating Stó:lō ways of knowing in teaching practices, the importance of utilizing community resources to connect students with their cultural identities, and the role of family collaboration in setting student expectations. This section emphasized the need for a culturally responsive evaluation framework that actively engages the community in supporting educational outcomes.

### **Cultivating Critical Reflexivity**

At the start of my PhD journey at Trent University, foundational texts like Shawn Wilson's *Research is Ceremony* (2008), Willie Ermine's concept of ethical space (2007), and Chapter 9 of the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS 2), titled *Research Involving the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples of Canada* (Government of Canada, 2022), profoundly transformed my approach to research in Indigenous contexts. Wilson's focus on relationality prompted me to continuously ask myself: *What is my role in this relationship? What are my obligations to the educators and the Seabird Island community?* This reflective process

encouraged me to approach the research with a deep sense of responsibility, aiming to fulfill these obligations through reciprocal and respectful engagement.

Ermine's concept of ethical space further shaped my approach by emphasizing the need for thoughtful engagement between Indigenous and Western worldviews. His work helped me understand the importance of including Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators in my study, especially when I initially felt conflicted about this decision. I questioned whether non-Indigenous educators could provide insights aligned with a focus on culturally and community-responsive evaluation. However, Ermine's framework encouraged me to see the inclusion of these educators not as a limitation but as an opportunity to explore how diverse worldviews intersected and contributed to the educational landscape at SICS. Embracing this balance allowed for a richer dialogue in the research, as I sought to create a space where all perspectives could be acknowledged and valued.

The TCPS 2 principles complemented the foundational concepts that guided my research, particularly the emphasis on reciprocity and maintaining respectful, meaningful connections. These principles aligned with my responsibility to ensure the research benefited the Seabird Island community while honouring its unique cultural and educational context. The *Concern for Welfare* principle, in particular, reinforced the need to protect the anonymity of educators, ensuring that their reflections did not lead to any unintended repercussions or tensions within the school. This guided me in structuring the research to support open, honest dialogue while maintaining confidentiality and ensuring a safe space for educators to share their insights freely.

While Wilson, Ermine, and the TCPS 2 principles were foundational to the understanding I developed during my first year in the PhD program at Trent University, the First Peoples Principles of Learning (FPPL) provided a more specific lens through which I could view these

broader concepts (FNESC, 2006). These principles, all focused on learning, framed the values of relationality, reciprocity, and respect in the context of education, making them especially relevant to my research. These principles are displayed on posters in many schools that are part of the First Nations School Association (FNSA). "The FNSA represents and works on behalf of First Nations-controlled schools in BC, and almost all of the First Nations schools in BC are members of the Association (FNSA, 2024, para. 3)."

While I always had the FPPL poster (Appendix C) on my classroom walls, they took on new significance, helping shape my reflective practice throughout the research. They encouraged me to engage thoughtfully with the community and ensure that my research practices were aligned with IK systems, relational values, and the lived experiences of the educators and students. They also reminded me to remain mindful of the connection between learning and community, guiding me to approach my work with cultural sensitivity and respect for local knowledge. Although the table below does not encompass the entirety of my reflections, it highlights how these principles informed the ethical, cultural, and relational dimensions of my work at SICS.

*Table 2: First Peoples Principles of Learning and Reflections*

	First Peoples Principle of Learning	Reflection
1	Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors	During my research, I focused on ensuring community well-being remained at the forefront of my work at SICS. This meant designing an evaluation tool that addressed students' needs and supported families and the wider community. By aligning the tool with the original vision for SICS, I aimed to create something that honoured the ancestors' and fostered collective well-being.
2	Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational	The research process required me to reflect deeply and self-assess, just as the new tool encourages educators to do. I had to regularly assess how my biases and assumptions shaped the research, ensuring that the tool would truly address the diverse needs of students at SICS. This reflection was integral in ensuring that the

		tool impacts teachers by helping them continuously adapt and refine their practices meaningfully.
3	Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions	Throughout the research, I remained mindful of my responsibility to address educational shortcomings, even when the findings were sensitive. Acknowledging these challenges was essential to fostering growth within SICS and ensuring the school could better meet the community's needs moving forward. By confronting these issues, the tool can support educators in creating positive change within the school and community.
4	Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities	Sharing and preserving knowledge was central to my approach as I worked to honour cultural continuity in this research. In creating the evaluation tool, I ensured it was designed to address the current needs of students at SICS while also supporting future generations. The evaluation process aimed to ensure that future educators will teach in ways that uphold and sustain the community's cultural values, preserving tradition for generations to come.
5	Learning recognizes the role of Indigenous Knowledge	IK was integral to shaping the research design, as it was deeply embedded in the contributions of Indigenous participants, who formed the majority and shared invaluable insights rooted in their lived experiences. Their perspectives embodied Indigenous ways of knowing, which my research sought to honour and incorporate, resulting in a tool that respects and uplifts these perspectives.
6	Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.	The stories, experiences, and perspectives shared by educators throughout the research process were essential in guiding the development of the tool. These narratives enriched my understanding of the school's complex dynamics and meaningfully shaped the research. Additionally, I needed to ensure the tool aligned with the community's original vision for the school and its educational goals.
7	Learning involves patience and time	The research process required me to honour the process and final product. I made a conscious effort not to rush but instead to allow the work to evolve naturally, recognizing that the depth and quality of the final product would emerge through thoughtful engagement. This approach ensured that I respected the time needed for reflective practice while acknowledging that meaningful change in the evaluation process will take time to adapt and implement.
8	Learning requires exploration of one's identity	Throughout the research process, I deeply explored my role and identity as a guest in the SICS community. I consistently reflected on my responsibilities in this space and how my identity influenced the way I approached the research. I've had to continually assess my obligations and responsibilities in this space, ensuring that my contributions respect the community while honouring the insights of educators.
9	Learning acknowledges that some knowledge is	I fully embraced the need to protect participants' knowledge by ensuring their contributions were treated with care and confidentiality. This involved anonymizing their responses, securely

sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations	storing data, and maintaining strict confidentiality throughout the research process. By taking these steps, I ensured that educators at SICS could share their insights freely, knowing their identities and perspectives would be protected.
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Peer debriefing also played an essential role in this reflexive process. During my time at Indspire, where I worked as the Mental Health Project Manager, I engaged in regular, insightful discussions with Shawna D’Antimo from the Research and Impact Unit. Although we were in different units, our conversations frequently centred around the importance of ensuring that community work empowers the people it serves. We spent much time reflecting on how research and community engagement processes must represent community voices, challenge outdated methods, and be designed to benefit the community directly. These discussions reinforced the importance of developing strategies that respect Indigenous sovereignty and autonomy to promote meaningful, sustainable change. Throughout these conversations, the confidentiality of all participants remained a priority, ensuring that our dialogue centred around broader themes relevant to community well-being and empowerment.

In acknowledging my biases throughout this research, I committed to ensuring that the development of the teacher evaluation tool was firmly rooted in both the literature and the collective insights of the educators at SICS. Rather than dictating the process myself, I aligned the tool with the wisdom shared by the participants, recognizing their contributions as central to shaping a framework that genuinely reflects the community's needs. This approach allowed the tool to be community-informed and grounded in evidence, ensuring it was culturally relevant and responsive to the specific educational context at SICS.

Ultimately, the FPPOL played a pivotal role in guiding the reflective practices that ensured the integrity of the work. These principles, along with foundational texts by Wilson, Ermine, and the TCPS 2, encouraged a process centred on respect, reciprocity, and cultural

sensitivity. By maintaining this commitment to critical reflexivity, I was able to lay the groundwork for a meaningful, community-centred teacher evaluation framework.

### **Commitment to Community and Ethical Considerations**

Throughout my research journey at SICS, I was deeply committed to ensuring that my work meaningfully contributed to the community. In addition to my research, I engaged in various projects that allowed me to give back in creative and educational ways. One such effort was a series of multimedia projects I produced as a regional lead for the National Collaboration Centre on Indigenous Education (NCCIE). These projects included two short films: one highlighting the vibrant community at SICS and another for the A:yelexw Center for Hope and Healing. The center, operated by the Seabird Island Band (SIB), provides addiction recovery services through a culturally-based holistic approach that integrates traditional healing practices. Additionally, I helped bring together a professional music video showcasing students' talent. The short film about the school and the music video are both featured on the school's website, while the video for the A:yelexw Center for Hope and Healing is showcased on its respective website.

Alongside these multimedia projects, I co-created culturally significant lesson plans for the NCCIE with Karla Kay, a Seabird community member, a teacher at SICS, and a member of the Stó:lō Education Committee (SEC), which I will discuss in the subsequent section. These plans covered the Halq'eméylem language, cedar weaving, salmon life cycles, and a medicine walk. Educational resources were carefully designed to honour Stó:lō knowledge and traditions, further supporting the integration of Stó:lō culture into the curriculum. For me, these projects were a way to help provide an outlet for the community to share its stories and celebrate its culture in meaningful ways.

My contribution to the community extended beyond the NCCIE initiatives and into health and wellness projects. At SICS, I organized group fitness sessions several times a week for students, parents, and staff, promoting a healthy lifestyle within the community. In addition, I coached basketball for two years. I used the fitness sessions and basketball to engage and foster connections, strengthening relationships and demonstrating my ongoing commitment to community well-being. The relational nature of my research allows me to view these contributions as essential to demonstrating my deep-seated commitment to the community. The multimedia projects, lesson plans, and health initiatives were tangible ways for the community to see that I was dedicated and actively giving back. I do not see these efforts as isolated from the research but as a vital means of allowing the community to witness my dedication firsthand. My approach is rooted in reciprocity, mutual respect, and a genuine desire to ensure that my work is responsive to and supportive of the community.

I believe this active engagement played a significant role in securing the community's trust, as reflected in receiving a Seabird Island Research Review certificate (Appendix B) from the SIB. This approval was a pivotal milestone, giving me the formal authorization to begin my research in a way that honoured the community's rights and sovereignty. At the same time, I submitted all research materials—recruitment communications, consent forms, and data collection instruments—to the Research Ethics Board (REB) at Trent University for review. The REB process required me to articulate my study's aims, methods, and potential impacts, ensuring that all ethical considerations were thoroughly addressed clearly. Collectively, these approvals provided the foundation for me to begin my work in a thoughtful and ethically sound manner.

In line with my commitment to ensuring reciprocity and respect throughout the research process, I included a gesture of gratitude to acknowledge participants' valuable time and insights.

While I had initially planned to offer each participant a \$25 gift card as a token of appreciation, the SIB generously matched this amount, enabling me to provide \$50 gift cards instead. I was incredibly grateful for this added generosity, as it allowed me to offer a more meaningful token of appreciation and reflected their support for the research. This gesture, given to teachers during the holiday season, symbolized the project's collaborative spirit and reinforced the overarching theme of reciprocity.

Ultimately, these ethical considerations were about ensuring that my research was fully aligned with and centred on the well-being of the Seabird Island community. These actions demonstrated that the research process was built on giving back, fostering trust, and meaningfully supporting the community. My efforts to maintain reciprocal and respectful relationships, alongside the support and trust I received from the community, were central to the ethical foundation of this work.

### **Collaborating with the Stó:lō Education Committee (SEC)**

During my teaching journey at SICS, I worked with Daughter Kay, Karla Kay, Saylesh Wesley, and Camielle Laslo, all Stó:lō educators. Recognizing their expertise and deep connection to Stó:lō communities, I contacted them to form the Stó:lō Education Committee (SEC) for my dissertation. They graciously agreed to guide the process, offering insights that ensured the perspectives of Stó:lō educators shaped and informed the direction of my work. While the initial plan was to meet regularly as a group to discuss various aspects of the research, the dynamics evolved differently after the first year, mainly when Saylesh and Camielle left the school. As a result, my interactions primarily took place with Daughter and Karla. Despite these shifts, the SEC's collective guidance remained pivotal, particularly in the crucial vetting of the interview questions, which each member reviewed and approved.

While the committee's role in my dissertation was instrumental, our collaboration extended beyond the scope of the research. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, I co-created lesson plans with Karla. I also worked more closely with Saylesh after I took on her previous role as the Indigenous Enhancement/Learning Support Teacher at Mount Slesse Middle School in the Chilliwack School District when she was seconded for a district position. This position allowed me to engage directly with Stó:lō students from various surrounding communities, further deepening my understanding of the supports essential for student success. In this role, I facilitated the Indigenous blanket exercise with Saylesh in classrooms at Mount Slesse Middle School. This was my first time working outside a First Nations community school, and we facilitated this primarily for non-Indigenous students. The exercise, an experiential tool designed to foster an understanding of the historical and ongoing impacts of colonial policies on Indigenous peoples, provided a powerful visual and participatory way for students to understand these impacts. Facilitating this exercise in a public school setting was particularly important, as it served as an act of reconciliation, bringing these crucial narratives into the wider school community.

Additionally, I participated in cultural events within the community, including a memorial at the Sumas First Nation Longhouse in honour of Daughter and Karla's mother and a naming ceremony held in the Seabird Island community. These experiences enriched my connection with the SEC and deepened my understanding of the cultural significance of community, tradition, and healing within Stó:lō education. While the committee's direct role in my research evolved differently than initially planned, their guidance at crucial stages was invaluable. These relationships profoundly influenced my understanding of Stó:lō education, playing a crucial role in shaping my personal and professional growth.

## **Educational Case Study on Teacher Evaluation at SICS**

This research examines how the teacher evaluation process at SICS can reflect an understanding of the pedagogical perspectives and practices valued by its educators (Calliou & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2015). Adopting Merriam’s qualitative case study approach, this study explores the teacher evaluation process within its natural setting at SICS. The approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of how these evaluations influence and are influenced by the school’s culture, community values, and the specific needs of the Stó:lō community. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews with educators with at least one year of experience at SICS. This purposive sampling was essential for gathering comprehensive insights from diverse perspectives within the school. The data analysis was conducted using narrative and content analysis, facilitating a deeper understanding of emerging themes through an iterative process of simultaneous data collection and analysis.

Yazan’s work (2015) was instrumental in helping me compare the approaches of Yin, Merriam, and Stake. This comparison was crucial in determining which case study approach would be the most suitable for my research context. Ultimately, it led me to adopt and delve deeper into Merriam’s approach, as it best aligned with the goals of my study and was well-suited to explore the complex dynamics at SICS. To demonstrate how some of the critical elements of Merriam’s case study approach were applied in my research, I have borrowed from the structure of Yazan’s Table 1, *Juxtaposition of Three Case Study Approaches*. The table below details the application of Merriam’s approach across various dimensions of the study. This visual representation gives the reader an overview of how Merriam’s framework was applied in my research design.

*Table 3: Application of Merriam’s Qualitative Case Study in Teacher Evaluation at SICS*

<b>Key Elements</b>	<b>Application of Merriam’s Case Study Approach in Education</b>	<b>Application in Your Study</b>
<b>Theoretical Grounding</b>	Merriam identifies a case as a clearly defined, bounded entity, such as a group, program, or event. The purpose is to gain a holistic understanding of this entity through detailed qualitative exploration (Yazan, 2015).	The case study at SICS focused on the teacher evaluation process as a bounded system, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of how evaluations are perceived and implemented in this unique educational context.
<b>Case Study Design</b>	A literature review forms the foundation for the case study, helping develop the theoretical framework. Merriam emphasizes five core steps: “conducting literature review, constructing a theoretical framework, identifying a research problem, crafting and sharpening research questions, and selecting the sample” (Yazan, 2015, p. 149).	The study design followed Merriam’s structure, beginning with a literature review to develop the theoretical framework. This guided the formation of research questions centred on the cultural and educational dynamics at SICS. Purposive sampling selected educators with relevant experience, ensuring insights from those with deep knowledge of the school.
<b>Data Collection Methods</b>	Data collection is anchored in three main methods: interviews, observations, and document analysis. Researchers must develop strong interviewing and observation skills to gather rich and meaningful data (Yazan, 2015).	I conducted semi-structured interviews with educational stakeholders at SICS. This method allowed for in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives and flexibility to address emergent themes, ensuring comprehensive data collection.
<b>Data Interpretation &amp; Analysis</b>	Merriam advises an iterative approach where data collection and analysis occur simultaneously. This involves summarizing, reducing, and interpreting data using strategies like narrative, ethnographic, and content analysis (Yazan, 2015).	I used narrative and content analysis to interpret the data collected. This iterative process facilitated ongoing reflection and played a crucial role in refining and developing themes and subthemes, offering more profound insights into the dynamics of teacher evaluations.

<b>Validating Data</b>	Merriam suggests enhancing validity through strategies such as triangulation, which cross-checks data from multiple sources, participant feedback to confirm accurate representation, extended observation, and peer review to identify biases and ensure robust findings (Yazan, 2015).	Validation involved peer examination and participatory research, with select members of the Stó:lō Education Committee reviewing the and final dissertation draft. This provided essential oversight to ensure the study aligned with Stó:lō educators' perspectives and respected their educational priorities.
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This study adopted Merriam's qualitative case study approach to explore how the teacher evaluation process at SICS can reflect educators' educational values and pedagogical practices. The structured research design, semi-structured interviews and an iterative data analysis process provided a nuanced understanding of teacher evaluations within this unique context. Validation through the involvement of select members of the Stó:lō Education Committee ensured that the research respected their perspectives. The table above outlines how Merriam's framework was adapted and applied in this study.

**Participant Selection and Sampling Criteria**

For my research, I conducted 19 semi-structured interviews with educators at SICS, including the Halq'eméylem language curriculum developer, the vice-principal, ten teachers, and seven educational assistants. This diversity allowed me to gather various perspectives on the teacher evaluation process, ensuring that the findings reflected the school's rich professional dynamics. I employed criterion sampling, a form of purposive sampling, to select participants based on a specific criterion: at least one year of experience working at SICS. Criterion sampling focuses on individuals who meet predetermined standards relevant to the study, enhancing the credibility and depth of the data (Palinkas et al., 2013). This approach ensured that participants were familiar with the school environment and could provide informed perspectives about the teacher evaluation process.

## Consent Process and Data Collection

To initiate the study, I emailed educators at SICS, informing them about the research and gauging their interest in participating. Following this, I visited the school in person, where I had the pleasure of reconnecting with former students, who excitedly welcomed me with a group hug. I distributed the consent forms (Appendix D) and questionnaires (Appendix E) as a package during this visit. However, for educators who were not present that day, I left additional copies with Karla and Daughter, both members of SEC, who ensured these materials were delivered and collected on my behalf. This approach streamlined the process, allowing me to gather all the necessary documents efficiently before beginning the interviews. The questionnaire was intended to be a secondary source for data analysis. Its purpose was to coordinate participants' interview availability and ensure that they met the criterion for participation. *Table 5* below outlines the participant background information gathered from the questionnaires.

*Table 4: Overview of Participant Background Information and Interview Scheduling*

Question	Description
Name	Participant's name
Position	Participant's position or role
Identification	Whether the participant identifies as Stó:lō, Indigenous (non-Stó:lō), or non-Indigenous
Teaching Experience	Grades/subjects taught at SICS
Years of Experience	Number of years teaching at SICS
Interview Availability	Three potential dates/times for the interview

The questionnaire was essential for scheduling interviews and collecting vital data on the identity distribution of participants. For a more detailed breakdown, refer to *Table 5: Participant Distribution by Role and Identity* below, which highlights the number of participants in each school role (e.g., Halq'eméylem Curriculum Developer, Vice-Principal, Teachers, and Educational Assistants) and the corresponding number of individuals in each category who identified as Stó:lō, Indigenous (non- Stó:lō), or non-Indigenous. The group represented a

diverse mix, with seven identifying as Stó:lō, six as Indigenous (non- Stó:lō), and six as non-Indigenous.

*Table 5: Participant Distribution by Role and Identity*

Role	Number of Participants	Stó:lō Participants	Indigenous (Non- Stó:lō) Participants	Non-Indigenous Participants
Halq'eméylem Curriculum Developer	1	1	0	0
Vice-Principal	1	0	0	1
Teachers	10	5	3	2
Educational Assistants	7	1	3	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>

The initial representation of Stó:lō educators in my study was significant, with Stó:lō participants comprising the largest group, surpassing both Indigenous (non-Stó:lō) and non-Indigenous educators. However, this representation has shifted over time. *Table 8: Distribution of Study Participants (2021/22) and Retention by 2023/24 School Year* provides further insight into participant retention, comparing the distribution of educators in the 2021/22 school year with those remaining by the 2023/24 school year. By the end of the 2023/24 school year, only one of the seven Stó:lō participants remained at SICS, whereas all six non-Indigenous educators were still employed at the school.

*Table 6: Distribution of Study Participants (2021/22) and Retention by 2023/24 School Year*

Cultural Background	Participants in Study (2021/22 School Year)	Participants Remaining (2023/24 School Year)
Stó:lō	7	1
Indigenous (non- Stó:lō)	6	3
Non-Indigenous	6	6

The interviews took place during the winter break of 2021–2022, involving 19 participants. Eighteen interviews were conducted via Zoom to ensure participant safety during the COVID-19 pandemic, while one participant opted for an in-person interview. I employed a semi-structured interview approach, allowing for flexibility in the conversations while

maintaining focus on key topics. Participants were not provided with the interview guide (Appendix F) beforehand to avoid rehearsed responses. Throughout the interview process, I began transcription and coding immediately, continuously reviewing and reflecting on the data to ensure it accurately represented participants' insights. This iterative process enabled me to develop themes rooted in the experiences shared during the interviews.

The combined efforts of participant recruitment, the distribution of consent forms and questionnaires, and the semi-structured interview process provided a thorough and efficient framework for gathering the necessary data. The questionnaire facilitated logistical coordination and ensured participants met the criteria, while the interviews allowed for in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences. Ultimately, the data collection process was instrumental in capturing the unique perspectives of educators at SICS, contributing to the development of a culturally responsive evaluation framework.

## **Chapter Overview**

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework grounded in the literature review, ensuring a data-driven approach guided the study. The framework is organized around five key themes: (1) culturally responsive education, (2) trauma-informed approaches, (3) holistic, inclusive assessments, (4) community engagement and collaboration, and (5) professional growth and self-reflection. It shaped the interview guide, ensuring it was culturally responsive and evidence-based. Indigenous research principles, particularly relational accountability and ethical space, grounded the study, emphasizing respect, reciprocity, and community collaboration. The First Peoples Principles of Learning (FNESC, 2006) built on these foundations, deepening the commitment to reflexivity throughout the research process. Additionally, Merriam's case study approach was selected as the most appropriate framework for

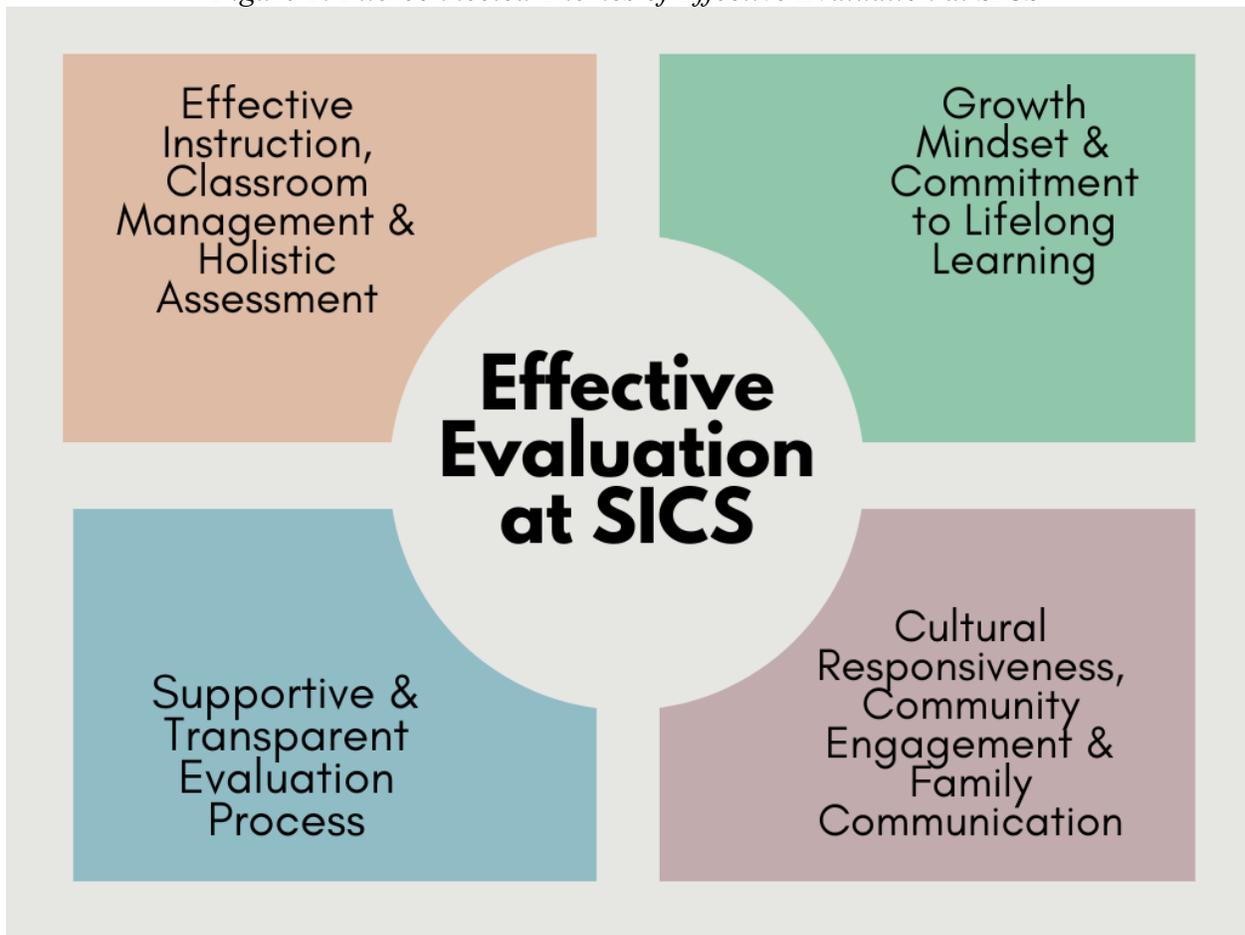
exploring the teacher evaluation process at SICS. Finally, this chapter highlights how confidentiality and informed consent were emphasized throughout the research, ensuring adherence to ethical guidelines.

## Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter weaves together a narrative that centers on the participants' insights, capturing their voices through carefully selected quotes while ensuring anonymity. These findings are presented within the framework of themes that emerged from the data, derived through thematic analysis. The themes and subthemes were identified based on frequency and relevance to the research questions, ensuring that the most critical insights were highlighted. Data collection and analysis were conducted simultaneously, aligning with Merriam's case study methodology, which involves continuously revisiting and reinterpreting data to ensure emerging themes reflect participants' experiences.

*Figure 1: Interconnected Themes of Effective Evaluation at SICS* visually represents the four overarching themes that emerged from the data: (1) Fostering a Growth Mindset & Commitment to Lifelong Learning, (2) Creating Supportive & Transparent Evaluation Processes, (3) Effective Instruction, Classroom Management, and Holistic Assessment, and (4) Cultural Responsiveness, Community Engagement & Family Communication. The figure illustrates how these themes contribute to the overall concept of effective education at SICS. The themes are presented in no particular order, reflecting their equal importance in the evaluation process. Each subsequent section of this chapter delves deeper into these four themes, using participant quotes to illustrate their perspectives.

Figure 1: Interconnected Themes of Effective Evaluation at SICS



To facilitate the data analysis, I used the mind-mapping software MindMeister to organize the gathered information visually. Mind mapping allowed for a non-linear approach to exploring the connections within the data. It encouraged a dynamic and interconnected view of data, helping to visualize how different themes and subthemes relate to one another holistically. While the original mind map was too expansive to include, I have distilled its core components into *Table 6: Emergent Themes and Subthemes from Educator Insights at SICS*, which outlines the overarching themes and subthemes from the data analysis. The themes presented in *Table 6* were shaped directly by the educators' voices and represent the collective understanding of what constitutes effective education at SICS.

*Table 7: Emergent Themes and Subthemes from Educator Insights at SICS*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub-theme</b>
1. Fostering a Growth Mindset & Commitment to Lifelong Learning	1.1 Embracing a Growth Mindset
	1.2 Formative Evaluation for Continuous Improvement
	1.3 Collaborative, Unified Vision of Decolonization & Growth
	1.4 Reflective Practice as a Path to Growth
2. Supportive & Transparent Evaluation Processes	2.1 Building a Culture of Support
	2.2 Creating Transparent Expectations
	2.3 Effective Post-Observation Feedback
3. Effective Instruction, Classroom Management, and Holistic Assessment	3.1 Classroom Management as the Foundation of Effective Instruction
	3.2 Purpose-Driven Instruction and Detailed Planning
	3.3 Holistic & Student-Centered Assessments
	3.4 Fostering Confidence, Engagement & Emotional Well-Being
4. Cultural Responsiveness, Community Engagement & Family Communication	4.1 Integrating Stó:lō Culture and Knowledge
	4.2 Fostering Community Engagement
	4.3 Building Trust & Collaborative Relationships with Families

This findings section is structured around each of the four emergent themes. Within each thematic section, you will find tables 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, and 6.4. In these tables, you will see further themes and subthemes, along with the codes that led to their formation. Each of these tables corresponds directly to the relevant theme it represents and is intended to give a clear outline of the data that contributed to the development of that theme.

### **Theme 1: Fostering a Growth Mindset & Commitment to Lifelong Learning**

The findings reveal educators' deep-seated commitment to lifelong learning and cultivating a growth mindset within their teaching practices. As Dweck (2017) described, a growth mindset is the belief that abilities and intelligence can be developed through dedication, hard work, and embracing challenges. This perspective contrasts with a fixed mindset, where individuals believe their abilities are static and unchangeable. The insights from SICS reflect Dweck's work, highlighting educators' understanding that continual learning and embracing experiences are fundamental to personal and professional development. The feedback

consistently underscores a dedication among educators to view challenges as opportunities for growth, strengthening their resilience.

*Table 7.1: Fostering a Growth Mindset & Commitment to Lifelong Learning*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Final Codes</b>
1.1 Embracing a growth mindset	1.1.1 Modelling growth mindset for students	Ongoing self-improvement, openness to feedback, flexibility in teaching methods
	1.1.2 Fostering lifelong learning in teachers	Continuous learning as part of professional development, administrator support for teacher growth, goal-based evaluation
1.2 Incorporating formative evaluation for continuous improvement	1.2.1 Real-time feedback and coaching	Dynamic feedback for teacher growth, growth through coaching, classroom presence by administrators
	1.2.2 Holistic evaluation process	Frequent and varied observations, multi-subject evaluations, continuous formative evaluation
1.3 Collaborative for a unified vision of decolonization & growth	1.3.1 Shared responsibility for culturally responsive education	Teamwork across school staff, whole-school involvement in growth, collaboration with other Stó:lō schools
	1.3.2 Aligning with Elders' vision for the school	Collective responsibility in decolonization, family engagement in goal-setting, teacher-administrator-community collaboration
1.4 Reflective practice as a path to growth	1.4.1 Self-evaluation	Reflective teaching practice, ownership of teacher growth, refining teaching through reflection
	1.4.2 Foundation for collaborative growth	Fostering growth-oriented evaluation conversations, collaboratively shaping professional development, reducing evaluation pressure

### ***Embracing a Growth Mindset in Evaluations***

Educators' reflections reveal an evolving focus on fostering a growth mindset, deeply embedded within the school's philosophy. The emphasis is on continuous learning, allowing educators to break free from rigid practices and embrace flexibility in their teaching methods. This approach encourages an ongoing process of self-improvement, aligned with the belief that growth is essential for personal and professional development.

*"I think the school has changed sort of some of the philosophy into a more of a growth mindset, sort of like, okay, we're not just stuck in one idea or one program or one*

*teaching style, trying to better ourselves. I think that would be one of the things I would like you to know”.*

A vital aspect of this growth mindset is how administrators support educators. Effective evaluation encompasses guiding and assisting teachers in their journey toward improvement. Administrators must create an environment where evaluations serve as opportunities for development rather than assessments of fixed abilities.

*“Everything is growth mindset-based, goal-based...that’s the important piece, right? I can’t make a goal for a teacher, because then the teacher doesn’t buy into that if it’s not something they feel is important right now...Teachers, in general, have signed up for lifelong learning, so they know that teacher growth is a part of what their job is. I don’t think any teacher goes into teaching and thinks I’m the perfect teacher and can’t learn anything else. So I think approaching evaluation from the viewpoint of what can I give this teacher that’s going to allow them to improve.”*

This commitment to growth, however, extends beyond administrators. Teachers must recognize that professional growth is an ongoing process that requires openness to feedback and reflection. Understanding this perspective helps create a culture of growth across the entire school community, motivating teachers to remain dedicated to their development.

*“I think it would help everybody if we did it more, to be honest, and done in a way that doesn’t create any bad things between people. But the people getting evaluated also need to understand the person’s not there judging you; they’re there trying to help you get better. Don’t you want to get better? It’s a good thing, you don’t want to be stagnant.”*

Ultimately, this focus on growth extends beyond educators and directly impacts the students. Teachers recognize that modelling a passion for learning and development is crucial in instilling the same values in students. By maintaining a growth-oriented approach, educators ensure that students inherit a mindset that values continuous learning and improvement, which is vital for their futures.

*“Making lifelong learners, making people who want to continue to learn and grow, whether that’s little or a lot. Making learning passionate...wanting to learn more...is really important, and it’s something that the next generation is not going to have if we as teachers, if we don’t instill that love in them to want to learn.”*

In this way, the growth mindset philosophy ensures that learning and development are central to teacher and student experiences, creating an environment where growth is encouraged and expected. The commitment to continuous improvement becomes a shared value, permeating all levels of the educational community at SICS.

### ***Incorporating Formative Evaluation for Continuous Improvement***

Educators' reflections at SICS emphasize the importance of an ongoing, holistic evaluation process that aligns with the school's broader growth mindset. Like personal and professional development, the evaluation process must be continuous, providing coaching, support, and feedback that helps educators grow in real-time rather than being a static, end-of-year evaluation.

*"Again, for me personally as an Indigenous educator... mine would be to have a sort of a holistic process as well as a formative one. So as opposed to 'Here's your evaluation and then we're going to give you some feedback at the end of the year,' make it an ongoing process. That way, I feel, one, I'm learning as I go along, I feel like I'm being coached. And the other thing is that it kind of keeps me on my toes...If we really want to see growth, it needs to be designed in a more formative process...as opposed to...just a check mark, checklist, here's your feedback, way you go. Not really learning anything there."*

Administrators need to be present in classrooms to support this ongoing process further. A solid presence ensures that evaluations are not based on isolated observations and reflect a deeper understanding of teachers' practices. Consistent presence allows administrators to observe all aspects of an educator's work and provide feedback that captures their development and ongoing interactions with students.

*"We can't base it off of one evaluation...I got observed and somewhat evaluated on those little snippets of time...if you make yourself present in the classes, doesn't have to be daily or weekly, but at least a few times throughout the year where they see us interacting with our own students and our children."*

Beyond increasing their presence, administrators should also observe teachers across different subjects. By assessing performance in multiple areas, administrators can provide more well-rounded feedback, which is crucial for supporting educators' overall growth and ensuring that development reflects the scope of their work.

*"The most important advice?...maybe to come in for different subjects as well. Yeah. And maybe not for a longer time, but just a little more frequently instead of evaluating on the one-time performance."*

This approach to formative evaluation highlights the importance of establishing a dynamic process that supports continuous improvement. By providing ongoing guidance and feedback, the evaluation process reinforces a growth mindset, encouraging teachers to reflect and develop their practice over time. More frequent and varied observations allow administrators to capture a fuller picture of an educator's work, resulting in a more comprehensive and accurate evaluation.

### ***Collaboration for a Unified Vision of Decolonization and Growth***

Collaboration is integral to the school's commitment to growth because it unites educators in working toward a shared vision. By uniting efforts between teachers, administrators, and community members, this process supports collective problem-solving and encourages a consistent approach to meeting students' needs.

*"I just think the more people involved, the better. I liked that because, again, it's showing that I always think back of like...decoloniz[ing] student experiences, and that's basically what I'm all about, it's a collaborative approach, it's something that needs to be done collectively with community, the teacher, the admin. So, the more people involved, for me, the better because you feel that much more supported, and you feel stronger in terms of unity."*

Expanding this vision of unity, one educator emphasized the importance of collaboration beyond educators alone, extending to all staff and school members:

*“Everything has to drive, everything has to work together, everybody has to be on the same page, including admin, including the cleaners, including the secretaries, including the maintenance people. Everybody has to be on the same page, and we have to be there for one specific thing, and that’s our children.”*

By ensuring every staff member is engaged, the school environment becomes a place where all efforts converge to support student well-being. Collaboration recognizes that success is a collective effort, not something achieved in isolation—similar to the dynamics of a successful team. Achieving shared goals requires ongoing cooperation and commitment from everyone involved. While progress has been made, there is always room for growth.

*“You need to be a team player...we love collaborating, I’m always in classes. But it has changed. It’s ever-evolving. I think we have come a long way, but I think we have a long way to go. But it’s just a matter of continuing and knowing then working on it.”*

For many, this collaboration is anchored in respecting the school’s foundational vision, which remains central to their goals today. As one participant shared:

*“Going back to that collaborative approach of community, teachers, professionals, we need to come together and really be on the same page and strive to achieve the vision of the Elders that first created the school. We definitely want to honour them and their dreams.”*

By grounding their collaborative efforts in the Elders' vision, educators are committed to fulfilling the school’s original purpose. Active engagement with families is equally critical in the collaborative process. It creates a shared responsibility in the educational journey, empowering students and families to contribute to goal setting. It ensures student development is a cooperative endeavour rather than one driven solely by teachers. Collaboration with families will be discussed in greater depth later in the chapter.

*“I think there needs to be a collaboration...with the families. Having them create goals and being part of the process and having the kids being part of the process, as a teacher, we can't create what these kids are going to do and say, "You're going to do it". It's not dictatorship, it's not. We need to work with these kids and these families to create what is it we're expecting of these kids”.*

Collaboration can also extend beyond the school's walls and involve other Stó:lō schools. By visiting other schools and understanding how they approach culturally responsive education, administrators and teachers can learn from one another by sharing ideas and strategies. This exchange strengthens educational practices and cultivates a more profound sense of community and shared purpose among Stó:lō schools.

*“I know it’s a colonial mindset of trying to be independent. We want to do things this way...I think it’s so important if we were to collaborate and visit other schools, especially our admin, maybe bring along a couple of teachers to go out to my school and see, okay, what are you guys doing for your culture program? How are things working in terms of your language program? What are you doing that’s holistic? How are you decolonizing [the] education experience? These schools need to come together and work as one and share ideas, and that sort of thing...collaborating with other schools can certainly improve our environment here and the school culture.”*

By recognizing that collaboration is essential to decolonizing education, SICS can build a united team that includes the wider Stó:lō community. Involving teachers, staff, families, and other Stó:lō schools fosters a sense of shared responsibility for creating a culturally responsive and growth-oriented environment.

### ***Reflective Practice as a Path to Growth***

Self-evaluation and reflection are integral to growth, enabling teachers to assess their practice, identify growth areas, and make meaningful adjustments to their teaching. Reflective practice can also help administrators align educators’ growth areas with targeted professional development opportunities, creating a more personalized path to improvement.

*I feel like they need to do a little bit more self-reflection like I was talking about. The teacher should be able to reflect on themselves, do a self-evaluation. What am I doing? What could I change? And maybe offer some more even professional development in those areas for different teaching practices, or different workshops that are more inspiring”.*

However, reflection within the educational system must also address the influence of colonial structures. As one educator noted, the system often operates through a predominantly

Western lens, which requires teachers to critically examine and challenge their own ingrained beliefs:

*"It's a colonial system that's 90% colonial, 10% cultural. Even the mindset, we talk about these things are geared towards sort of a Western approach of living, but the mindset of - - and I'm guilty for this as well, I have to stop and really think about, okay, I need to interrogate some of my views and some of my beliefs, because I've been -- and many other Indigenous people and teachers, I'm sure, have been impacted by colonialism."*

This awareness encourages educators to adopt a more culturally responsive approach, interrogating their practices and assumptions to better serve their students. Incorporating self-reflection into the evaluation process encourages educators to approach their work more intentionally, allowing their practices to evolve and better support student development.

*"I think change and self-reflection, evaluation are all ways for us to look at what we do, because it is a craft and to better it, and we're here for children. And if you don't like that, then I think you're in the wrong position, wrong career."*

Including self-reflection also shifts evaluations from feeling like critiques to becoming more collaborative conversations. By encouraging educators to take ownership of their progress, administrators can help alleviate the pressure associated with traditional evaluations by making the process more collaborative, comfortable and empowering.

*"I think that's a good idea too, the self-evaluation piece, because (a) education and assessment is moving in that direction—self-evaluation and reflection. If we want the students to do that, we most certainly should be doing that ourselves. And (b) I think, when you do a self-evaluation and reflect on what you've done, and then have a discussion about it, it feels less like an evaluation and more like a conversation. I think that's important for some people is that some people really don't like that evaluation piece, because they feel like they're put on the spot and they're made to defend what they're doing or things like that even though that's not the intention, but that's how it can be felt and perceived. So I think having an aspect of self-evaluation would be a good thing".*

Incorporating self-evaluation and reflection into the teacher evaluation process allows educators to take greater ownership of their professional growth and gain valuable insights into their development. This approach shifts evaluations toward a more collaborative and growth-

focused model rather than a top-down process. Self-evaluation encourages reflection, offering opportunities for meaningful refinement and improvement in teaching practices.

## **Theme 2: Creating Supportive & Transparent Evaluation Processes**

This section delves into the necessity of fostering a supportive and transparent teacher evaluation process at SICS. It emphasizes the importance of regular, clear communication between administrators and teachers, ensuring that evaluations are collaborative and constructive. By prioritizing teachers' well-being and offering emotional support, the evaluation process builds a foundation of trust and care. When educators feel supported, they are more likely to view it as a tool for growth rather than a punitive measure. Administrators can create an evaluation culture that strengthens teacher morale through open dialogue, timely feedback, and clear expectations.

*Table 7.2: Supportive & Transparent Evaluation Processes*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Final Codes</b>
2.1 Building a culture of support	2.1.1 Support-focused approach	Teacher wellness as priority, emotional well-being checks, safe space for feedback, informal observations for low-pressure growth, building trust
	2.1.2 Transparent and supportive practices	Flexible approach, adapting to teacher preferences, formal structure for clarity, continuous dialogue
2.2 Creating transparent expectations	2.2.1 Setting up teachers for success	Clear communication of criteria, advance notice of expectations, clarity on observation purpose, mutual understanding of objectives
	2.2.2 Planned and structured approach	Trust through open communication, consistent and clear practices, alignment with growth goals, transparency in process
2.3 Effective post-observation feedback	2.3.1 Specific, actionable, timely, and feedback	Focus on strengths and areas for growth, reducing anxiety through prompt responses, timely and continuous input for effective adjustments
	2.3.2 Reciprocal exchange	Shared reflection on practices, constructive dialogue, open conversation, clarity and support throughout

## ***Building a Culture of Support Through Teacher Evaluations***

Support must be integral to school culture to fully cultivate trust and growth. Evaluations should be an extension of this culture, focusing not just on critique but on supporting teachers' professional and personal development.

*“This is where you are, well, let’s keep going. And how can I support you?...And I think the administrator has to make sure that that is the culture of the school, is that we’re here to support you. Not only are we here for children, but we’re here to make sure that you’re going to be okay. And if you’re not, then how can I support you? And, how can that be reflected in an evaluation? Maybe that is reflected in evaluation, maybe you are needing support, so as an administrator, what am I going to put in to ensure that that’s going to happen?”*

Before evaluating teachers, it is essential to show genuine concern for their emotional well-being. Administrators should build a foundation of support by acknowledging and caring about how teachers are doing, as this fosters trust and demonstrates a commitment to their overall well-being. When teachers feel genuinely supported, it reinforces that their well-being is a priority.

*“Obviously, academics are very, very important. But I think for me, we can’t be the best we can be if we’re struggling. So I think one of my biggest things on that would be how are you doing? How are you feeling? How are you coping? How are you finding the classroom dynamics? How are you managing classroom behaviour? I think I would focus on whether the teacher was struggling, how they were emotionally because I would do a check-in with the teacher; that would be, I think, my first priority. And then I think the rest kind of follows because we’re evaluating the teacher, not the child. We know the teacher, we know that they’ve all been to university, we know they’ve all got the teaching degree, we know that everyone can teach, but how we are as what’s going through our lives personally or what’s affecting us personally affects how we can do that. So, I think the first thing for me would be the well-being, the wellness of the teacher.”*

Once a foundation of support has been established, educators can better understand that evaluations are designed to help them thrive in their roles. This demonstrates that administrators have their best interests at heart and that they acknowledge the interconnection between personal and professional growth.

*“Yeah, that’s a good one. Be gentle. Advice for an administrator conducting evaluations. I think it’s really important that this job that I really, I really like knowing that somebody is watching over me and that somebody is supporting me and that somebody is looking in on me, and I like knowing that it’s not going to be a one-shot deal: make it or break it. I like knowing that it’s going to be progress over time and that I’m not going to get fired for having a bad day.”*

Evaluation processes should be flexible and considerate of individual teacher preferences.

While some educators feel pressured during formal observations due to their structured and official nature, they may find informal, unscheduled check-ins less stressful. The more casual approach of informal observations allows them to stay consistently prepared without the tension that comes from formality.

*“So I don’t like that kind of pressure where you know that that’s coming and you know that they’re going to be watching you, I didn’t like that. I much prefer like now the more informal kind of evaluating, observing, okay, kind of little informal discussions, that makes me want to be a better educator, ... because it’s not just, ‘Oh, I better be really good in this five-minute recording. I better be the best I can be because they’re watching me.’ It’s like, no, if you’re going to be observed kind of informally all the time, you’ve got to be on your toes all the time. You got to be the best you can be all the time.*

On the other hand, some educators prefer a more formal evaluation structure. They find clarity and comfort in having designated times for observation, allowing them to prepare and showcase their strengths fully. Formal evaluations help these teachers feel more in control of the process.

*“Everybody has a certain level of comfort and everybody has a certain way of doing things. Some people will have a huge problem if someone just walks into their room and sits down and observes because maybe it’ll set off one of the kids or it’ll distract your lesson; all the kids will be like, oh, so and so is in here, kind of thing. Yeah, it really depends on the person. And it also depends on the kids. If I had a super rowdy class, I think they...can get completely thrown off, and the lesson would be done. And then how do you teach something that—you can’t. But it’s also a good opportunity for the admin to see how you can manage the kids. A lot of it’s like, it’s really situational.”*

Administrators should adapt to accommodate differing needs, ensuring evaluations align with each educator's preferences and comfort level. By maintaining a consistent presence in the

classroom, administrators can gain a deeper understanding of classroom dynamics and instructional approaches. A transparent and supportive system remains essential whether teachers prefer informal observations or designated times for formal evaluation. By incorporating these elements into the evaluation process at SICS, administrators can establish a system that prioritizes professional growth and well-being. Through a compassionate approach that focuses on collaboration and emotional support, evaluations become a tool for fostering a culture of trust and development.

### ***Creating Transparent Expectations for Teacher Evaluations***

Building on the idea of making evaluations supportive, it's equally important to establish transparent expectations so that educators clearly understand the process. When teachers are 'in the know,' it reassures them that administrators are open and transparent. This clarity helps teachers feel more confident in navigating the evaluation process. However, some educators at SICS expressed confusion around evaluation, highlighting the need for more open communication.

*"I've had admin come in and just kind of watch for a few minutes and then leave. So I don't know if that was part of an evaluation or not or just checking in to see that everyone's engaged. I don't know."*

*"I could have been evaluated at one point and I just didn't know it. But in terms of a formal 'Hey, we're going to come in. We'd like you to teach a lesson,' because I've done teacher evaluations myself. I've always let the teacher know, and that had never happened."*

Additionally, one educator mentioned that they could not recall being evaluated, reflecting a lack of formalized processes. Transparency in evaluations provides clear guidance for teachers and ensures that the process feels purposeful and supportive of their ongoing development.

*"To be quite honest, I've never had a teacher evaluation at Seabird Island Community School. So when I first started, I was put on obviously a probationary period. And when that ended, I believe it was two months in, it was basically just a quick interview and a quick skim through my binder, and that was it. And then I received feedback at the end of the year, and that's as much as I can remember."*

For evaluations to truly support professional growth, they must be designed to set teachers up for success. This requires a planned process with clear communication between administrators and educators. Teachers should clearly understand the evaluation objectives and the specific measures used to evaluate their performance.

*"I think it needs to be a planned process, and I think there needs to be some conversation maybe before they even come in so that the teacher has an idea of what the end product should look like. Because I would hope that the administrator is trying to set the teacher up for success, like teachers are for students. I think that's the main thing as teachers is we try to help our children be as successful as we possibly can. I see administrators that is their job for teachers, is to try and make the teachers in that building as successful as they possibly can be so that the children get the best opportunities they possibly can. And so having communication with administrators and teachers, I think it would be really important."*

Educators need a clear understanding of the objectives and expectations of the evaluation process from the start of the school year. This ensures their practices are aligned with what administrators are looking for from the get-go, not just at the time of evaluation.

*"[Admin must] be forthcoming with their objectives well in advance so that the teacher can feel ready for the day that they are evaluated, and to know all of the expectations...everything has to be transparent; everything has to be clear. There should be no trick questions or methods. Everything should be out in the open."*

Administrators should ensure that evaluations offer the same clarity teachers are expected to provide for their students. Just as educators must have clear learning objectives on the board before each lesson and criteria to help students understand how they can demonstrate mastery, teachers should receive transparent criteria in evaluations so they know what it takes to succeed in their roles.

*“Like I say, that whole idea of putting objectives on the board before you teach a class should be very similar for the teachers with their evaluations. Did you know what you were expected to do? Did you know how you were expected to conduct yourself? Did you know all of the policies and procedures? And often, it’s no, even if you have the handbook...And so those sorts of factors, I think, would really help teacher evaluations to know what it is they’re being evaluated for and to have a say as to when and how they’re going to be evaluated.”*

For evaluations to be effective and supportive, they must be transparent, well-communicated, and designed with educators' success in mind. Clear objectives and open communication are crucial for creating a meaningful evaluation experience. By fostering a system where expectations are known in advance, administrators can help ensure teachers clearly understand the process and what is required of them.

### ***Effective Post-Observation Feedback***

Effective post-observation feedback is integral to the teacher evaluation process and should not be treated as an afterthought. The feedback process ultimately ties the entire evaluation together, allowing administrators and teachers to engage in meaningful dialogue about teaching practices. This reflective exchange is critical to creating targeted growth plans to help teachers improve their performance and foster a collaborative professional environment. A successful evaluation involves an approach where administrators provide feedback and remain open to discussion, ensuring the process feels like a constructive dialogue rather than a one-sided judgment.

*“Be open to listen, I think. Administration knows what they want. I think that they need to go in with an open mind and really have a conversation, not just, oh this is what you do...Have an open conversation. I have open conversations, but I know a lot of people don’t. I think creating that safe space, where teachers can feel that they can talk and not be judged, I think that’s really important.”*

Establishing open dialogue creates a space where both administrators and educators can reflect on the observation and share their insights. It encourages a reciprocal approach to

feedback, allowing both parties to better understand each other's perspectives on instructional strategies and decision-making. This kind of exchange leads to more productive conversations and helps ensure that both sides are on the same page.

*'This is what I observed. What do you think?' and then have a conversation. I would like that. And not have like, do this, do this, do this. It's like, well, it's getting...input on your behaviour. And what are some positives? What are some negatives about it? And what's a different way you could do it? Can you try this next time? I got that from doing my observations at my practicum. That's how they talked to me, and I find it really helpful.'*

When administrators fail to follow up with clear post-observation feedback, educators can feel confused about the process and uncertain about how it informs their growth. This lack of communication can lead to anxiety and disengagement from the evaluation process. Without adequate follow-up, teachers are left in the dark, unsure of what administrators observed and how to improve based on those observations.

*"[Evaluation] made me feel very nervous. And then afterwards, I kind of had an uneasy feeling after being evaluated. And then there was hardly any follow-up, so I didn't know what they were writing notes about. There was no communication afterwards."*

Teachers, like students, benefit from constructive feedback that starts by acknowledging their strengths. Beginning with positive reinforcement helps build confidence and sets a supportive tone, showing that administrators are there to support, not just evaluate.

*"I just think just always start with the positives, always start with what the teacher is doing well, because, at the end of the day, we're all human beings, whether we would do that with a child. We wouldn't just start aggressively with a child, we'd be gentle with the child, so be gentle with the adults too...I think that would be the most important thing."*

An essential consideration for post-observation feedback is ensuring that it is provided continuously throughout the evaluation process rather than waiting until every educator has been observed. Administrators should deliver feedback promptly after each evaluation, allowing teachers to immediately make necessary improvements. This approach ensures feedback remains relevant and enables real-time reflection and adaptation.

*“So one thing, when you just said that, is also getting the feedback quickly...they do the assessments and everybody, so it might take three weeks to get through the high school and the elementary school, everybody getting their little half hour in, and then you got a time slot to sit down and have a discussion. So, if you’re at the beginning, it’s taking a long time to find, okay, was there something she liked, was or something she didn’t like? So...a timely manner is really, really, really important for feedback.”*

Delaying feedback until the end of the year diminishes its effectiveness, as teachers lose the chance to make timely adjustments. To be beneficial, feedback should be provided when there is still time to implement changes and see results. End-of-year feedback restricts opportunities for growth during the school year.

*“And making sure when you’re doing the evaluations -- timely, it’s done in a timely manner...carving out time to make sure that when it’s done, it’s done...Rather than at the end of the year, I find when they’re at the end of the year, I’m like, oh, well, there’s not much you can do about it now; the year is done. Making sure it’s in a timely manner reflective on what they see.”*

In addition to timeliness, specificity is crucial for effective feedback. General comments leave teachers unclear on how to improve, whereas specific guidance allows them to focus on particular areas of their teaching. Feedback should highlight strengths and areas for improvement, ensuring that teachers feel acknowledged for their efforts while understanding the next steps for their growth.

*“I guess I never really thought about it until I was evaluated. I think just being more specific is probably the big thing. I know we’ve been talking about. And yeah, be more specific. And then I mean, that’s really it, I think, honestly. Don’t bombard teachers, don’t overwhelm them when evaluation is occurring. And I think also, when teacher evaluation happens, be specific with what maybe they might need to work on, but also be specific with what they’ve succeeded in and what they do well. So often, you know, when we’re being evaluated, maybe if the focus is on what we need to improve upon, not what we’ve been doing well, I think that’s just a part. When I evaluate a student, I’m marking what they get right and what they get wrong. So, I think when we evaluate teachers, it should be similar.”*

Administrators must prioritize effective post-observation feedback. This includes fostering open dialogue, starting with positives, providing timely and specific guidance, and

ensuring teachers feel supported. By taking these steps, evaluations can reduce anxiety and help educators translate observations into meaningful growth, enhancing their practice and the overall learning environment.

### **Theme 3: Classroom Management, Effective Instruction, and Holistic Assessment**

This section focuses on evaluation criteria, exploring the critical components of explicit instruction, consistent classroom management, and holistic assessment. It emphasizes the importance of thoughtful planning, purposeful lessons, and assessments that allow students to demonstrate their learning effectively. Collectively, these practices foster emotional well-being, engagement, and confidence in students. By integrating these essential aspects, educators create an environment that nurtures student development, ensuring that learning goes beyond academic metrics to encompass socioemotional learning and personal growth.

*Table 7.3 Effective Instruction, Classroom Management, and Holistic Assessment*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Final Codes</b>
3.1 Classroom management as the foundation of effective instruction	3.1.1 Classroom structure and control	Maintaining discipline, balancing strictness and flexibility, ensuring smooth transitions, managing diverse abilities
	3.1.2 Promoting safety and focus	Addressing behavior and bullying, positive student-teacher interactions, supporting inclusive learning environments
3.2 Purpose-driven instruction and detailed planning	3.2.1 Organized instruction	Scaffolding learning effectively, consistent curriculum adherence, flexible pacing, maintaining focus on student progress
	3.2.2 Clear instruction	Student engagement through clarity, clear lesson objectives, communicating learning outcomes
3.3 Holistic & student-centered assessments	3.3.1 Flexible and varied assessment methods	Aligning assessments with learning styles, incorporating student self-assessment, formative check-ins
	3.3.2 Ensuring ongoing student progress tracking	Addressing challenges with subject-specific assessments, reducing test pressure, student reflection on learning
3.4 Fostering confidence, engagement, &	3.4.1 Strong teacher-student relationships	Regular check-ins, building trust through consistency, fostering emotional well-being, teacher self-care

emotional well-being	3.4.2 Building confidence through experiential education	Hands-on learning, teaching life skills, integrating cultural frameworks, accessing school resources for student support
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### ***Classroom Management as the Foundation of Effective Instruction***

While prior sections emphasized the evaluation process, we now turn to evaluation criteria, starting with classroom management, which educators at SICS identify as foundational to effective instruction. Classroom management is one of the most immediately observable aspects of teaching. The moment you enter a classroom, you can immediately tell if the teacher has established control or if the environment lacks structure.

*“You can just go into a classroom, you can see whether the teacher has the skills for classroom management. Because I really think, man, 80-90% of teaching is just classroom management. And so, you can see when you walk into a classroom, are the kids just kind of taking over the classroom? Are they walking around? How many kids are on task? Just simple kind of anecdotal observations are also really important as well.”*

Maintaining order in the classroom isn’t optional for teachers—it’s essential. Without a well-managed environment, students struggle to focus, and meaningful learning becomes difficult. Teachers need effective strategies to foster a space conducive to learning because even the most brilliantly designed lesson can fall flat in a chaotic classroom.

*“Do they have classroom management skills? Because that’s first—kids aren’t going to learn in a disruptive classroom. Can these teachers, do they have strategies and tools in their tool belt to have classroom management? Because if you don’t have classroom management, you don’t have anything.”*

*“You can have the best lesson plan laid out, and you can be like a super pro and get an A+++ on your lesson plan, if you can’t deliver your lesson, there’s a problem.”*

Beyond maintaining order, an essential part of classroom management is ensuring the classroom feels safe. A structured environment where students feel secure and supported is

crucial for fostering a positive learning atmosphere, and teachers are expected to create this sense of safety.

*“You have to also look at the way the teacher is interacting with the kids. Are the children responding in a positive way to the teacher? Is there a sense of structure and safety in the classroom that the teacher has actively created that environment?”*

Creating this safe space also involves addressing issues like bullying. Teachers play a critical role in monitoring and intervening in situations where students are being unkind or disruptive. Ensuring no tolerance for bullying is a crucial aspect of fostering a safe learning environment. Educational assistants are essential in this process, often managing challenging behaviours. They work closely with teachers, and without their support, it can be difficult to maintain a positive and focused classroom. Their role allows teachers to effectively support the rest of the class, ensuring a productive learning environment for all students.

*“I think this group's really mean to each other, really mean. I got a couple bullies. Well, they're trying to be but we don't let them. There's been improvement there, but it's been really difficult this year because I just I haven't had a lot of consistent help in the room. And there was a point in time where they weren't even sending me an extra person.”*

From my experience, educators at First Nations schools are encouraged to address behavioural issues with the least severe intervention necessary, fostering a respectful and constructive classroom environment without escalating discipline unnecessarily. I believe this approach is rooted in a response to the legacy of formal education, which frequently relied on harsh disciplinary methods.

*“Classroom management, I want to see that. I want to see classroom expectations. I want to see that the students are following those...if students aren't following those...we're not jumping down throats if simply positioning yourself by the child will stop the behaviour that you're not wanting to see. So just little things like that.”*

Discipline in the classroom requires a delicate balance, as teachers must navigate between enforcing rules and allowing flexibility to ensure both structure and positive

relationships with students. Many educators express an internal struggle in navigating this decision, and I can relate—wanting to foster strong connections with students while ensuring they respect boundaries.

*“I had an internal struggle for a while there and still do sometimes. I’m like, should I be strict out, or should I be more relaxed and let them get away with this kind of thing? There’s that internal struggle still sometimes of my upbringing and how I should be with these children.”*

Additionally, teachers are expected to facilitate learning for students of varying abilities within the same classroom, making classroom management even more crucial. Teachers must find ways to engage all learners while providing individualized support.

*“I want to see short instructional periods with lots of practice and one-on-one support or small group support, so we’re not lecturing for 45 minutes on something. We do a quick lesson, and then we let the students work and practice and cycle around. I want to see the teacher moving and interacting with all of the students, not just the ones who are being the loudest and needing assistance.” —Participant 17*

Apart from managing diverse ability levels, teachers must also navigate shifts in the classroom environment, as learning can occur in different areas throughout the day. Effective classroom management ensures that students remain focused and that transitions are smooth, regardless of where the activities occur.

*“Management, I think would be the most important, because how are kids going to learn...maybe we’re doing a lesson, but they have to be at their tables for something, the group thing. Or maybe we’re in a circle on the carpet and doing a lesson there so that they can all see, and they can all be involved in...Transitions are important. Some kids just don’t transition well.”*

Classroom management is undeniably the foundation of effective instruction. Without it, even the best lesson plans become ineffective, hindering student learning. Teachers create a productive and focused learning atmosphere by fostering a structured environment, promoting safety, applying thoughtful discipline, and adapting to different ability levels and settings.

Prioritizing classroom management paves the way for engaging instruction and more meaningful student learning experiences.

### ***Purpose-Driven Instruction: Clarity, Consistency, and Detailed Planning***

With classroom structure firmly in place, educators can shift their focus to delivering purposeful and well-organized instruction. Once order is established, teachers can deliver structured lessons, carefully crafted to meet students' needs and guide them toward success. Effective planning helps teachers stay organized and focused while allowing flexibility to adjust lessons based on student progress, ensuring they align with curriculum demands.

*“You got to look at the way the teacher is planning. The teacher needs to have a good sense of where they’re going and what they’re doing. It can’t be on the seat of your pants, stuff is going to change as you go but be planned, be planned, be well-planned, be planned in detail.”*

Strong planning ensures adherence to the curriculum and appropriate pacing, meaning that the curriculum is covered as thoroughly as possible by the end of the school year. While sticking to the curriculum provides structure, teachers must also scaffold learning by gradually building on students' prior knowledge. This approach supports continuous progress and ensures lessons align with long-term learning objectives.

*“Sticking to the curriculum, that could be one, making sure that everybody’s moving forward at the pace that they need to be and learning what needs to be done. Not just kind of winging it day-to-day. What do you have planned? Preparedness, accountability for students, yeah, I would say those are the two key ones.”*

A key component of effective planning is ensuring that each lesson has a clear purpose. This gives students a sense of direction and helps them stay focused. When students understand the objective, they know what they are working toward and can more easily refocus if their attention drifts. By clearly outlining what students are expected to achieve, teachers minimize confusion and keep the lesson progressing smoothly.

*“The first thing I’m looking for is a purpose. What is the lesson about? Why are the students sitting there learning what they’re learning? So, we look for a lesson objective. We know that students’ minds wander, heck, my mind wanders all the time. So how do they refocus on what’s happening? What re-centers them, what orients them to what’s happening if their mind wanders? There needs to be a purpose. I’m looking for organization, organization is important for the students and for the teacher because it minimizes interruptions, it minimizes transition time, it keeps things moving towards that first thing, the purpose of the lesson.”*

One way to clearly communicate the lesson’s purpose is to display learning outcomes at the front of the classroom for students to easily refer to throughout the lesson. I remember instructional coaches from the First Nations School Association (FNSEA) emphasizing the importance of this approach, as it provides students with a visual cue that reinforces the lesson’s objective and helps keep them on track.

*“I would have the goal of every lesson right above the board so the kids knew exactly what we were doing. They knew what the goal was for themselves so that at the end of the lesson, they know that at the end of the lesson they should be able to capitalize proper nouns in every sentence, for example, just simple things like that have been kind of the goals. And then once I’ve mastered them then move on...And so I think that’s been really helpful instead of just bombarding five things, like work on all these things. No, it’s like, work on this and then move on from that.”*

While careful planning is crucial, it’s equally important for teachers to be adaptable. A classroom is a dynamic environment, and teachers must be flexible in adjusting their lessons on the fly in response to changing circumstances. Whether it’s an unexpected behavioural issue or a sudden shift in the school schedule, pivoting and adapting helps teachers maintain appropriate pacing.

*“[Be] prepared to make changes if there are changes in the class because that’s always happening, be very flexible, knowing what the agenda is supposed to be, because sometimes that changes too.*

By ensuring that lessons are well-organized, purposeful, and adaptable, teachers provide students with clear expectations and a structured path to success. Strong planning, combined

with flexibility, allows for instruction that is not only engaging but also responsive to students' needs, ultimately driving meaningful learning and growth.

### ***Holistic & Student-Centered Assessments: Multiple Pathways for Demonstrating Learning***

After exploring how to deliver effective instruction, we now consider how educators can meaningfully assess students' work. Assessment is a natural extension of instruction, offering insights into how well students grasp the material. While we often associate quizzes and tests with stress and pressure, the assessment process doesn't have to be anxiety-inducing. As teachers gain experience, they learn how to reduce this pressure, ensuring that assessments become a tool for growth rather than fear. Simple preparations and avoiding stress-inducing tactics, help shift the focus from the pressure of performance to the learning process.

*I would try to keep it simple, prep them and prepare them really well so that they were successful. I didn't want them to feel like they were being stressed out having to, 'Oh, I have to know this.' You know what I mean? I wanted them to enjoy it at the same time.*

Assessment is not solely about grades; an essential element of formative assessment is regularly checking in with students to see if they can articulate what they've learned and why it matters. These check-ins also provide valuable feedback for teachers. By gauging students' understanding, teachers can identify areas needing adjustments or re-teaching, ensuring that content is absorbed effectively. I particularly enjoyed using exit cards as a 'ticket out the door,' offering a quick and efficient way to check for student comprehension before they left the classroom.

*"I think the big one kind of what we've been talking about is just do the students know what they've learned or what you've taught, I guess? And do they understand why it's important? Because I think a lot of times students are just kind of learning something and they don't really know why they're learning it. And so, I think if we can ask students, okay, what have you learned and why do you think it's important? If they can answer those two questions correctly, then I think that that's considered maybe partially a successful lesson, an accessible classroom."*

This principle also applies to instructional coaches and administrators, who can check in with students to gauge their understanding of lessons and then share the results with teachers. I recall a school-wide initiative led by instructional coaches from the FNSA, where they would pull students out of our classroom to ask what they were learning. The wide range of answers was eye-opening, and it became clear that not all students fully grasped the learning objectives. This feedback prompted me to ensure I was more explicit about the learning objectives so that all students could clearly articulate what they were learning.

*“[Admin] would take a kid out into a room and be like...So what did you learn in this lesson? And that, it was kind of a big eye-opener for me, because there were some kids who didn't know what we had spent an hour on, doing a lesson and activity and assessment, and they still didn't really quite understand. And so that was really eye-opening, as kind of we were talking about, I need to make the teaching much more explicit. I need to make sure that kids understand what they learn. I need to make it engaging for them, obviously. That was the first thing that came to mind.”*

As teachers at SICS, we worked closely with a regional principal and instructional coach from the FNSA. Before arriving at SICS, I worked with the FNSA at the Blueberry River First Nations School, though it was with a different regional principal and instructional coach. It was a lot of work learning the scripted and standardized approaches during that time, but by the time I arrived at SICS, I had built a solid foundation to apply what I had learned effectively. The FNSA supported my literacy and numeracy instruction, ensuring that my students were benchmarked and made measurable progress with their reading and math skills throughout the year. Benchmarking involves regularly using standardized assessments to measure students' progress over time. However, not all educators were fans of this standardized approach.

*“With Reading Mastery and with Saxon Math, students had to do regular tests. And so that's how they would show us where they were at and how they were growing or not, because those tests had to be marked, and we had to enter the data so that it could be examined by the coaches from the FNSA and admin. And so it was just something that we had to do, a lot of it felt contrary to a supportive learning environment, very cold,*

*ruthless Western ways of measuring a student's learning, and therefore their self-worth was not necessarily what felt right for me. But I had to do it, it was part of the job. And so that's what we did to help the students understand their own learning, their own growing, and so I would like I say, do what I can to layer in my own compassion and my own soul-to-soul sort of medicine to help them to understand that this wasn't personal. I never wanted the students to feel like their scores reflected their intelligence or their worth in any way”.*

Standardized benchmarking is just one form of formative assessment used to track student progress. However, formative assessments can be more flexible and non-standardized, including tools like quizzes, class activities, reflective journals, exit tickets, discussions, or observations. These low-stakes assessments help scaffold learning by allowing students to practice skills and receive feedback before moving on to high-stakes summative evaluations, such as final exams or projects.

*“We want to assess their skill improvement, not necessarily the final project that they do, although that’s a piece of it. So, we’ve been looking at taking the learning outcomes that we’re hoping to teach the students and turning those into ‘I can’ statements and then having them do rubrics.*

Differentiating instruction is essential to meet the diverse needs of students effectively. I was introduced to Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences during my teacher education program at Lakehead University, and it has greatly influenced how I approach classroom instruction. Gardner’s theory emphasizes that students learn differently, highlighting eight distinct intelligences: linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic (Gardner, 2011). Understanding these intelligences helps ensure that teaching methods are varied and adaptable, allowing students to engage with material in ways that best suit their learning styles. Building on this, differentiating assessments is equally essential, providing students with multiple ways to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding.

*“I always say to the kids, ‘knowledge is power.’ I want to know what you have up here. Let’s figure out how you can get it out. Do you need to speak it? Do you need to draw it? Do you need to do a diorama? I’ve been working with an English teacher, and the end project for a novel study has always been an essay. These kids hate essays. So, over the year, a year and a bit, her and I have sat down and said, ‘What can we do? Let’s differentiate. Let’s give options.’”*

Assessment methods often vary by subject area. For instance, assessments tend to be more hands-on in subjects like physical education or science, involving projects, experiments, or practical demonstrations. In contrast, subjects like literacy may rely more heavily on written assignments and verbal expression. Tailoring assessments to fit the specific requirements of each subject ensures that students are evaluated in ways that reflect the key skills and competencies needed in that discipline.

*“There’s both an oral assessment as well as actual written assessment. And then for literacy, what I’ve been focusing a lot on the last couple years is the writing output. So different rubrics depending on what the writing assignment might be, whether it’s like writing a brochure or a paragraph or a story, depending on what that might be, the different rubric. And then science, social studies, those main things, just different assignments, different tests, quizzes. For science, I try to do a lot of cool, fun experiments for the kids. So how well they succeed in those and how well they follow instructions. I think it’s definitely a big thing for me is the kids really struggle with the procedure and actually following through procedure. So that’s something that I’ve been kind of assessing them a lot on.”*

Some subjects, like literacy and numeracy, which are taught daily at SICS, provide frequent opportunities for assessment. However, other subjects, such as Halq’eméylem, are taught only once a week, making it much more challenging to assess students’ progress.

*“It’s so hard for language, it’s hard to tell if they’re actually acquiring it... we had very minimal time for language, so they would only get it once a week. And it’s not enough time for them to actually acquire it and use it, so I had to adapt the way I assessed”.*

Further complicating the evaluation process is the challenge administrators face when evaluating teachers in subjects they may not be proficient in. Without subject expertise, it can be

challenging to provide meaningful evaluations of a teacher's effectiveness in delivering instruction.

*“How is someone who is not for example fluent Halq'eméylem speaker going to assess or evaluate a teacher who's teaching Halq'eméylem?”*

Encouraging students to reflect on their work promotes the development of higher-order thinking skills, such as critical thinking and self-awareness. These skills, emphasized in my teacher education program, are essential for helping students engage deeply with the material, think independently, and understand their learning process. While higher-order thinking fosters deeper learning, lower-order skills like memorization also play a vital role by providing the foundational knowledge that students can build upon.

*They do self-assessment. We do assessments on them, see where they match. And it's interesting because I actually find the kids are much harder on themselves than we are. So that's one of the ways we assess. We also look at core competencies and have them do self-assessments on that. We have reflection pieces that we have them do as well after the project is finished. What would you do different next time? What did you do? Well, what can you improve on? Things like that. So, we take all those pieces and then base our assessment around that.”*

Assessment methods also vary depending on the age group, which is essential given that SICS serves students from kindergarten through grade 12. For younger students, assessments often focus on approaches that capture their development as they build foundational skills.

*“In kindergarten, it's an awful lot of conversation. It's also an awful lot of observation. And there are also some rubric things that we use with criteria. It has to be a real blend, though, because the children are pre-literate. And also, it gives you a really nice, clear, rounded picture. So, between observation, interaction, assessment, one on one typically, then you kind of get a rounded view of the child as learner.”*

Finally, keeping detailed records of students' performance is essential for writing accurate report cards. Tracking progress over time provides teachers with concrete data to evaluate students' development objectively. I typically used a spreadsheet to track grades, ensuring that assignments were weighted appropriately to calculate an accurate overall grade for each student.

*And how is the teacher keeping track of the student's performance? What kinds of assessments and evaluations, and records of the student's achievement does the teacher have? So, when it comes time to write a report card, they actually have data and evidence to look at rather than just a subjective feeling of how the child is doing. I'm just going to keep going.*

Holistic, student-centred assessments offer students various ways to demonstrate their understanding and progress. From frequent check-ins to comprehensive final projects, these assessments prioritize skill development and encourage students to reflect on their learning journey. Teachers nurture academic growth and personal engagement by incorporating a keen awareness of individual student needs. This approach ensures that students are not only evaluated on their final performance but are also supported throughout their learning journeys.

### ***Nurturing Growth: Fostering Confidence, Engagement & Emotional Well-Being in Learning***

At SICS, assessing student development requires teachers to look beyond traditional academic metrics and adopt a holistic approach. This involves considering students' socioemotional well-being, personal experiences, and how trauma may affect their learning. Focusing on socioemotional learning (SEL) helps teachers understand that these factors are a precursor to student learning. Students need to feel supported and secure for meaningful learning to take place.

*"I have to assess my environment and the students, like you say, in a holistic way. My first target is to look at the SEL, the social-emotional learning of the students and where they are at...what trauma they were bringing to the classroom because there wasn't one single child that didn't have it. And that trauma, as you know, plays out in everything else that they do. It's there. It's weird, because I'm speaking as though it's them, but it's also me, like a lot of us that are Indigenous come with the same can of worms...I think that teachers teaching trauma [to] students would be a hugely successful way of helping them to grow and to heal because we understand what trauma is; we lived it ourselves."*

Regular check-ins are important for teachers to stay attuned to students' emotional well-being. These informal interactions help teachers understand how students are feeling and where they may need additional support.

*“I also measure how happy they are too, like how comfortable and just like observations and just chatting to them and checking in with them. And I check in on what their emotional state and how they’re progressing emotionally too. And that’s just through getting to know the kids and hanging out with them.”*

While it may seem obvious, consistency and attendance are critical for fostering a stable learning environment. Teachers who demonstrate punctuality and regular attendance provide students with a reliable presence, something many students come to look forward to and depend on. This consistency is vital for students who need a dependable routine to feel supported.

*“Consistency, punctuality, attendance, I’m sorry, those are some frustrating things, but I think they are very important. A consistent, punctual person in regular attendance is extremely important for the children to be able to trust them and relax and have a relationship.”*

An essential part of teaching is connecting students with the appropriate resources within the school environment to ensure they receive the support they need. Teachers are crucial in facilitating access to support systems that contribute to students' well-being and development.

*How is the teacher interacting with the other supports in the school? When they observe that there’s a child who needs something, are they reaching out to other people to get what that child needs, and are they following up on that?”*

A key aspect of preparing for the school year is for educators to familiarize themselves with student files before classes begin. These files often contain valuable information, such as educational histories, documented challenges, and Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), which are formal documents outlining specific learning goals and the support each student needs. Other relevant details might include behavioural reports or family circumstances that impact learning. By reviewing these files beforehand, teachers are better equipped to make informed decisions and provide tailored support from day one.

*“I would look through their file. I think that’s the first thing that teachers need to do is to look through their files, because I’m finding that I know these kids’ files, and you ask a teacher about it and they’re like, ‘Oh, where is that?’ That’s not okay. These kids have things in their files that will help guide us for when we have them. They have educational*

*psychology assessments that they need, speech and language assessments that they need. They've got their benchmarking. They've got all of their stuff, all of their IEP meetings, all of their meeting notes, everything's in their file. So that's what I do to make sure that these kids are getting what they need."*

Self-care is a crucial aspect of effective teaching, as it allows teachers to maintain the emotional and mental resilience needed to support their students. When teachers prioritize their well-being, they are better prepared to manage the various classroom demands, creating a more favourable environment for their students.

*"This is when I would especially be watching teachers, how they carry themselves, how well they're taking care of themselves. Self-care is a huge factor in my evaluation, it would be. That's another thing that's like I say, it's much easier said than done. I wouldn't know how, I'd have to figure it out and learn it. But I would be making sure that they are incorporating self-care into their work plan. And it has to be meaningful. It's not just something we say. I need to know that you're doing this because self-care is going to matter for everybody. Every child does matter. But in order for children to matter, the adults need to show that they matter too."*

Educators should take the time to understand their students' interests, even when those interests differ from their own, and show genuine enthusiasm for students' passions. This authentic connection helps students feel understood and supported, creating a more positive and inclusive learning environment.

*"How well do you know your students? I think a lot of teachers don't really take the time to get to know their students in a more meaningful way rather than just, okay, their birthday. Sure, that's something, but I think actually, how many teachers can have an actual dialogue discussion with their students about things that they're interested in, whether it's whatever sports, video games, books, coloring, art? I think if a teacher is able to do that, then I think all those other things kind of will fall into place eventually. So I would say that would be a big piece of the criteria for evaluating teachers as well."*

Engaging students in learning is crucial, and this engagement is enhanced when educators connect lessons to students' interests. By aligning educational content with what students are passionate about, teachers can capture their attention and foster deeper understanding. I always aimed to integrate students' interests into my teaching. For instance, while it may seem like a

simple activity, I saw a significant increase in engagement when using colouring sheets to teach multiplication. In this exercise, correct answers corresponded to specific colours, and the completed image featured characters or scenes from students' favourite TV shows and video games. This approach made learning more engaging and demonstrated that their interests were recognized and valued in the classroom. While students were required to master this foundational skill through rote learning, this approach provided a more creative way to reinforce the concept.

*“I want to see some engagement in the lesson. I want to see, I don’t know if fun is the right word, but some level of interest from the students. So that tells me that the teacher is tapping into the student’s interest, the teacher has gotten to know the students so that they can tailor their lessons to what the students are interested in. It might not be all the time, but that’s why I think the single snapshot isn’t necessarily the perfect thing; seeing it more over time is better, because then you get the sense that the teacher is learning the students’ interests and developing those relationships.”*

In addition to fostering personal relationships, teachers play a vital role in preparing students for life beyond the classroom. By modelling positive interactions and promoting the development of social skills, educators help students build meaningful connections with others. This emphasis on personal growth helps shape students into well-rounded individuals who can confidently engage with the world around them.

*“I think it’s how you can relate to the children, how you can get them to be better little people. I think an evaluation should be about how you relate to the children, how you can get them to socialize, how you can get them to—life skills, you know, I think that’s how an evaluation should be...so it’s like, yeah, you just have to teach the children to be respectful little human beings.”*

Student engagement and progress often become clearer in hands-on activities, where improvement is demonstrated through practical results. Seeing students apply their skills and show visible growth in real-time scenarios is rewarding. As students gain confidence and take ownership of their learning through these practical tasks, teachers can more easily observe how such experiences contribute to their development. These settings provide straightforward ways to

measure progress and emphasize the role of experiential learning in fostering skill mastery and self-confidence.

*“I think I would say their active engagement in whatever it is they’re doing at the time, as well as their demonstration of improvement of skills. I think this one’s a little bit easier to do that in, because with woodwork, for example, you can see when students are getting better, and even around confidence. At the beginning of the year, I’m often cutting wood for them on the chop saw, for example, or fine cutting on the band saw because the kids don’t want to do that. But they stand, and they watch, and they learn. This time of year, they’re doing all of that themselves. So, I think that’s how they demonstrate it.”*

Fostering confidence, engagement, and emotional well-being in students requires a holistic approach to teaching and assessment. By building meaningful relationships, understanding student backgrounds, and creating supportive learning environments, teachers play an essential role in nurturing both the academic and emotional development of their students.

**Theme 4: Cultural Responsiveness, Community Engagement & Family Communication**

This section highlights the importance of integrating Stó:lō culture, emphasizing the essential role of communication with families at SICS, and encouraging community engagement. Educators articulate the need to participate in community events and embed cultural knowledge into students’ educational experience. By actively engaging with families and the broader community, teachers build trust, foster collaboration, and ensure that learning is culturally relevant and inclusive. Communication with families is positioned as a critical tool for reinforcing shared responsibilities and strengthening community cohesion.

*Table 7.4: Cultural Responsiveness, Community Engagement & Family Communication*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Final Codes</b>
4.1 Integrating Stó:lō Culture and Knowledge	4.1.1 Aligning teaching with Stó:lō values	Deeper integration of Stó:lō history and language, applying First Peoples Principles of Learning, fostering student cultural pride
	4.1.2 Reflecting cultural knowledge in evaluations	Embracing cultural practices genuinely, balancing Indigenous and Western frameworks, avoiding superficial cultural inclusion

4.2 Fostering Community Engagement	4.2.1 Gaining experiential knowledge	Participating in cultural activities like canoe racing, fostering cultural understanding through immersion, building relationships with families
	4.2.2 Strengthening school-community bonds	Engaging the wider community, showing commitment to the community by stepping out of comfort zones, transparency in teacher-student interactions
4.3 Building Trust and Collaborative Relationships with Families	4.3.1 Strengthening school-community bonds	Prioritizing positive communication, starting with good news, keeping families updated, regular and proactive contact
	4.3.2 Fostering collaboration	Collaborating on IEPs and shared goals, early involvement of families, holding teachers accountable for ongoing communication

***Integrating Stó:lō Culture and Knowledge into Teaching Practices***

As a teacher at a band-operated school like SICS, evaluation criteria must align with the community's original vision for the school. Teaching practices should be rooted in this vision, reflecting the community's values and philosophies. Teachers must deliver culturally responsive education to ensure their methods resonate with students and support the community's goals.

*“We are a band-operated school; we’re in an Indigenous community working with students, so what is our ultimate goal as Seabird as it pertains to our philosophy? What is the Seabird Island philosophy? Well, you go and look at the philosophy, and it talks about holistic learning as well as language and culture. And so, when you’re evaluating a teacher, part of that criteria must include some of those things that I’ve mentioned— language, culture, history.”*

Even as a community school, it is essential to recognize that dismantling colonial educational structures remains an ongoing effort. Educators must continually learn how to provide an education that truly reflects the community's values. Most teachers have had their perceptions of education shaped by formal, non-community educational systems. Consequently, embracing and implementing culturally responsive teaching is a collective learning process for everyone involved.

*“We need to step back and unlearn before we can move forward. And the learning process for our students really begins in terms of, like I said, going back to creating these decolonizing educational experiences for our kids. It does start right from the top all the*

*way down, even as teachers, we have to really think about how we can do this in other ways. A lot of the colonial view is not holistic. A lot of it can be very disruptive to many of our teachings and therefore, our students learning if it's not done holistically, and that's a big part of decolonizing our approaches, decolonizing ourselves as a professional and an educator. Something that's really opened my eyes and, yeah, I am more reflective that way and I think that's important to kind of go back and say, okay, well, how could I do that differently? What can I take from my arsenal as an Indigenous educator that will help these students, help them in their journey through the education system? A system that is not designed for Indigenous students."*

Beyond acknowledging culture, it is essential to embed Stó:lō history, language, and cultural values at the heart of education. This approach moves beyond offering isolated language classes and treating cultural elements as supplementary. Instead, it involves restructuring the educational framework so these components serve as the central foundation, shaping and defining all aspects of learning. This genuine effort honours and uplifts the community's identity meaningfully.

*"I definitely believe that the curriculum could use a lot more of the Stó:lō culture involved in it. And not just from a language base either, like, add more of the social studies towards it, towards the history and all that."*

While some efforts have been made to integrate culture into the curriculum, the challenge remains to ensure that these inclusions are not superficial. When evaluating teachers, looking beyond a "checkbox" mentality is essential. Cultural integration should not be a box to tick but the foundation upon which daily teaching is built.

*"There's a lot of ways to incorporate more. I mean, what could be done is when admin is looking at the year plans and they're looking at the units, looking at how the Stó:lō culture is built into those units more, I find a lot of people just copy and paste from the BC curriculum and say, 'Oh, I checked that box,' versus actually living it and owning it and making sure that that's more than just a check box. So, evaluating teachers are making sure they're not just checking the box, that they're actually bringing life to that."*

Adding to this point, another educator noted the importance of inviting community members and Elders into the classroom to avoid superficial cultural lessons:

*“I feel there's a lot of just trying to check a box just for checking a box. If you're going to check a box, just watch a movie that day then. Don't try to do a lesson, where you're saying, 'Oh, we're going to learn about culture' without really bringing in Stó:lō knowledge, bringing in cultural Elders, community members. If you're not comfortable with teaching it, find someone and bringing them in who will. As a teacher, if you're not comfortable, that's okay. There's nothing wrong with not being comfortable in teaching something new, but reach out to people who can connect you with people who will bring that to your classroom for that firsthand experience.”*

This approach emphasizes that authentic cultural education often requires collaboration with those who have deep cultural expertise, creating an enriched and respectful learning experience. Although the importance of cultural engagement is broadly acknowledged, participants have varying perspectives on incorporating it into formal evaluations. Some contend that cultural integration should emerge from teachers' authentic commitment to connecting with the community. This perspective highlights the danger of relegating cultural practices to hollow formalities.

*“I don't necessarily know if it should be part of evaluations. I think it should really come from the heart and the desire and want to get to know the community and build those relationships with students.”*

However, teaching in a way that reflects students' lived experiences and cultural identities is undeniably important. By integrating the knowledge and experiences students bring from their communities into lessons, educators create more relevant and engaging learning environments. This approach makes the curriculum more relatable and enhances students' understanding by connecting new concepts to their existing knowledge.

*“But how to reword that is how do you take the students' knowledge and implement it into your teaching, in the sense that I have a couple hunters in my class, and they know about spotlighting but they didn't know what it was called.”*

Working in a Stó:lō community inherently requires educators to integrate Stó:lō cultural practices and perspectives into their teaching. This involves deeply understanding and embracing

the community's values, traditions, and approaches to learning, ensuring that educational practices are culturally relevant and supportive of students' identities.

*“Well, I kind of feel like they should [integrate culture] because we are serving the Stó:lō people. But that’s going to be really hard for people that are new to the culture. But if you look at the First Peoples Principles of Learning, which it would probably be drawing heavily from, those are some pretty good principles. And how would you incorporate them? Well, the only one that keeps coming up to my mind right now is that learning involves patience and time...Again, kind of like the portfolio of assessment for a teacher as well as for the students. And that some knowledge is sacred, yeah, I’ve learned that, that’s true...But I kind of feel like if you’re going to be working for the Stó:lō people, then your evaluation should include their ways of thinking, because that’s the people we’re ultimately serving.”*

By the time students graduate from SICS, they should have had a profoundly immersive cultural experience. The goal is to ensure that students leave the school with a strong sense of cultural identity, having engaged with Stó:lō traditions, language, and teachings throughout their educational experience.

*“By the time they graduate, they should have done all of it and then some.*

Incorporating Stó:lō culture and knowledge into teaching at SICS is a complex but necessary process. While it is essential for teachers to deliver culturally responsive education, it is equally crucial for this approach to be met with authenticity and depth. Ultimately, the goal is to create a learning environment where students are deeply connected to their culture, ensuring that by the time they graduate, they are well-versed in the culture, knowledge, and traditions of their Stó:lō communities.

### ***Fostering Community Engagement and Cultural Understanding***

At SICS, the responsibility to connect with and serve the wider community is deeply embedded in its identity as a community school. This responsibility calls for teachers to actively build relationships with families and community members. These interactions provide an invaluable opportunity for new and veteran teachers to understand the context in which their

students live and grow. Engaging with the families early in the school year helps bridge the gap between school and home, enabling educators to better understand their students' backgrounds and needs.

*“We’re a community school, and we serve a community. These events are a perfect way for teachers, new teachers, veteran teachers, anybody to build relationships with the families outside of a school setting...these events, these community outreach events, anything like that are really good at building those bridges, building those relationships, things like that...I do think that participation...would be a good idea, especially early in the year where you’ve got new students and presumably new parents to meet too.”*

For teachers at SICS, immersing themselves in the community, attending local events, and stepping out of their comfort zones provide invaluable opportunities to gain deeper insights into families' lives. It also helps them demonstrate their commitment to understanding and supporting the community.

*“I had to get to know the communities and the families and do my work in terms of community engagement in order to, like I said, build those relationships...we really need to step out of our comfort zone. My advice to you would be to pursue it because they have some knowledge that would be very valuable for you to tap into...Through a lot of community engagement. I always encourage -- well, I have a lot of colleagues at different schools who ask, ‘How can I be more involved?’ And so I always encourage them. If they have a feast or a gathering in the community and you’re invited, you need to really take them up on that offer, be there and just show, that shows a lot that you care, and try to attend as many functions, community gatherings and things like that as possible.”*

Community engagement also gives teachers the opportunity to understand the deeper meanings behind cultural traditions that cannot be fully conveyed through textbooks. These practices often carry significance beyond what is immediately visible, and without exposure, they risk being misunderstood or oversimplified. By engaging with these experiences, teachers develop a deeper appreciation for the cultural richness that shapes their students' lives, which might otherwise be overlooked.

*“It’s not just a kid going into a canoe to go race and make some money. There’s a lot more to it than just racing. There’s a lot of stuff that happens prior to racing. There’s a lot of cultural significance of the canoes and the paddles and how one takes care of*

*themselves before they get on the canoe. There's things that we have to do culturally to be safe on the water. We have to feed the spirits in the water, feed the spirit of the canoe. We have to take care of our own body. We have to cleanse ourselves. We have to be a pure mind and body and spirit to actually be on the canoe and for things to go smoothly...there's lots of things that I guess we don't share out publicly but, say, teachers were more involved, they would start to learn more of these things."*

Beyond the benefits of community engagement for teachers, it is equally essential for families to observe how educators interact with students. When families see teachers who show genuine care and respect toward their students, it helps build trust in the school system. This strengthens the bonds between the school and the community, providing reassurance that children are not only being educated but nurtured and supported.

*"I think it's very important for the community to see how the adults of the schools interact with those kids to make sure that they're actually comfortable and to see it firsthand, not just hear about it on a report card... Because then the community gets to see firsthand how they're the humans that they're sending to school or interacting with the adults that are within their environment, because the teachers and the EAs see more of the students in the course of a week than their own families."*

Community engagement at SICS goes beyond attending events; it involves actively connecting with families, understanding the broader community context, and participating in cultural experiences. Educators foster trust and build meaningful relationships with families by stepping out of their comfort zones and immersing themselves in the community. This engagement strengthens the bond between school and home, creating a foundation for an educational experience informed by and responsive to the cultural and social realities of the community. Through these efforts, the connection between the school and the community is enriched.

### ***Building Trust and Collaborative Relationships with Families***

At SICS, building strong, trusting relationships with families is a core part of the school culture. Establishing open lines of communication with parents and guardians is seen as a

responsibility and a fundamental part of supporting students' success. Positive communication is encouraged by the administrators, ensuring that parents hear from teachers not only when concerns arise but also with important updates about their child's progress. This approach helps keep parents informed and creates an open line of communication, making families feel connected to their educational journey.

*"I think [contacting parents/guardians is] something that at Seabird the administration really kind of tries to implore teachers to do. [Admin] has sent out constant reminders to teachers to call home to give, I guess, good news, because I think so often teachers will call home only if there's bad news. And so, [admin] has really got on teachers really through emails, whatever meetings, saying make sure you are meeting with parents, whether it's a phone call, email, in-person, text, and telling them the good news of their children. And that was something that when I first was evaluated by [admin] in my very first year at Seabird, that was one of those specific things, explicit things. Because [admin] asked to look at my call log, and it was pretty empty...it's connected to organization as well, because I was communicating with a lot of families, but I was just not keeping notes of it. And so that's something that I then tried to keep in mind anytime I talk to parents, okay, write this down when I'm communicating."*

Communication between teachers and parents typically begins after the school year has started at SICS. However, initiating this communication before the school year should be a priority. Early engagement allows parents to share valuable insights about their child, including their hopes for their child's growth and development. This proactive approach emphasizes the value of family involvement in the education process. It highlights the need for teachers and parents to collaborate from the very beginning to support student success.

*"Every child got to come in and every parent got to speak with the teacher before the school year started so that they could talk about the child and what the parents' hopes and dreams were for the child and any specific things coming up. And I think it just kind of—it reinforces the value of the family in...educating their children. I imagine that there will be quite a few differences of opinion regarding what children can accomplish at what times and what not. So yeah, I think that's cool, let's do that."*

Initiating communication with positive news is crucial for building strong relationships. Waiting until there is a problem to reach out to parents creates a reactive rather than proactive

dynamic. Teachers quickly realize that leading with negative news is one of the quickest ways to put parents on the defensive and cause them to disengage. By starting communication early with positive updates, teachers create a foundation that makes it easier to address any concerns that may arise later on.

*“Because we usually make those first phone calls a month or two into the school year when everything’s going wrong with the student, when the student’s struggling, often the communication doesn’t happen until the problem, and then it’s straight in, and that’s the first communication you have with that parent. It’s not right, it shouldn’t be that way. And also, I really like the point with the practicums, students introducing themselves, because...to know who these adults are that are working with the children, for a parent, or a grandparent, is really important. Because you’re trusting your children with these adults, you should at least know who they are.”*

In addition to starting on a positive note, maintaining consistent communication throughout the school year is essential. Regular updates help keep parents informed about what their child is learning and experiencing in the classroom, ensuring they remain engaged and connected to their child's educational journey. This consistency helps parents feel more in tune with their child's day-to-day learning.

*“Well, telephone, daily agenda rating, when they’re coming to the door, when you see them out in public, you acknowledge them and make sure that they are being seen by you. I’ve tried really hard not to just always be phoning for something that is disruptive when, I’m going to say, if the child is having trouble in school. I try to find moments where I can call a parent and say, ‘You know, your child is doing fabulous.’”*

Beyond communication, genuine collaboration between teachers and families is critical to student success. Involving families in Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings, setting goals together, and maintaining open lines of communication ensures that everyone is working toward the same objectives. This collaborative approach emphasizes that education is a shared responsibility between the school and the home, where both parties support the child’s growth.

*“I think there needs to be a collaboration. I love doing these IEP meetings with the families. Having them create goals and being part of the process and having the kids being part of the process, as a teacher, we can’t create what these kids are going to do*

*and say, 'You're going to do it.' It's not dictatorship, it's not... We need to work with these kids and these families to create what is it we're expecting of these kids. If they're meeting, can you help us at home? What is this going to look like? How do you think that we can meet the needs here? I get text messages all the time, 'My child didn't sleep well last night, just a heads up.' Knowing what these kids are coming in with. I built those relationships. I've earned those relationships. These teachers need to earn those relationships and have these hard conversations with these parents. I'm on your side. I'm on your team. How can we help your child become successful? Not how can I help your child...It's how can we as a team help your child? So, collaboration 100% is crucial."*

At SICS, many teachers go above and beyond to ensure that students and families feel supported. This dedication is evident when teachers take extra steps to show parents that their children's well-being is a top priority. By demonstrating genuine care and investment in students' success, these efforts help reinforce the strong sense of community and support that defines SICS.

*"And if I have to stay for a meeting with a parent, I'll stay for a meeting with a parent. I think—with our students that they know that they just don't have one adult in the room who supports them. Every adult in that room supports them regardless of what it is. So, I'll write in planners...I'll call. I'll do whatever it takes."*

Communication with families must be prioritized, and this process should be closely monitored to ensure that teachers consistently do it. In my experience, when parents are regularly informed and communicating with teachers, students tend to stay on their toes because they realize they can't withhold information or fly under the radar. With both parents and teachers involved, students are held more accountable for their actions and progress.

*"I think it needs to be monitored. I think it needs to be high priority. There is nothing worse than a parent phoning me saying, 'I've only talked to this teacher once and it's negative. No, thank you. No, thank you. My first comment to any teacher is, 'Have you contacted the parents?' If they get a good grade, 'Have you contacted the parents?' It should be something that's done all the time. I know it's time-consuming; I get it. But the text messages I sent, 'Oh, so and so had a great day today.' That didn't take long. I think the teachers need to be held accountable. Yeah, I do, actually. Because building those relationships with the families, it's crucial. It's absolutely crucial in these kids' education. Because if the parents don't buy in, the kids aren't going to buy in. So I don't know, yeah, they do need to be held accountable."*

Teachers who make themselves available for communication ensure that parents feel comfortable reaching out whenever necessary. This open and responsive approach reassures parents that teachers are committed to providing support in whatever way is needed. By maintaining clear and accessible communication, teachers create an environment where parents feel valued, knowing they are truly part of a collaborative effort.

*“If a student’s not at school, I have each parent’s phone number in my phone, and I text on a daily basis. I will have parents phoning me at night if they need to chat. I text parents all the time; a lot of my parents don’t have phone minutes or whatever it’s called, do a lot of texting. I very rarely email unless it’s like consent forms or setting up meetings or something like that, like setting up team meetings. I mostly do phone calls. I love my kids. I love my parents. And I say this to the parents all the time, you’re not alone. You and your family have a team here. So it’s not for us. It’s not just the kids having a team...the families actually have a team at school.”*

Building trust and collaboration with families must be vital to teachers' roles at SICS. Through open and consistent communication, teachers and families work together to create a wraparound support system for students. This partnership isn't just about solving problems but also about celebrating successes and ensuring families feel valued and encouraged to participate in their child’s development. In this wraparound model, support extends beyond academics, addressing students' social and emotional needs as well. This approach helps build parents' trust in the school, reassuring them that educators support and actively want them involved in their child’s educational journey.

## **Chapter Overview**

This chapter presents key findings from interviews with educators at SICS, highlighting a range of themes that shape effective teacher evaluation practices. Educators emphasized the importance of fostering a growth mindset, where continuous, formative feedback supports ongoing professional development. This includes a call for more collaborative and reflective feedback processes that empower educators to self-reflect. The chapter also explores the need for

supportive and transparent evaluation structures to address uncertainty, emphasizing the importance of clear communication. Additionally, evaluations must prioritize teacher well-being, assuring educators that administrators recognize the connection between personal and professional growth.

The findings underscore the importance of evaluations that assess teachers' ability to deliver an education that honours the needs of Stó:lō students, ensuring both academic and cultural growth are considered. These evaluations focus on educators' instructional practices, classroom management, and holistic, student-centered assessments. Finally, the chapter addresses the significance of community engagement and fostering solid relationships with families. Together, these themes emphasize a more responsive and supportive approach to teacher evaluation, redefining what it means to be an effective educator at SICS.

## Chapter 5: Analysis

While the literature review outlines several best practices in education, best practices are often decontextualized, making it challenging to apply them universally. Calliou and Wesley-Esquimaux (2015) remind us that “we cannot assume that what is successful in one situation, context, or culture will necessarily work in a completely different one” (p. 41). To address this gap, we turn to wise practices, which are context-specific and culturally grounded approaches that honour the unique values and needs of the community (Calliou and Wesley-Esquimaux, 2015). By building a literature review that explored best practices in education, I established a foundation for the theoretical framework that informed my interview guide.

This guide was then used to interview educators at SICS, with questions rooted in best practices, to understand how these practices could be applied in the specific context of SICS. Through this approach, I aim to uncover insights that are tailored to the school’s unique environment, which ultimately presents the best opportunity to answer the overarching research question: *How can the teacher evaluation process at Seabird Island Community School (SICS) reflect an understanding of the wise pedagogical perspectives and practices valued by its educators?* (Calliou & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2015).

Following the interviews and ongoing thematic analysis, four key themes emerged, which are discussed in my *Findings* section: (1) Fostering a Growth Mindset & Commitment to Lifelong Learning, (2) Creating Supportive & Transparent Evaluation Processes, (3) Effective Instruction, Classroom Management, and Holistic Assessment, and (4) Cultural Responsiveness, Community Engagement & Family Communication. These themes were instrumental in revealing educators’ understanding that evaluation could not be examined in isolation from the wider context of school culture. A supportive and growth-oriented evaluation process can only

be achieved when this foundation is embedded within the school's culture, ensuring that the process is not just about the tools used but also how they support teachers and nurture personal and professional development. The best practices identified in the literature review and these four primary themes will be analyzed through the wise practices model to show how the findings shape and inform best practices.

In designing the interview guide, I rooted questions in established best practices in education, providing a structured basis for exploring effective evaluation processes. However, through conversations with educators at Seabird Island Community School (SICS), these best practice questions elicited responses that reflected wise practices—practices that are context-specific, culturally grounded, and responsive to the values and needs of SICS. The wise practices model thus acted as a heuristic tool in this study: it allowed best practices to be reinterpreted within a culturally relevant framework, enabling the emergence of insights that could not be captured by generic best practices alone. These insights, grounded in the unique perspectives of educators at SICS, directly informed the creation of the evaluation tool, ensuring it addresses the specific cultural and professional development needs within this educational context.

The wise practices model consists of seven elements of success, offering a valuable framework for exploring how the teacher evaluation process at SICS reflects the wise pedagogical perspectives and practices valued by its educators. The analysis explores these elements, highlighting their importance in shaping an effective teacher evaluation process. This analysis informs the development of the teacher evaluation framework, which will be presented at the end of the chapter and serves as the foundation for the teacher evaluation tool. *Table 7: Application of the Wise Practices model to Teacher Evaluation at SICS* provides a brief overview of these seven elements, offering a concise snapshot of what will be further elaborated

upon in the analysis. The definitions of each element are sourced from the original text (Calliou & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2015) and have been expressed in my own words. The chapters' sections are primarily structured around these themes, except for *Accountability and Stewardship*, which, rather than being a standalone section, is embedded throughout. This approach underscores the fundamental role of this theme across all areas of the teacher evaluation process, highlighting its critical importance in shaping and guiding the overall framework.

*Table 8: Emergent Themes and Subthemes from Educator Insights at SICS*

Element of Success	Defining the Key Elements	Relevance to SICS Teacher Evaluation
Identity & Culture	A strong grounding in cultural identity and traditional knowledge is essential for effective leadership. Leaders must integrate community culture, language, and history into their roles.	At SICS, teacher evaluations should ensure educators deliver culturally responsive education, fostering a deep sense of cultural belonging and connection for students. Evaluations must assess teachers' ability to integrate and adapt instruction to meet the cultural needs of the students.
Leadership	Leadership is action-oriented, focusing on implementing ideas and creating results. It extends beyond formal authority roles and includes individuals who lead by example in the community.	Teachers at SICS serve as educational leaders by actively driving the collective school vision. Evaluations should assess how well these leaders implement this vision, foster collaboration, and ensure that the educational environment reflects and supports these core values.
Strategic Vision and Planning	Leaders must establish long-term goals and create strategic plans to realize them. This involves proactive resource allocation and aligning actions with the community's vision.	Administrators should use evaluations to create individualized growth plans for teachers, just as teachers develop tailored growth plans for their students. This ongoing process drives the entire school toward its collective vision, where students are nurtured as future leaders within the community.
Good Governance & Management	Good governance requires transparent, well-structured systems to ensure that initiatives align with community values and goals. It involves input from various stakeholders and operates with cultural integrity.	Teacher evaluations at SICS must be guided by transparent processes that promote ongoing growth rather than serving as static assessments. The evaluation system must be more linear than top-down, ensuring a collaborative approach where a strong culture of support is embedded.

Accountability & Stewardship	Leaders are accountable for managing community resources effectively and transparently, ensuring that decisions align with community interests and values.	At SICS, teachers are responsible for supporting students' academic growth and fulfilling their roles as cultural stewards within the community. Evaluations should measure how well educators contribute to students' emotional and cultural growth, in alignment with the community's holistic vision of success.
Performance Evaluation	Regular evaluation ensures that initiatives meet goals and that leaders are held accountable for their effectiveness. Culturally competent evaluations are essential in Indigenous contexts.	Teacher evaluations at SICS are crucial for holding educators accountable for fulfilling their responsibilities. However, the process should promote shared accountability between educators and administrators. The evaluation process should foster mutual growth and not be perceived as one-sided.
Collaborations, Partnerships, & External Relationships	Building external partnerships is crucial for community success, ensuring mutual support and resources from outside entities.	Teacher evaluations at SICS should involve collaboration with parents, community members, and other Stó:lō schools. This approach ensures the evaluation process aligns with the original community vision of being deeply connected to and engaged with families and the community.

**Strategic Vision, Planning & Leadership**

Strategic vision and planning refer to the need for leaders to establish long-term goals for the community that inspire and motivate its members to support initiatives that drive positive change (Calliou & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2015). These strategic plans provide a framework for decision-making and help ensure that resources are directed towards collective goals. At first glance, leadership in this context might seem to refer solely to those in formal positions of authority, such as administrators at SICS. However, leadership is an action-oriented concept that involves turning ideas into tangible results and is not limited to individuals in formal positions of power (Calliou & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2015). Every educator at SICS can contribute to realizing a collective vision for the school. As one educator expressed:

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*“Going back to that collaborative approach of community, teachers, professionals, we need to come together and really be on the same page and strive to achieve the vision of the Elders that first created the school. We definitely want to honour them and their dreams.”*

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This responsibility extends beyond educators, as support staff also play a vital role. In a community school, where many staff members are from the community, their presence deepens the school’s connection to the community and helps drive a collective vision. Another educator emphasized this point, stating:

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*“Everything has to drive, everything has to work together, everybody has to be on the same page, including admin, including the cleaners, including the secretaries, including the maintenance people. Everybody has to be on the same page, and we have to be there for one specific thing, and that’s our children.”*

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The collective efforts referenced above are intrinsically tied to the foundational vision established by the Seabird Island School Board (SISB). As previously outlined in the introduction, this vision emphasized child development as a partnership between home, school, and community (Gardner, 1984). The vision also highlighted the importance of integrating Stó:lō history, culture, and language. While cultural preservation remained central, the vision extended beyond this focus, emphasizing the Board’s broader educational priorities. Specifically, the SISB’s policy extended to the need for academic achievement and preparing students to succeed in a multicultural society. Oskineegish (2014) reinforces the dual responsibility of First Nations schools to ensure both academic success and the preservation of cultural identity. This comprehensive approach is reflected in the following statement:

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*“Education is preparation for total living. It encompasses the physical, social, psychological, spiritual, and academic achievement of each person. Education should provide the student with the knowledge and skills to live in a multicultural society. Our education system should raise the academic achievement and increase the number of Indian high school graduates. The School Board will ensure that our students have the opportunity to choose the best in a multicultural society. The School Board will ensure that our students have mastered the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic (Gardner, 1985, p. 26 & 27)”.*

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Although the SISB vision was clearly articulated, it was not until I began researching for my dissertation that I discovered and understood the original vision for the school—a vision I had previously been unaware of (Gardner, 1986). Research demonstrates that clear school vision statements are crucial in shaping school culture and driving meaningful organizational changes that enhance the learning environment and student outcomes (Daniel et al., 2024). This observation underscores the importance of ensuring that all educators at SICS understand and embrace the school’s vision from the outset of their teaching journey. To ensure this, the vision will be placed on the first inside page of the teacher evaluation tool, reinforcing its foundational role in guiding educational practices. While providing this tool to teachers at the beginning of the school year would be ideal, this placement serves as a clear reminder of their roles in driving the community vision.

### **Performance Evaluation**

In the previous section, I outlined the community vision for education at SICS. Now, I explain why evaluation is essential in aligning staff performance with this vision. As noted, "staff performance is tied to strategic objectives and that results are being achieved" (Calliou &

Wesley-Esquimaux, 2015, p. 48). Furthermore, the evaluation tool responds to the need for "an Indigenous evaluation framework that makes room for culturally competent evaluations" (Calliou & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2015, p. 48). This tool is grounded in the perspectives of Indigenous educators, who make up the majority of study participants (13 of 19), ensuring that Indigenous voices inform the evaluation process. Central to this tool are the non-negotiable pillars of cultural responsiveness, community engagement, and family involvement. These elements are central to the process and critical in defining educators' competence and growth.

While the findings overwhelmingly demonstrate that educators acknowledge the necessity of delivering a culturally responsive Stó:lō education, they also reveal ambiguity regarding how to effectively implement such an education and how administrators can evaluate teachers in this domain. Moreover, the literature emphasizes the importance of ongoing support for educators navigating these complexities (Morcom, 2017b; Oskineegish & Berger, 2021). This body of research further reinforces the notion that while evaluation is pivotal, it must be part of a comprehensive framework for delivering culturally responsive education at SICS. The wise practices model further demonstrates this by recognizing performance evaluation as just one of seven elements of success (Calliou & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2015).

Delivering a culturally responsive education is undoubtedly complex, but a responsive evaluation tool is the first crucial step. To illustrate this, I draw upon the Understanding by Design (UbD) framework, which centers on backward design (McTighe & Wiggins, 2005). At its core, backward design starts with clearly identifying desired outcomes—what students should understand and be able to do. After defining the desired outcomes, assessments are created to measure students' ability to demonstrate their understanding and mastery of these outcomes. The final step is crafting a learning plan that actively supports and guides students toward achieving

these goals, ensuring that each learning activity directly aligns with assessments, which in turn aligns with the desired outcomes. I learned about this framework during my Master of Education program, and it was crucial to my first year of planning as a teacher. The most valuable aspect was how it pushed me to start by thinking about what I wanted students to take away at the end of a unit. This shift in perspective helped me focus on the big picture and made my planning more intentional and focused.

With the backward design framework in mind, I see the teacher evaluation tool embodying the same principles. The research, combining best practices and educator insights, defined the desired outcomes, central to the teacher evaluation framework that I present at the end of this chapter. This framework laid the foundation for the teacher evaluation tool, which serves as the critical mechanism for assessing how teachers align with these desired outcomes. The final step, which this work will not directly address but is of immense importance, is the creation of an administrator learning plan. This plan would serve as the strategic roadmap, ensuring that administrators are fully equipped to guide and support teachers in meeting the expectations outlined in the evaluation tool. In alignment with the school's original vision, the plan will outline how administrators can foster teacher growth and prepare them to deliver a culturally responsive and holistic educational experience. It is crucial, as it ensures that educators are not only evaluated but also fully supported in reaching the competencies outlined, bridging the gap between expectations and effective practice.

### **Good Governance & Management**

In discussing the importance of governance and management, Calliou and Wesley-Esquimaux (2015) emphasize the responsibility of leadership in establishing systems that support strategic objectives. They assert, “leaders must set up good governance and management

structures and systems to effectively carry out the goals and program needs for their communities” (p. 47). Within this context, each administrator is responsible for devising a learning plan to support teachers in meeting the expectations outlined in the evaluation tool. While the specifics of these plans vary among individual administrators, this study focuses primarily on evaluation.

Despite the emphasis on evaluation, teacher insights have revealed an important theme: a solid evaluation structure needs to be embedded within a broader framework for teacher growth. This reflects the interconnectedness of IK, where growth and learning are understood within a relational and community-driven context (Morcom, 2017a). Evaluations are just one component of a much larger process of teacher development. Two key themes emerged from the findings related to the role of administrators in this process: (1) fostering a growth mindset and commitment to lifelong learning, and (2) ensuring a supportive, transparent evaluation process. These themes underscore educators' desire for evaluations that promote professional growth and are seen as a supportive, ongoing part of their development rather than isolated, high-stakes events. Teachers highlighted the significance of feeling supported by administrators, which they identified as a precursor to embracing a growth-oriented process. This sense of support signals that administrators prioritize their well-being and professional growth.

Educators frequently referenced the idea of a "growth mindset," a concept popularized by Dweck (2017), which emphasizes the belief that abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work. While several educators explicitly mentioned the importance of cultivating this mindset, it was also implicitly referenced throughout the findings. This suggests that many educators view continuous improvement not only as a personal goal but as an integral part of their professional development and the evaluation process. Evaluations, in this context, are seen

as opportunities for fostering growth and development, rather than solely tools for assessing performance.

Building on this, it became clear from both the findings and literature that educators strongly preferred regular check-ins rather than isolated evaluations. This preference aligns with Goe et al.'s (2012) research, which demonstrated that frequent assessments are more effective in promoting teacher growth than high-stakes, one-off evaluations. These check-ins allow administrators to gain a more holistic view of teacher progress and adjust professional development plans as needed in real-time. At SICS, the new evaluation tool will include three formative assessments spaced throughout the year and a final evaluation, ensuring that assessments are continuous and serve as part of a developmental process.

Moreover, post-observation dialogue was highlighted as a critical element of fostering this growth-oriented process. Danielson (2012) emphasizes that post-observation discussions are vital for creating professional development plans that are reflective and constructive. These dialogues allow teachers to collaborate with administrators, focusing on actionable strategies for improvement. Similarly, Mathers and Oliva (2008) stress the importance of using post-observation feedback to set developmental goals. Teachers are generally familiar with SMART goals—Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound—which provide a clear and structured pathway for tracking progress. These goals help ensure that feedback is reflective but also actionable and goal oriented. These principles will be integrated into the evaluation tool, ensuring that post-observation discussions lead to the development of clear, actionable goals. This structured approach will enable educators to track their progress effectively while fostering a growth-oriented mindset.

Incorporating these principles into the evaluation tool, administrators will initiate post-observation discussions with positive feedback before offering targeted areas for improvement. This approach not only helps build trust but also reinforces the supportive nature of the evaluation process. By acknowledging strengths first, the process encourages educators to feel confident and supported in their growth journey. Scheeler et al. (2004) also emphasize that timely and constructive feedback is crucial for improving teaching effectiveness.

Following this evaluation structure, the final evaluation tool at SICS will empower educators by allowing them to evaluate their administrators. Specifically, the tool will allow teachers to evaluate key elements of administrative support, including transparency, supportiveness, and the degree to which administrators foster a growth-oriented process. Transparency will be evaluated based on the clarity and consistency with which administrators communicate the expectations and objectives of the evaluation process. Educators will be able to determine if the criteria for evaluations are clearly defined and if they align with the broader goals of teacher development, ensuring that there is no ambiguity about how performance is measured.

Supportiveness, a critical aspect of the evaluation tool, will focus on how well administrators address the emotional and professional well-being of educators. Educators will be able to assess if they feel genuinely supported in their professional growth and whether administrators provide constructive, actionable feedback that encourages development rather than focusing solely on deficits. This feedback will be evaluated not just in terms of emotional support but also in its practical implications—whether administrators provide specific resources, such as mentoring or targeted professional development, that help teachers meet the expectations outlined in the evaluation.

The final component of the tool, centered around fostering a growth-oriented process, will allow teachers to assess whether administrators actively create an environment that encourages continuous learning. Administrators will be evaluated on their ability to set up systems for ongoing feedback, including follow-up meetings and check-ins that turn the evaluation process into an ongoing dialogue, rather than a one-time event. This will ensure that teachers view the evaluation as an integral part of their professional development journey, not just as a performance review.

By incorporating these mechanisms into the evaluation tool, SICS ensures that evaluations become a tool for growth, supporting both the professional development of teachers and the broader educational objectives of the school. As noted by Putman et al. (2018), fostering continuous professional growth through evaluations is critical, and this framework ensures that administrators play an active role in facilitating this ongoing development.

### **Culture & Identity**

Shifting from the discussion of the evaluation process, it's important to now focus on the criteria used to evaluate teachers. While the dual nature of the original vision stressed both academic skills like reading and writing alongside cultural and community responsiveness, the research and interview questions leaned more heavily toward the latter. This does not downplay academic success but reflects an understanding that SICS is widely recognized as a model for First Nations schools in terms of reading and writing achievement. This is evidenced by our participation in the Martin Family Initiative's Model Schools Literacy Project (MSLP), an evidence-based literacy improvement plan that supports students' reading and writing success.

As discussed, all educators are considered educational leaders in the wise practices model. At SICS, "for any Indigenous leader to be competent in advocating and representing their

community's interests, they must have a strong understanding of, and grounding in, their culture, traditional knowledge, and historical connection to their traditional territories" (Calliou & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2015, p. 46). While not all teachers may be Indigenous, the responsibility to advocate for and represent community interests has been established in the vision, emphasizing the need for all educators to be grounded in cultural knowledge and community connections.

Furthermore, the importance of culturally responsive education has been well-established in the literature, and educators have also acknowledged the importance of integrating Stó:lō culture into the curriculum to ensure that the educational environment reflects and honours students' cultural identities. However, the findings indicate that culture is not yet a central part of the classroom experience, with many educators expressing uncertainty about effectively incorporating it into daily teaching. Aside from one mention of a unit plan on the salmon cycle, there was a general lack of consistent cultural integration. One educator highlighted the importance of involving those who live and embody Stó:lō culture, stating:

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*"I feel there's a lot of just trying to check a box just for checking a box. If you're going to check a box, just watch a movie that day then. Don't try to do a lesson, where you're saying, " Oh, we're going to learn about culture without really bringing in Stó:lō knowledge, bringing in cultural Elders, community members. If you're not comfortable with teaching it, find someone and bringing them in who will. As a teacher, if you're not comfortable, that's okay. There's nothing wrong with not being comfortable in teaching something new, but reach out to people who can connect you with people who will bring that to your classroom for that firsthand experience".*

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This reflection underscores a critical issue—ensuring that the integration of Stó:lō culture is deeply grounded in lived experience. Like many educators, I faced familiar challenges in

delivering culturally responsive education. While topics such as residential schools or Orange Shirt Day were often highlighted, they were frequently treated as isolated initiatives rather than components of a sustained effort toward cultural integration. Having completed a bachelor's degree in Indigenous Studies, I believed I was better equipped than those without grounding in IK or content. Yet, like many others, I still struggled to authentically weave Indigenous content into my teaching. My degree provided valuable knowledge, but possessing a degree alone does not necessarily lead to cultural competence—especially when every community presents a unique cultural context that requires a nuanced understanding.

Moreover, cultural competence alone does not guarantee cultural responsiveness. Competence is a necessary precursor, involving knowledge and understanding of a culture. However, cultural responsiveness demands more—it requires actively applying that knowledge in ways that are relevant, meaningful, and respectful within the educational environment. This distinction is crucial, as simply being knowledgeable is not enough; educators must adapt and respond to the cultural dynamics of the specific communities they serve. As Oskineegish and Berger (2021) note, “teachers who are willing to look for support and resources on Indigenous content are more likely to develop culturally appropriate lessons” (p. 129). Ultimately, this willingness and active pursuit of responsiveness enables meaningful cultural integration in the classroom.

I sometimes feel that the more I learned about IK, the more I realized how ill-equipped I was to authentically integrate it into my practice. This feeling stemmed from my exposure to elements of IK that are deeply rooted in lived and experiential learning. It became clear that understanding certain knowledge concepts was different from living them. However, this is not an excuse. The findings from my research underscored how, generally speaking, educators at

SICS, including myself, positioned ourselves as what Webb and Mashford-Pringle (2022) define as "perfect strangers." Webb and Mashford-Pringle argue that many non-Indigenous teachers, when confronted with the ongoing legacy of colonialism in education, adopt a "perfect stranger" stance, distancing themselves from Indigenous cultures and, in doing so, avoiding deeper engagement.

This distancing was evident in the reflections of many educators at SICS, who recognized the need for a more culturally responsive approach to educating Stó:lō students. However, despite this recognition, efforts often stalled at acknowledgment, with limited follow-through. This challenge, however, is part of a broader systemic issue, revealing how deeply entrenched colonial legacies remain in the education system. It reflects a societal pattern where cultural responsiveness, though recognized as necessary, frequently falls short of addressing the deeper barriers that prevent genuine inclusion and integration of marginalized perspectives. As one educator explained:

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*"It's a colonial system that's 90% colonial, 10% cultural. Even the mindset, we talk about these things are geared towards sort of a Western approach of living, but the mindset of -- and I'm guilty for this as well, I have to stop and really think about, okay, I need to interrogate some of my views and some of my beliefs, because I've been -- and many other Indigenous people and teachers, I'm sure, have been impacted by colonialism."*

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While the literature emphasizes that teachers must take the initiative in integrating Indigenous content, it also underscores the need for providing educators with “ongoing support to increase their ability to incorporate appropriate and relevant Indigenous content and pedagogy in their teaching practice” (Oskineegish & Berger, 2021, p. 132). This idea? Quote? aligns with Morcom's (2017b) findings, highlighting the additional support required for successful

Indigenous language immersion programs and cultural education. These insights collectively point to the necessity of adopting a whole-school approach in delivering a culturally responsive Stó:lō education. Such an approach would ensure that educators at SICS are not working in isolation but are instead part of a collaborative, school-wide effort to embed Indigenous perspectives and practices into the curriculum. This will require equipping teachers with more resources, as well as providing continuous support, professional development, and mentorship to help them effectively fulfill this role. Without sustained and systemic support, even the most well-intentioned efforts may fail to bring about the deeper cultural integration needed to serve Stó:lō students meaningfully.

Additionally, this approach must account for the diverse spectrum of cultural responsiveness among educators at SICS—a critical insight raised by many teachers. They acknowledged that this spectrum is evident in various ways: some teachers are new to Stó:lō communities, with little to no cultural exposure before arriving at SICS, while others were born and raised in Stó:lō communities, spending their entire lives immersed in the culture. This diversity in background creates varying levels of comfort and familiarity when integrating Stó:lō perspectives into their teaching practice. While these insights strongly support the need for an evaluation tool that assesses teachers' ability to integrate Stó:lō content and pedagogy, they also highlight the importance of recognizing where each educator is on their cultural learning journey. Rather than viewing cultural responsiveness as a fixed starting point, it must be recognized that educators are at different stages of deepening their relationship with Stó:lō knowledge and practices. This recognition is critical to fostering growth and ensuring that support is tailored to meet teachers wherever they are on this continuum.

The ambiguity around what it means to deliver culturally responsive education and the diverse stages of cultural understanding among educators is why the final evaluation tool will focus less on rigid metrics and more on recognizing where educators are in their cultural learning journey. Central to this part of the evaluation will be establishing culturally responsive growth goals, ensuring that each educator is supported in deepening their ability to authentically integrate Stó:lō knowledge and practices into their teaching. This approach acknowledges the complexity and individualized nature of cultural responsiveness, fostering a more meaningful and adaptive framework for educator development.

### ***Retention and Representation of Stó:lō Educators***

When reflecting on the gaps in delivering a truly culturally responsive education, particularly the need to integrate culture meaningfully and authentically, it becomes clear that education must be rooted in students' lived experiences, values, and perspectives. This reinforces the long-standing need for strong community engagement, which is central to the original vision for SICS and consistently emphasized in the literature. Engaging the Stó:lō community has always been essential to ensuring that education reflects and honours the cultural realities of the students. What this work has helped me understand is that Stó:lō educators are the most vital form of community engagement. Their presence ensures that cultural connections remain strong, as they deeply understand students' daily lives and cultural backgrounds.

Muñiz (2020) notes that culturally responsive teaching leverages students' cultural knowledge and experiences as bridges to academic content. This process is much more challenging when educators lack close ties to the community. Gay (2002) adds that grounding learning in students' cultural realities makes education more accessible and meaningful. Seeing educators from their community is powerful for Stó:lō students, allowing students to better

envision possibilities for their futures. This representation helps dismantle the perception that specific opportunities or achievements are reserved for others, providing a powerful sense of validation and possibility. It encourages students to pursue their goals with the confidence that their background and experiences are not obstacles but assets in their journey.

As highlighted by the retention data (Table 6), a significant shift in Stó:lō representation at SICS brings concerns about the school's ability to maintain its culturally responsive approach. Losing teachers deeply embedded in the community and culture disrupts the continuity of cultural knowledge and the vision of community-centred education that the school must uphold. The retention of Stó:lō educators plays a critical role in fostering a culturally responsive environment where students can see their cultural identities reflected in their education. While it is unfair to speculate on the reasons behind this shift, the implications for the school's vision are clear.

As Cranston (2014) emphasizes, recruiting and retaining educators who demonstrate strong cultural competence, particularly those who understand First Nations history, traditions, and relationships with the land, is essential for creating an environment that supports students' cultural and academic success. Teachers from Stó:lō communities are uniquely positioned to build deep, authentic relationships with students and their families, fostering a sense of continuity between school and community. When these teachers leave, the school risks losing its connection to the cultural contexts shaping students' experiences and worldviews.

### **Collaborations, Partnerships & External Relationships**

Beyond recognizing the importance of having a Stó:lō educator body, we now turn to the broader need for community engagement outside the school environment. Calliou and Wesley-Esquimaux (2015) highlight the vital role of collaborations, partnerships, and external

relationships in fostering success within Indigenous communities. In this context, we will explore collaboration beyond the immediate school community, including the involvement of parents and other community members. This aligns with Oskineegish's (2014) recommendation for teachers to cultivate strong relationships with Elders, families, and community members to acquire the knowledge necessary for integrating culturally responsive practices into their teaching. Collaboration between educators and parents is crucial for supporting students' learning and development, a point many educators emphasize in the findings. Numerous insights stress the importance of these partnerships, with effective communication identified as essential in building strong relationships and ensuring student success.

Openness and transparency in decision-making are essential to building community trust, as Calliou and Wesley-Esquimaux (2015) emphasized. The findings echoed this sentiment, highlighting the importance of parents and the community witnessing firsthand how educators interact with students. Direct engagement strengthens the bond between families and the school, allowing parents to see the care and education their children receive. This trust-building process also plays a crucial role in de-stigmatizing the formal education system, which has historically been harmful to Indigenous students in Canada. By fostering open communication and strong relationships with the community, schools like SICS can challenge the negative legacy of formal education and rebuild confidence in the school as a supportive and culturally respectful institution. Klump and McNeir (2005) further reinforce that this active engagement is essential for reconnecting families and communities historically alienated from the educational system.

Educators emphasize the importance of establishing early communication with parents to ensure a unified approach to supporting students' education. Early opportunities for parents to share their aspirations and concerns are crucial. This reinforces the idea of education as a

partnership between home and school, where educators and parents collaborate to support students' holistic growth. Additionally, Muñiz (2020) identifies family and community engagement as one of the eight competencies for culturally responsive teaching, highlighting the importance of involving families in the educational process.

Educators also highlight how strong relationships with the community are foundational to their ability to understand and engage with Stó:lō culture. These connections enable educators to gain a deeper understanding of Stó:lō culture and the unique dynamics of the community. Many educators at SICS emphasized the importance of participating in community events such as feasts, festivals, and traditional ceremonies. Engaging in cultural activities like canoe racing was seen as a way for educators to grasp the more profound cultural significance of these traditions, including the spiritual preparation and holistic care of body and spirit they involve. This kind of immersion goes beyond superficial understanding. It allows educators to truly appreciate how cultural practices shape their students' identities and offers valuable insights for developing more culturally responsive teaching methods.

While educators overwhelmingly address the need for parental collaboration and community engagement, they also shed light on the fact that both are very challenging for administrators to evaluate, as these interactions often occur outside of school hours and beyond the school environment. The findings suggest that parental engagement remains particularly difficult for administrators to assess. Although administrators at SICS emphasize the importance of educators maintaining consistent contact with parents, measuring the depth and quality of this engagement proves challenging. This difficulty ties into the broader theme of trust—educators are expected to maintain their responsibilities and duties in these areas, even with minimal oversight from administrators. Like integrating Stó:lō culture into teaching practices, these facets

will be assessed through self-evaluation, reflective practice, and the development of growth goals in the teacher evaluation tool.

### **Effective Instruction, Holistic Assessment and Classroom Management**

Following the discussion on culturally responsive education, we will focus on effective instruction, classroom management, and holistic assessment. Mainstream teacher evaluations often emphasize vital aspects such as classroom management, instructional delivery, and student engagement (Mireles-Rios et al., 2019; Province of BC, 2023). However, the findings and educators' insights from SICS still underscore the importance of approaching these areas with cultural responsiveness. I want to acknowledge that this theme requires less expansion, as the insights from SICS already provide a clear and well-defined understanding of what effective instruction, classroom management, and holistic assessment should entail. Educators at SICS have done an outstanding job operationalizing these components, and their perspectives will directly inform the evaluation framework. With this foundation in mind, I will outline how these insights will shape the evaluation tool, ensuring it accurately reflects these core areas.

A significant theme emerging from the findings is the need for clarity of purpose in lessons. Teachers emphasized that lesson objectives should be part of a broader year-long curricular plan, ensuring that each lesson contributes to the overarching goals for student learning. These plans must account for the fact that many teachers at SICS serve in generalist roles, teaching a variety of disciplines. As one educator emphasized, evaluations should ensure that teachers demonstrate a strong understanding across multiple subjects, which aligns with Shulman's (1986) assertion that "the person who presumes to teach subject matter to children must demonstrate knowledge of that subject matter as a prerequisite to teaching" (p. 5). The evaluation tool will ensure that teachers are evaluated across multiple disciplines.

In addition to ensuring alignment with broader curricular goals, clear and specific outcomes are crucial in day-to-day lessons. To reflect this in the evaluation tool, educators must display daily learning outcomes in the classroom, framed as “I Can” statements. These statements, which are student-friendly expressions of learning objectives, clarify what students will achieve by the end of the lesson. For example, rather than simply putting a lesson title like "Salmon Cycle" in front of the class, the "I Can" statement would say, "I can explain the life cycle of a salmon." These clear, accessible outcomes ensure that students understand their learning and how each lesson fits into the larger academic framework across various subjects. As part of evaluating instructional delivery, administrators should be able to immediately identify learning objectives upon entering the classroom and observe that instruction aligns with the stated outcomes. Integrating daily lesson objectives with broader interdisciplinary goals ensures that the curriculum is cohesive, student-centred, and well-paced throughout the academic year, supporting a well-rounded learning experience for students.

Having established the importance of clear learning objectives in guiding instruction, it is equally important to consider how students are provided multiple outlets to demonstrate their learning. Educators at SICS emphasized the need for diverse assessment strategies, recognizing that students learn and express their understanding differently, extending from Gardner’s multiple intelligences theory. This approach ensures that assessments account for various strengths, offering a fuller picture of student learning by accommodating different learning styles. This means moving beyond traditional tests to include diverse forms of expression, such as presentations, creative projects, written reflections, oral storytelling, artistic performances, or hands-on problem-solving tasks. These approaches allow students to showcase their learning in ways that capture a more comprehensive view of their development.

Following this, educators underscored the importance of self-reflection. Self-assessment helps students become more aware of their learning progress and challenges, fostering autonomy and ownership over their development. Preston and Claypool (2021) critique traditional assessments, arguing that they fail to account for the emotional, spiritual, and social dimensions of learning, which are critical for holistic student growth. This further reinforces the need for self-reflective practices, allowing students to engage more deeply with their learning experiences beyond academic performance.

Learner portfolios will be essential to teacher evaluations, providing evidence of student development that might not be visible during classroom observations. These portfolios are collections of student work that showcase a variety of formative and summative assessments across different subjects, offering a comprehensive view of their learning journey. Gabi and Mavengere (2019) note that “portfolios encourage students to reflect on their strengths, needs, errors, interests, challenges, and objectives, as well as encourage interactive processes among students, teachers, and parents” (p. 25). Based on my experience during my first year of teaching, I found portfolios particularly effective during parent-teacher conferences. They provided a visual and reflective representation of student growth, facilitating more meaningful conversations about progress and areas for improvement. As part of the evaluation process, teachers will be required to share these portfolios with administrators during post-observation discussions, ensuring that both formative and summative assessments are included. Additionally, including student self-assessments within these portfolios will capture the holistic nature of student growth, including self-awareness and critical thinking.

Effective student assessment is closely linked to the classroom environment in which learning takes place. For students to fully demonstrate their progress and understanding, the

classroom must be a structured, supportive, and respectful atmosphere. These elements are central to effective classroom management, ensuring students can focus, feel secure, and interact meaningfully with their learning and assessments. Classroom management is widely regarded as a critical element of effective teaching, and it often becomes a central focus during administrator observations (Mireles-Rios et al., 2019). Educators at SICS echoed this sentiment, emphasizing that even the most well-prepared lesson can fall short without solid classroom management. However, the findings also highlight the need for culturally responsive classroom management (CRCM), although educators did not explicitly use this term. They did point to the importance of adapting management strategies to be sensitive to the cultural context. Drawing on both the literature and the educators' insights, I will further demonstrate how classroom management will be evaluated at SICS.

One crucial point raised by educators was the need to use the least severe intervention necessary when managing behavior. While this approach could apply to any school, my experience at community schools has taught me that there is zero tolerance for any form of educator aggression. This principle is especially important in all communities, where students deserve an environment that prioritizes safety and respect. Given the historical context in Indigenous communities, this becomes even more significant, as these communities have faced the lasting impact of abuse in formal education systems. However, ensuring a safe, respectful environment is a universal priority across all educational settings.

In addition to maintaining a structured and secure learning environment, educators at SICS emphasized the importance of fostering strong student-teacher relationships. This involves managing interactions with students in a way that builds respect and trust. Educators noted that creating a positive, respectful classroom environment is foundational to effective classroom

management. These relationships help shape the sense of safety and security essential for learning. Strong student-teacher relationships foster an environment where students feel safe participating, engaging, and taking risks in their learning. This insight aligns with the literature on culturally responsive classroom management (CRCM), which emphasizes that “a commitment to building caring classrooms” is a core component of effective management strategies (Llewellyn & Boon, 2015).

Engagement through relevant and interactive lessons also featured prominently in educators' feedback. Teachers emphasized tailoring lessons to students' experiences and interests, ensuring active participation. This aligns with another essential CRCM component: “knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds.” By understanding their students' cultural and personal experiences, educators are better equipped to create lessons that resonate with them, fostering greater engagement and participation. The idea that student engagement is inseparable from effective classroom management also ties into CRCM principles, reinforcing that classroom management extends beyond discipline to foster a learning environment where students feel connected and supported. To maintain a well-structured classroom, student engagement is essential, as it creates an atmosphere of involvement and focus, reducing disruptions.

To tangibly integrate student feedback and classroom management strategies into the teacher evaluation process at SICS, several key elements will be incorporated. While teachers will not be graded directly on student opinions, anecdotal feedback from student pullouts will offer valuable insights into their perceptions of classroom engagement, focus, and the learning environment. These pullouts, which are short informal conversations with students outside the classroom, will be used to gauge student understanding of learning objectives and assess their level of connection with the material and classroom atmosphere. This feedback will be shared

with teachers during post-assessment dialogues, allowing them to reflect on how their classroom management and instructional practices are perceived by students. This insight and classroom observations will focus on how well teachers maintain order and foster a respectful, supportive environment. Evaluations will review culturally responsive strategies, particularly in minimizing disruptions and using the least severe interventions necessary when addressing behaviour.

By integrating both observations of classroom management and student feedback on engagement, the evaluation process will provide a holistic understanding of how teachers create structured, caring, and effective learning environments across different subjects. This combined approach ensures that teachers are evaluated on their ability to manage the classroom and their effectiveness in fostering a dynamic, inclusive space for student learning across disciplines. By addressing both classroom management and subject matter expertise, the evaluation tool supports educators in balancing these responsibilities, ensuring a rich, well-managed learning environment that supports student success in all areas of instruction.

### **The Creation of a Culturally Responsive Teacher Evaluation Framework**

The analysis in this chapter laid the foundation for creating the teacher evaluation framework at SICS. Drawing from literature and community-driven insights, the framework ensures educators are supported in their growth while advancing the school's broader vision of educational and cultural excellence. This approach reflects the need to move beyond decontextualized best practices, focusing on wise pedagogical perspectives and practices. The framework addresses instructional effectiveness and how educators support student well-being, engage with the community, and pursue continuous professional growth. It includes opportunities for self-evaluation, enabling educators to reflect on their practices. Additionally, it allows teachers to provide feedback on the evaluation process, informing administrators about

their experiences and perceptions. This structure promotes accountability while ensuring the process remains rooted in wise practices.

The following table highlights the primary evaluation themes and their application to the evaluation tool. The evaluation tool itself, Seabird Assessment for Learning, Mentorship, and Ongoing Nurturing (SALMON), can be found in Appendix G. I have received permission to include this tool from my Stó:lō Education Committee (SEC).

*Table 9: Teacher Evaluation Framework at SICS*

<b>Evaluation Themes</b>	<b>Application to the Evaluation Tool</b>
<b>Cultural Responsiveness, Family Collaboration &amp; Community Engagement</b>	
Stó:lō Cultural Responsiveness & Halq'eméylem Integration	Teachers' ability to integrate Stó:lō cultural knowledge, traditions, and the Halq'eméylem language into their lessons will be assessed. Collaboration with the language and culture team will be required. Evidence of culturally responsive lesson plans and classroom activities will be vital in demonstrating effective integration.
Communication & Collaboration with Families	Teachers will be assessed on their communication and relationship-building with families, focusing on how family input is integrated into supporting student learning. Regular and meaningful interactions with families that foster trust and promote student development will be critical measures of success.
Community Participation & Engagement	Teachers will be assessed on their involvement in community and school events, focusing on building trust and fostering inclusivity in the classroom. Active participation in cultural gatherings and significant community activities will demonstrate their engagement and connection with the broader community.
<b>Instructional Design, Classroom Management &amp; Holistic Assessment</b>	
Curriculum Planning, Pacing, and Learning Objectives	Teachers' ability to plan and pace curriculum effectively throughout the year will be assessed. Clear, student-friendly learning objectives that align with long-term outcomes should be visible in the classroom to support student understanding and progression.
Classroom Management	Classroom management will be assessed based on how well teachers create a respectful and inclusive environment that supports students' emotional and cultural needs. Effective strategies that foster a positive classroom climate will be central to the assessment.
Holistic Assessment Strategies	Teachers will be assessed on their use of holistic assessments that capture a range of student abilities. Alternative assessments, such as portfolios and presentations, will be reviewed for their effectiveness in measuring student progress across different dimensions.
<b>Collaborative Growth &amp; Leadership Development</b>	

Professional Development Plan	Teachers will set professional development goals that align with the school’s strategic needs. These goals will focus on enhancing teaching practices and contributing to student success, ensuring alignment with both individual growth and the broader objectives of the school.
Collaborative Leadership	Teachers’ contributions to leadership within the school, including mentoring peers, supporting collaborative planning, and taking part in school improvement initiatives, will be evaluated. The focus will be on how effectively teachers foster collaborative growth and contribute to building a strong leadership culture within the school.
Educator Self-Care Routine	Teachers will be assessed on how well they balance professional responsibilities with personal well-being. The evaluation will emphasize sustainable self-care practices that support long-term success in both their professional role and personal life.
<b>Educator Evaluation of Administrators</b>	
Facilitation of the Evaluation Process	Teachers will assess how effectively administrators manage the evaluation process, focusing on whether it promotes transparency and professional growth. The emphasis will be on the overall structure and execution of the evaluation system to ensure it supports continuous improvement.

**Chapter Overview**

This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the teacher evaluation process at SICS through the wise practices model, emphasizing the need for culturally responsive and context-specific approaches. By connecting best practices from the literature with insights from SICS educators, the chapter establishes an evaluation framework aligned with the community’s educational vision. Central to the framework is supporting teachers in their growth as they progress in integrating Stó:lō culture, language, and values into their teaching, meeting them where they are on their cultural learning journey.

Key components highlighted in the framework include the importance of clear learning objectives, culturally responsive classroom management, and holistic assessments that consider students' academic, emotional, and cultural growth. The chapter also emphasizes the role of self-evaluation and collaborative growth in promoting continuous professional development, with the evaluation tool incorporating mechanisms such as student pullouts and post-evaluation dialogues to encourage teacher reflection and meaningful improvement.

The evaluation process at SICS focuses on administrators assessing teachers and emphasizes the importance of self-reflection and the creation of individualized growth plans. These plans are designed to support and hold educators accountable for their growth in building connections with parents and engaging with the community. This approach ensures that teachers' professional development aligns with the school's broader cultural and educational goals, ultimately enhancing their ability to nurture students' cultural identities.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

The teacher evaluation process at SICS serves as an extension of the original vision for the school, driven by the literature on best practices and the insights of educators at SICS. It functions as a critical mechanism for fostering teacher development, cultural integration, and community engagement. Grounded in the wise practices model, the analysis highlights the need for approaches rooted in the school's context to ensure the evaluation system is responsive to the unique needs of the community, the school, and its educators.

One of the key findings is that teacher evaluations at SICS cannot be examined in isolation from the overall school culture. The themes identified in this study—such as fostering a growth mindset and establishing transparent and supportive evaluation processes—highlight that how the evaluation process is facilitated is just as important as the criteria being assessed. Moreover, how evaluation is carried out reflects the school's culture, emphasizing that growth, transparency, and support must take precedence within the school environment.

The analysis further reveals that teacher evaluations at SICS need to reflect both academic outcomes and the cultural and emotional aspects of student learning. While educators recognize the importance of delivering culturally responsive education, there are still challenges in integrating Stó:lō culture into classroom practices. This highlights the need for a flexible evaluation process that provides teachers with the support and resources to enhance their cultural competence and responsiveness. It must also adapt to meet teachers at drastically different stages in their learning journey— whether new to the community, from the community, or somewhere in between. Including culturally responsive growth goals in the evaluation tool addresses this need, providing a framework that promotes meaningful engagement with culture without imposing rigid benchmarks. The teacher evaluation tool, incorporating self-reflection,

administrator feedback, and community engagement, fosters teacher growth while supporting culturally responsive practices and community-centred values. This approach emphasizes that teacher development is intrinsically linked to parent and community engagement, reinforcing the importance of cultural responsiveness in fostering a holistic educational environment.

Integrating Stó:lō culture into the classroom remains critical to the community vision for education at SICS. However, the research findings reveal some challenges, particularly in the retention of Stó:lō educators. The data show a shift in the representation of Stó:lō educators at the school, raising concerns about maintaining the cultural connections essential to community-centred education. This underscores the importance of retaining culturally connected educators and ensuring that all teachers, regardless of background, are supported in their efforts to integrate Stó:lō culture into their teaching.

Ultimately, the teacher evaluation process at SICS is a dynamic practice that must remain responsive to the needs of both the educators and the community. By grounding the evaluation framework in the wise practices model, this study has outlined a process that supports teacher growth, encourages cultural integration, and promotes collaboration between educators, administrators, and the wider community. As SICS moves forward, this evaluation tool provides a way to ensure that educators are both supported in their development and held accountable to the school's vision of a culturally responsive, community-based education.

### **Challenges in Adopting the New Evaluation Process**

Several critical implications emerge from these findings, particularly regarding the role of administrators in successfully implementing the new evaluation process at SICS. As highlighted, it is not just about setting evaluative criteria but also about how the evaluation process is facilitated. Administrators need to take the lead in setting a precedent for culturally responsive

education and should be equipped with tailored professional development, mentorship, and coaching skills to guide educators through this process. Mentorship and coaching capacity will be crucial for helping teachers integrate Stó:lō culture and language into their practice meaningfully.

Implementing this framework will require a significant reprioritization of administrators' duties. More time will need to be spent on mentorship, classroom presence, and post-observation meetings with teachers, where feedback is rooted in open dialogue. This process must also involve increased collaboration between administrators and the language and culture team, who can provide insight into how well teachers incorporate Stó:lō knowledge and language into their classrooms. This becomes even more critical given that SICS currently has no Indigenous administrators, let alone Stó:lō administrators.

For teachers, this process also requires more time and engagement with the community. Culturally responsive education cannot be treated as an add-on but must be integral to the educational experience. However, the solution is not to burden teachers with more responsibilities, especially as many have expressed feelings of overwhelm. Instead, there needs to be a reprioritization of teaching responsibilities at SICS. This could involve reducing non-essential tasks, such as unnecessary meetings that do not directly contribute to cultural integration. Additionally, streamlining administrative duties by simplifying reporting processes or using technology to manage routine tasks more efficiently would free up valuable time. This way, teachers can engage more deeply with the community and integrate Stó:lō culture into their teaching without feeling overextended.

It is essential to consider how this information might be received, particularly when discussing challenges in delivering culturally responsive education. Based on my experience

working in several First Nations schools, I can confidently say that SICS provides one of the most culturally responsive educational environments I have encountered. This work is not about highlighting shortcomings but rather about reimagining what it means to deliver culturally responsive education in alignment with the school's original vision.

During my time at SICS, I witnessed firsthand the dedication and care that educators brought to their work, which prompted me to reflect on the broader implications of this study. The challenges I faced in balancing curriculum demands with the holistic needs of students are not unique but rather indicative of the broader issues many educators encounter in similar contexts. This study underscores the need for better preparation and support for teachers, particularly in addressing the complex needs of First Nations students. By rethinking how teacher education and professional development can be more attuned to these realities, SICS and other schools can continue fostering environments where educators and students thrive.

### **Limitations**

Throughout this research journey, I have come to understand the importance of self-compassion when acknowledging limitations and challenges. Rather than viewing these challenges as failures, I now see them as essential to personal and professional growth—reflecting the focus on lifelong learning that many First Nations educators emphasize. We continue to grow and model resilience for our students by embracing this mindset. One of my key takeaways from this study is that making mistakes and learning from them is how we build our capacity for resilience. With that in mind, the critical limitations of this study are as follows:

1. **Narrow Definition of Educational Stakeholders:** Initially, I adopted a more Western approach, assuming that only those who had been formally evaluated—such as administrators, teachers, educational assistants, and the language and culture team—

could provide valuable insights into evaluating culturally responsive education. This perspective limited my understanding of the teacher evaluation process by excluding critical voices from the broader community. Over time, I realized that individuals like parents, guardians, Elders, knowledge keepers, community leaders, and education committee members offer equally valuable perspectives. Their involvement would have contributed to a more holistic and culturally grounded understanding of effective, culturally responsive education. This shift in my thinking reflects my growth in recognizing the importance of community-wide engagement in shaping education.

2. **Overemphasis on Administrative Evaluations:** Initially, I focused too heavily on how administrators evaluated educators, assuming that those in higher hierarchical positions were best equipped to evaluate teaching effectiveness. However, I soon realized this assumption was flawed, as it ignored the importance of involving all educators in the process. A collaborative approach more accurately reflects the communal nature of teaching at SICS, where every educator plays a vital role in nurturing students and contributing to their overall development. By solely relying on administrators, the evaluation process risks overlooking the shared responsibility and diverse perspectives essential to supporting teacher and student growth.

### **Recommendations for Future Action and Research**

This research has prompted me to reflect on several areas that could enhance culturally responsive education at SICS and beyond. Throughout the study, I became increasingly aware of the need for broader community engagement, more comprehensive evaluation tools, and a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by Indigenous educators. These reflections led to the

following recommendations, which aim to support the development of culturally responsive education and create more inclusive, growth-oriented evaluation processes.

1. **Inclusion of a Broader Range of Stakeholders:** Future research should include the perspectives of community members who may not be directly employed by the school but are nonetheless deeply invested in the education of Stó:lō youth. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the educational strengths and challenges within the Stó:lō community. Employing interviews, focus groups, and surveys with these stakeholders would enrich future evaluations.
2. **Understanding Stó:lō Educator Retention:** Further research should explore the reasons behind the departure of Stó:lō educators from SICS and other Stó:lō schools. Conducting exit interviews and longitudinal studies could provide insights into the challenges these educators face and help develop retention strategies. Such research would examine workplace conditions, professional development opportunities, and community support systems.
3. **Culturally Responsive Evaluation Tools:** One significant limitation of current evaluations is their reliance on Western educational paradigms that prioritize quantifiable outcomes, often neglecting the relational and holistic aspects of Indigenous education. Future research should explore alternative evaluation methods that honour Indigenous ways of knowing, teaching, and learning. For example, evaluation tools could prioritize narrative-based feedback, where educators share their personal growth and cultural learning journeys in collaboration with community members.
4. **Teacher Orientation and Ongoing Cultural Support:** It is recommended that SICS adopt a school-wide, ongoing orientation and support program to enhance culturally

responsive education. This initiative should involve collaboration with Stó:lō community members and experienced staff to ensure cultural integration, community engagement, and Stó:lō values are embedded throughout the school. Recognizing that educators are at different stages in their cultural learning, the program should provide tailored support for all teachers—whether new or experienced. To further refine this process, future research and informal community discussions could explore how this orientation can best support teachers in immersing themselves in the cultural context and deepening their practices, ensuring ongoing professional development and mentorship opportunities are accessible to all.

5. **Parent Orientation for Strengthening Educational Partnerships:** Based on educator insights, there is a valuable opportunity to establish a student-parent-teacher-school orientation before the start of each school year. This initiative would create a space for all parties to come together and co-create learning goals, aligning expectations not just between students and teachers but across the entire school community. Such an orientation would set a clear precedent for cultural responsiveness and foster deeper connections between families, educators, and the school. By taking a holistic approach, this process ensures that parents, teachers, students, and the school leadership work collaboratively, reinforcing a shared commitment to Stó:lō cultural values and student success.
6. **Assessing the Long-Term Impact of the Evaluation Tool:** Finally, evaluating the long-term effectiveness of the newly developed evaluation tool at SICS is essential. Rather than relying on rigid metrics, future assessments should consider whether the tool supports meaningful teacher development and improvement in teaching practices. This

could be achieved by regularly gathering feedback from educators through various methods, such as interviews, observations, and reflective discussions. By remaining adaptable and responsive to the evolving needs of teachers, the tool can continue to foster growth and contribute to the overall educational goals of SICS.

### **Final Thoughts**

Reflecting on this journey, I have come to understand the deep interconnectedness of effective education at SICS. This work has made it clear that teachers and students are learners, and educators desire the same patience, nurturing, support, and structure for their growth that they strive to provide for their students. They want their development to be assessed holistically, acknowledging diverse learning styles and gifts. One critical insight from this research is how turning any evaluation element into a “checkbox” undermines its importance. When we reduce a complex process to a mechanical task, we lose sight of its purpose and meaning. Educators recognize that genuine growth for teachers and students necessitates a thoughtful and nuanced approach to honouring each individual’s unique journey.

Moreover, just as evaluation criteria cannot be viewed in isolation from the process itself, the evaluation process cannot be separated from the broader school culture. I have come to genuinely appreciate the significance of interconnectedness—a concept I previously viewed mainly as a buzzword. If the overarching school culture is not one of patience, mentorship, support, and inclusivity, the evaluation process cannot reflect those values. If educators do not feel nurtured and supported, it weakens their ability to embody these principles in the classroom. This interconnectedness becomes a living practice where the well-being of teachers is directly tied to the well-being of their students. This interconnectedness extends to families, which form the foundation of the community. Engaged families contribute to a culture of support that

benefits students, ultimately shaping future generations. The well-being of educators, families, and students is interconnected, reinforcing a process that nurtures growth and learning for everyone involved.

The findings from this study highlight the interconnected nature of teacher and student well-being—an aspect often overlooked in mainstream evaluations. It is essential to consider not only the holistic needs of students but also those of teachers. As a community school, we must recognize that the challenges students and teachers face are closely related. Many educators also deal with the same intergenerational trauma affecting our students, and we must support their well-being to create a positive educational environment. A crucial part of this support involves ensuring Stó:lō representation within the teacher body, as it plays a significant role in helping Stó:lō students see themselves reflected in their educational experience, fostering a sense of belonging and connection. Therefore, we must support these educators and focus on retaining them, as their representation is vital for creating an inclusive environment. This approach extends to the entire school community and beyond, creating a space where everyone—students, teachers, families, and community members—feels included, nurtured, and supported.

I genuinely hope this evaluation tool will help educators understand that education cannot be separated from the context and lived experiences of the students. The community's vision for creating a school like SICS was always rooted in the need for a culturally responsive education that mainstream schools simply do not offer. This was true when the school was founded in 1978 and remains true today in 2024. While public education is making strides, my experience has shown me that community schools are far better positioned to support Indigenous students from within their communities. Providing community education means we are working not just to develop students but to strengthen families and, in turn, the community. We carry a generational

responsibility to foster students' self-esteem, pride in their identity, love and respect for others, emotional regulation, resilience, and a healthy sense of self. My time at SICS has allowed me to witness the beauty of Stó:lō students and their communities. Serving the children and families of Seabird Island has been a profound honour, and for that, I am deeply grateful.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Phases of the Research Project

	Apr. 2021	May 2021	Dec. 2021	Jan. 2022	Jan. 2022 – Sep. 2024	Sep. 2024	Dec. 2024
Obtain permission to research with SICS							
Defend dissertation proposal							
Receive ethics approval from Trent – REB							
Identify prospective participants & book interviews							
Complete interviews and surveys							
Analyze qualitative data							
Complete final dissertation draft							
Defend dissertation							

**Appendix B: Certificate of Approval**



## Appendix C: First Peoples' Principles of Learning



# FIRST PEOPLES PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING

Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.

**Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).**

Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions.

**Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities.**

Learning recognizes the role of indigenous knowledge.

**Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.**

Learning involves patience and time.

**Learning requires exploration of one's identity.**

Learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations.

For First Peoples classroom resources visit: [www.fnesc.ca](http://www.fnesc.ca)



## Appendix D: Research Participant Consent Form



Enwayaang Building  
Peter Gzowski College  
1600 West Bank Drive  
Peterborough, ON K9J 7B8  
Phone: 705-748-1011 ext. 7466  
Fax: 705-748-1416  
EMAIL: [indigenoustudies@trentu.ca](mailto:indigenoustudies@trentu.ca)

I understand my participation in the study titled *Totí:lthometel: Creating a Community-Based Teacher Evaluation Tool for K-12 Stó:lō Schools* is strictly voluntary and includes two data collection procedures: a questionnaire, taking approximately five minutes to complete, and a personal interview, lasting roughly one hour. I also understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any stage of the data collection process and, upon withdrawing from the study, all data I have offered will not be reported. I also understand that the researcher will link findings from the questionnaire and personal interview and that information gathered may be used for publication. Furthermore, I know that the researcher will protect my responses' confidentiality and maintain anonymity by ensuring that only he and his supervisor review transcripts and by using pseudonyms in reference to participant quotes.

In writing up the research, the researcher will make his best effort *in trying to ensure comments are not attributable to participants*. Data and recordings will be encrypted and held on a password-protected USB stick to ensure that data is stored safely and confidentially. All information recorded from you during this research will be destroyed by April 30, 2025. I understand that while the researcher cannot guarantee any individual benefit to participants, participants may receive satisfaction from contributing to research in this area. I also understand that dissertation results will be shared with the Seabird Island Band and Seabird Island Community School – results will not be disseminated beyond the dissertation. In accordance with the conditions outlined above, you are now considered fully informed. By signing below, you freely give your consent to participate in the research project titled *Totí:lthometel: Creating a Community-Based Teacher Evaluation Tool in K-12 Stó:lō Schools*.

By signing below, you freely give your consent to participate in the research project.  
Please check the boxes that are appropriate for you.

I agree to the interview being audio recorded.

I agree to the interview being video recorded.

I have received a copy of this consent form.

I agree to be quoted or cited as needed, without further consultation.

I agree to be quoted or cited, after being informed by (circle one) **email** / **phone** and after confirming the wording. Please provide contact information:

---

Participant Name	Participant Signature	Date
------------------	-----------------------	------

If you would like more information about how the data will be used, please contact the Researcher, the Supervising Investigator, or the Certifications and Regulatory Compliance Officer at Trent University (1600 West Bank Drive, Peterborough, ON Canada, K9L 0G2):

Researcher:  Jason Bruce Indigenous Studies PhD Candidate <a href="mailto:jasonbruce@trentu.ca">jasonbruce@trentu.ca</a>	Supervising Investigator:  Dr. Don McCaskill. Ph.D. Professor of Indigenous Studies <a href="mailto:dmccaskill@trentu.ca">dmccaskill@trentu.ca</a> Phone: (705) 748-1011 ext. 7820	Certifications and Regulatory Compliance Officer:  Jamie Muckle <a href="mailto:jmuckle@trentu.ca">jmuckle@trentu.ca</a> Phone: (705) 748-1011 ext. 7896
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## Appendix E: Pre-Interview Questionnaire for Participants



Enwayaang Building  
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Phone: 705-748-1011 ext. 7466  
Fax: 705-748-1416  
EMAIL: [indigenoustudies@trentu.ca](mailto:indigenoustudies@trentu.ca)

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study, *Totí:lthometel: Creating a Community-Based Teacher Evaluation Tool for K-12 Stó:lō Schools*. In preparing for the personal interview, would you please fill out the accompanying questions which will provide background information for the study. I will collect your answers to the questions prior to our interview session.

**\*Note\*- Please elaborate on your responses if you feel it results in greater clarification.W**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Do you identify as Stó:lō, Indigenous (non-Stó:lō) or non-Indigenous?
2. What grades/subjects have you taught at the Seabird Island Community School?
3. How many years have you taught at the Seabird Island Community School?

Please list 3 dates/times that could potentially work for you between now and January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022, to participate in an interview lasting roughly one hour:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F: Researcher Interview Guide



Enwayaang Building  
Peter Gzowski College  
1600 West Bank Drive  
Peterborough, ON K9J 7B8  
Phone: 705-748-1011 ext. 7466  
Fax: 705-748-1416  
EMAIL: [indigenoustudies@trentu.ca](mailto:indigenoustudies@trentu.ca)

### *Initial Open-Ended Questions*

1. Tell me about how you came to the Seabird Island Community School (SICS).
2. Do you think that the school culture at Seabird Island Community School has changed since you first started teaching there? If so, how?
3. Who, if anyone, has been your primary mentor at SICS? Tell me about how they influenced you. How have they been helpful?

### *Assessment, Pedagogy and Relationship Building*

4. How do you assess your students in terms of their knowledge and skills?
5. How do your students demonstrate a meaningful understanding of the material?
6. How do you work to support students' growth and success in and out of school?
7. How do you interact with your students, their families, and their communities?

### *Experiences with Teacher Evaluation at SICS*

8. How has teaching practice been evaluated in your experience at SICS? What was it like?
  - a. Do you think it helped you improve your teaching skills? If yes, why do you say that? If no, why do you say that?
9. What do you think are the most important methods to evaluate teacher performance at SICS?
10. What criteria should be included in a teacher evaluation at SICS?
11. Have your views about evaluation changed since you have been evaluated. If so, how?

### *Developing an Effective, Culturally and Community-Based Teacher Evaluation Tool*

12. Should teaching evaluations incorporate Stó:lō ways of knowing and teaching? If yes, how can they be incorporated?
13. Can the ability to link Stó:lō community resources to the lived experiences of students (e.g. bringing in community members to share teachings) be part of teacher evaluation? If yes, how can it be done?

14. Should community engagement (e.g., participation in community events and activities) be part of teacher evaluations? If yes, how can it be done?
15. Should interactions with students' families be part of teacher evaluations? If yes, how can they be included?
  - a. Should teachers be required to co-create expectations with students' families? If yes, how can it be done?

***Ending Questions***

16. What is the most important advice you would give to an administrator conducting evaluations?
17. Is there anything else before that occurred to you during this interview that would help me better understand your experience at SICS?
18. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

# SALMON:

Seabird Assessment for Learning, Mentorship,  
and Ongoing Nurturing

An Evaluation Tool for Educational Leaders



The illustration is a circular composition on a light beige background. It features several stylized salmon fish. The largest fish at the top is dark blue with black spots and white stripes. Below it is another large fish with a red and white striped pattern. To the left is a circular fishhook with red, white, and black concentric patterns. Other smaller fish are scattered around, including one with a red body and one with a black and white striped body. The entire illustration is set against a dark red background with a decorative border on the right side.

# VISION, MISSION & VALUES

## Our Vision

To ensure that the Seabird Island Community School (SICS) promotes Stó:lō history, culture, and language are at the forefront of education, deeply embedded into the learning experience. We are committed to teaching the highly honored values of self-reliance, generosity, honesty, and respect to guide students in their personal and academic journeys.

## Our Mission

At SICS, we believe in a holistic approach to education that fosters a partnership between home, school, and community. Our mission is to maintain open, honest, and positive communication between families and schools. By providing appropriate opportunities for family and community involvement, we aim to create an inclusive educational process that allows everyone to participate meaningfully.

## Core Beliefs

We believe education at SICS is preparation for total living, supporting physical, social, psychological, spiritual, and academic growth.

We aim to provide students with the knowledge and skills needed to thrive in a multicultural society.

We are committed to raising academic achievement and increasing the number of Indigenous high school graduates.

We ensure that students at SICS have the opportunity to choose the best educational paths in a multicultural society.

We strive to ensure our students master the fundamental skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic, providing them with the tools for success.



## DEDICATION & GRATITUDE



**T**his tool is dedicated to the incredible students of Seabird Island Community School (SICS), whose unwavering spirit and determination are a testament to their resilience. Your strength, courage, and resolve inspire us all to work towards a more inclusive and equitable educational landscape.

I am deeply grateful to the Seabird Island Band (SIB) for granting me the opportunity to conduct my study within your community. Your unwavering support and openness have allowed me not only to work at your community school for two years but also to gain invaluable experiences, lessons, and cherished memories that will last a lifetime.

I extend my highest appreciation to my Stó:lō Education Committee – Camielle Laslo, Dianna Kay, Karla Kay, and Saylesh Wesley. Your collective expertise, guidance, and commitment have been invaluable throughout this process, and I am truly honored to have had the chance to collaborate with such a dedicated team.

To my colleagues at the SICS, thank you for your unwavering dedication to fostering a nurturing environment for our students and promoting educational excellence. Though I must maintain anonymity for the educators involved in this journey, know that your contributions have been pivotal in bringing this project to life. I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to have worked alongside such inspiring professionals, and I will always treasure the experiences we shared during my time at SICS.

May the tools within these pages empower educators and communities to honor your unique identities, fostering a sense of belonging and pride that will light the path to a brighter future for all.

*- Jason Bruce*



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## INTRODUCTION TO SALMON

The Seabird Assessment for Learning, Mentorship, and Ongoing Nurturing (SALMON) evaluation tool represents a significant departure from traditional approaches to teacher evaluation, embracing a holistic, community-centred framework explicitly designed for the unique cultural and educational context of the Seabird Island Community School (SICS). Developed collaboratively with contributions from the language and culture team, teachers, educational assistants, and the vice-principal, this tool offers a comprehensive yet practical means of assessing teacher effectiveness and growth. Its innovative design reflects the belief that evaluation should be more than a performance review—it should foster mentorship, continuous learning, and cultural responsiveness.

Unlike conventional evaluation models, SALMON is rooted in best practices for culturally responsive schooling for Indigenous students, integrating cultural responsiveness as an essential component of effective teaching at SICS. The tool is divided into ten primary sections, carefully balancing administrative oversight with teacher self-reflection and collaborative goal-setting. By addressing every facet of teaching practice—from instructional planning to community engagement and self-care—SALMON provides a comprehensive, nurturing approach that encourages personal and professional growth, drawing upon educator insights and cultural responsiveness.

Crucially, the tool also emphasizes the relational nature of evaluation. While administrators evaluate key aspects of instructional practice, teachers are encouraged to assess their own engagement with the community, their self-care routines, and even provide feedback on how the evaluation process itself is facilitated by administrators. This two-way dialogue ensures that evaluation is not a top-down process but one that promotes transparency, fairness, and mutual accountability, aligning the school's educational practices with its original community mission and vision.

The SALMON tool is designed to help teachers not only identify their strengths and areas for improvement but also to support them in setting actionable goals for future growth. Through this collaborative, reflective, and culturally responsive approach, SALMON aims to elevate the educational experience for both teachers and students at SICS, fostering a learning environment where continuous improvement is nurtured and celebrated.



# SALMON:

## Key Areas of the Assessment and Nurturing Tool

### 1. CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS, FAMILY COLLABORATION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

**Stó:lō Cultural Responsiveness & Halq'eméylem Integration:** Teachers will be assessed on their ability to integrate Stó:lō cultural knowledge, traditions, and the Halq'eméylem language into their lessons. Collaboration with the language and culture team will be required. Evidence of culturally responsive lesson plans and classroom activities will be key in demonstrating effective integration.

**Communication & Collaboration with Families:** Teachers will be assessed on their communication and relationship-building with families, focusing on how family input is integrated into supporting student learning. Regular and meaningful interactions with families that foster trust and promote student development will be key measures of success.

**Community Participation & Engagement:** Teachers will be assessed on their involvement in community and school events, with a focus on building trust and fostering inclusivity in the classroom. Active participation in cultural gatherings and significant community activities will demonstrate their engagement and connection with the wider community.

### 2. INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN, CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT & HOLISTIC ASSESSMENT

**Curriculum Planning, Pacing, and Learning Objectives:** Teachers' ability to plan and pace curriculum effectively throughout the year will be assessed. Clear, student-friendly learning objectives that align with long-term outcomes should be visible in the classroom to support student understanding and progression.

**Classroom Management:** Classroom management will be assessed based on how well teachers create a respectful and inclusive environment that supports students' emotional and cultural needs. Effective strategies that foster a positive classroom climate will be central to the assessment.

**Holistic Assessment Strategies:** Teachers will be assessed on their use of holistic assessments that capture a range of student abilities. Alternative assessments, such as portfolios and presentations, will be reviewed for their effectiveness in measuring student progress across different dimensions.

### 3. COLLABORATIVE GROWTH & LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

**Professional Development Plan:** Teachers will set professional development goals that align with the school's strategic needs. These goals will focus on enhancing teaching practices and contributing to student success, ensuring alignment with both individual growth and the broader objectives of the school.

**Collaborative Leadership:** Teachers' contributions to leadership within the school, including mentoring peers, supporting collaborative planning, and taking part in school improvement initiatives, will be evaluated. The focus will be on how effectively teachers foster collaborative growth and contribute to building a strong leadership culture within the school.

**Educator Self-Care Routine:** Teachers will be assessed on how well they balance professional responsibilities with personal well-being. The evaluation will emphasize sustainable self-care practices that support long-term success in both their professional role and personal life.

### 4. EDUCATOR EVALUATION OF ADMINISTRATORS

**Facilitation of the Evaluation Process:** Teachers will assess how effectively administrators manage the evaluation process, focusing on whether it promotes transparency and professional growth. The emphasis will be on the overall structure and execution of the evaluation system to ensure it supports continuous improvement.



# Using the SALMON Tool for Growth and Reflection

## GUIDING YOUR JOURNEY IN STÓ:LO CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS AND EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The SALMON evaluation tool fosters ongoing dialogue between educators and administrators, supporting growth in key areas like curriculum planning, classroom management, holistic assessments, leadership, and Stó:ló cultural responsiveness. It combines self-evaluation and administrator input, leading to collaborative goal-setting for continuous improvement. Here's how to use the tool effectively:

### 1. Guiding Reflection Questions:

Begin by reflecting on the questions at the start of each section. These are designed to help you think about various aspects of your teaching practice, such as cultural responsiveness, collaboration, and fostering a sense of belonging. Use these reflections to guide your thoughts as you move through the evaluation process.

### 2. Self-Evaluation (Teacher Stream):

In the Self-Evaluation section, reflect on your progress and areas for growth. Use a highlighter to mark along the **inner lines** between the stages, showing the stage you believe you've reached: Spawning, Fry, Smolt, or Returning Adult. Highlight all the lines leading up to your current stage to visually track your journey.

As can be seen in the sample, the teacher self-evaluated at the 'Fry' stage, while the administrator's evaluation placed them at the 'Smolt' stage. This helps illustrate differences or alignment in perceptions between self-assessment and external feedback. The four stages—Spawning, Fry, Smolt, and Returning Adult—are discussed in depth on the following page. refer to that section for a detailed understanding of each stage.

### 2. Administrator Observation & Feedback (Admin Stream):

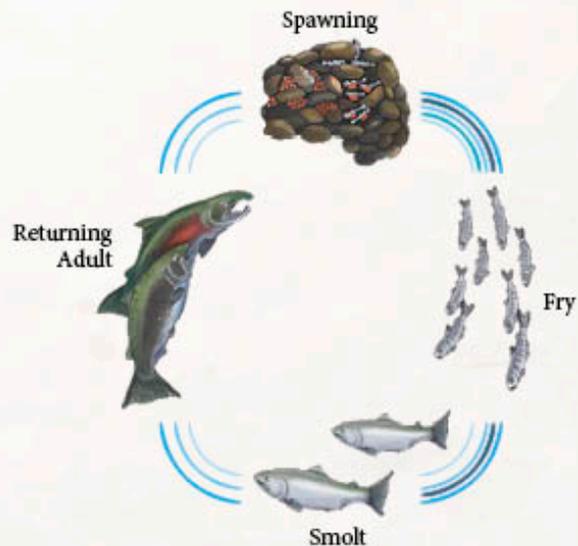
Following your self-evaluation, the administrator will observe your teaching and provide feedback. They will highlight the **outer lines** to reflect their assessment of your progress. Their feedback complements your self-reflection and offers insights to guide your development.

### 4. Coactive Goal-Setting:

After both evaluations are complete, you and the administrator will meet to collaboratively set goals. In the Coactive Goal-Setting section, document the key focus areas that you both agree on. These goals ensure alignment between your personal growth and the broader objectives of the school.

### 5. Revisiting the Evaluation:

The tool is flexible and can be revisited over time, with both streams updated to track ongoing progress. This ongoing reflection and adjustment encourage continuous growth in cultural responsiveness and professional development.



# The SALMON Journey: Nurturing Educator Growth



## 1. Spawning (Initiating Growth)

The Spawning stage represents the very beginning of a teacher's growth journey. Just like salmon eggs full of potential, teachers in this stage are laying the foundation for future development. It is a time of exploration and discovery, where teachers are building their core skills and starting to integrate new strategies and cultural knowledge into their practice. This stage is about nurturing early efforts, with a focus on support, mentorship, and building confidence for the path ahead. It's the stage of promise, where teachers begin to realize their capacity for growth.

## 2. Fry (Emerging Growth)

In the Fry stage, teachers are starting to find their flow. Like young salmon navigating a stream, they are gaining independence and actively applying the foundational skills they've developed. This stage is marked by emerging confidence, with teachers building on their strengths and refining their practices. The focus here is on demonstrating progress and adapting to new challenges with support and feedback. Teachers in this stage are moving from learning to leading in their classrooms, developing a clearer sense of direction.



## 3. Smolt (Sustained Growth)

The Smolt stage reflects consistent and sustained growth. Teachers in this phase are confidently applying their skills, adapting fluidly to diverse classroom needs, and are culturally responsive in their daily practices. Like smolt transitioning into deeper waters, teachers in this stage are preparing for broader challenges and greater responsibilities. The focus is on maintaining strong practices and continuing to evolve as educators, with opportunities for leadership and collaboration. Teachers are no longer just applying strategies—they are mastering them.



## 4. Returning Adult (Thriving and Leading)

The Returning Adult stage represents teachers who are thriving in their roles and leading within their school and community. Just as salmon return to their home waters after a long journey, these teachers have completed a full cycle of growth and are now contributing their knowledge and experience to others. They are mentors, role models, and leaders, helping to nurture the growth of students and colleagues. At this stage, teachers are fully immersed in their practice, leading with confidence, cultural responsiveness, and a deep connection to the community.





## **Cultural Integration, Family Collaboration & Community Engagement**

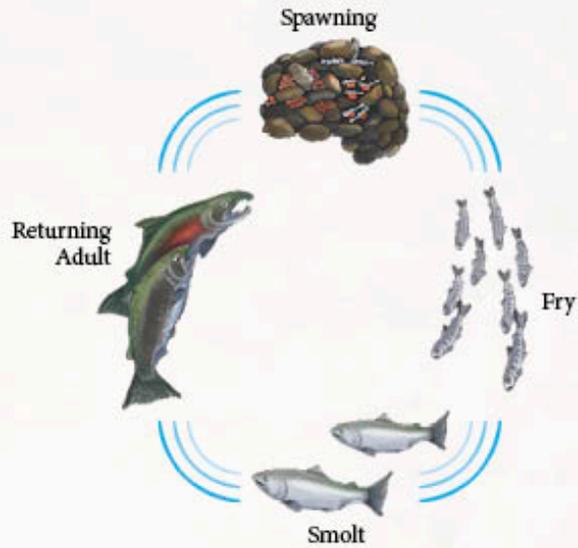
This section evaluates how teachers integrate Stó:lō culture and Halq'eméylem language into their lessons, work with cultural guardians, and collaborate with families. Teachers' participation in community events and their engagement with families are key indicators of their ability to foster trust and inclusivity in the classroom. Authenticity in cultural responsiveness and strong community bonds are crucial.



## Stó:lō Cultural Responsiveness & Halq'eméylem Integration

### GUIDING REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How effectively do you incorporate Stó:lō cultural knowledge and Halq'eméylem language into your daily lessons?
2. In what ways do you collaborate with community members or Elders to ensure authentic cultural content is integrated into your teaching?
3. How do you ensure that students feel a deep sense of cultural belonging and connection in your classroom?
4. What additional resources or support do you need to strengthen the integration of Stó:lō culture into your teaching practice?



### SELF-EVALUATION


### ADMIN. FEEDBACK

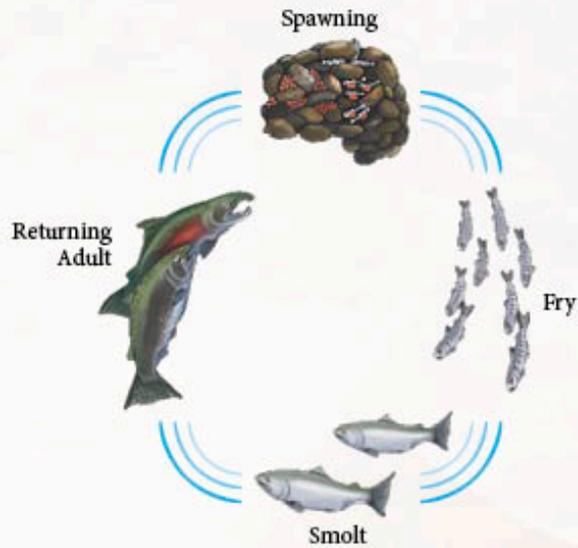

### COACTIVE GOAL-SETTING




# Communication & Collaboration with Families

## GUIDING REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How consistently do you engage with families to understand their aspirations and concerns regarding their child's education?
2. What methods do you use to involve parents in their child's learning process, both inside and outside of school?
3. How do you ensure that communication with families is reciprocal and supports a collaborative approach to student success?
4. What strategies do you plan to implement to enhance family involvement in future classroom activities or school events?



## SELF-EVALUATION


## ADMIN. FEEDBACK


## COACTIVE GOAL-SETTING

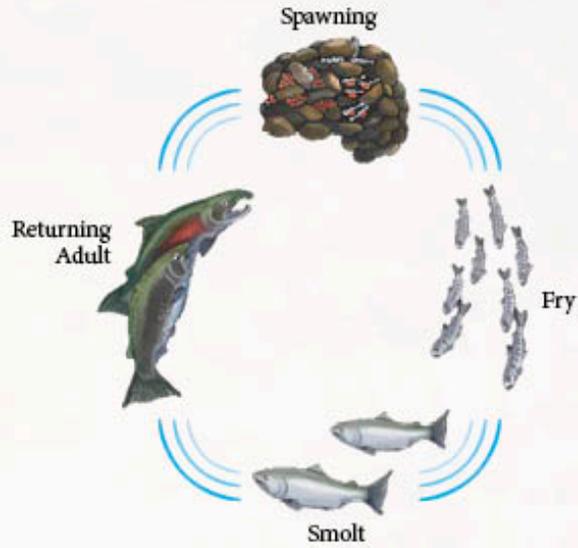





# Community Participation & Engagement

## GUIDING REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways do you participate in community events and ceremonies to build deeper relationships with the Seabird Island community?
2. How do you incorporate community experiences and knowledge into the classroom to enrich student learning?
3. What steps do you take to ensure that your involvement with the community aligns with the educational goals of the school?
4. How can you further strengthen your connections with the wider Stó:lō community to support your students' learning?



## SELF-EVALUATION


## ADMIN. FEEDBACK


## COACTIVE GOAL-SETTING





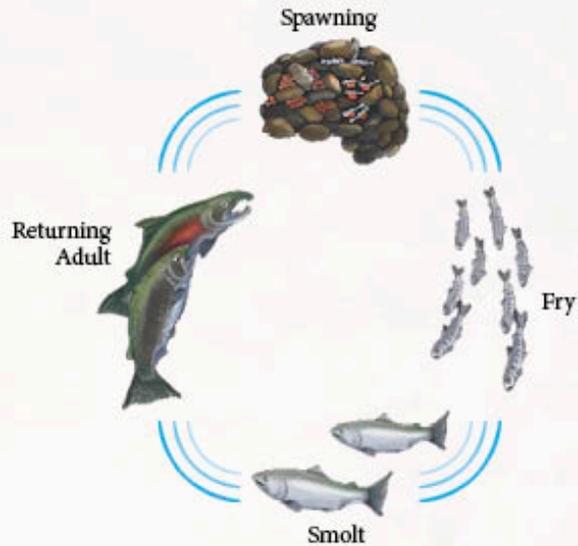

## Instructional Design, Classroom Management & Holistic Assessment

Focused on curriculum structure, pacing, and classroom environment, this section assesses how teachers manage diverse student needs. Emphasis is placed on using holistic assessment strategies that promote student growth, as well as maintaining a classroom that respects emotional and cultural needs. Teachers are also evaluated on their use of alternative assessments, with portfolios serving as a method to showcase a broad spectrum of student achievements.

# Curriculum Planning, Pacing & Learning Objectives

## GUIDING REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How do you ensure that your curriculum planning aligns with broader academic and cultural goals throughout the school year?
2. How do you incorporate student-centered goals and culturally relevant topics into your curriculum planning?
3. How do you ensure that your lesson pacing allows students to progress steadily while meeting both academic and cultural objectives?
4. What steps will you take to improve the alignment between daily learning objectives and broader curricular goals?



## SELF-EVALUATION

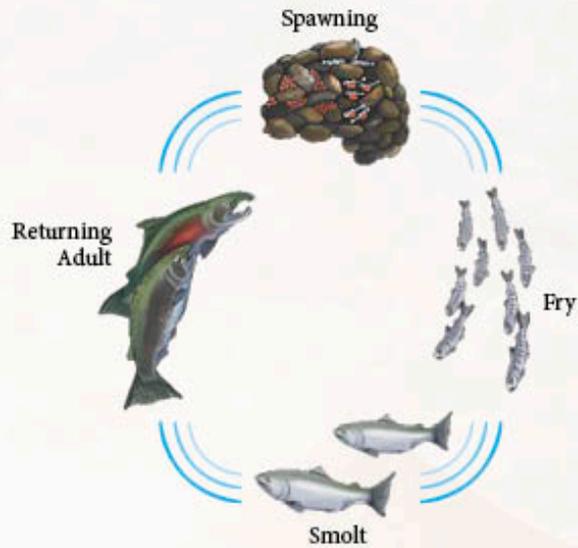

## ADMIN. FEEDBACK


## COACTIVE GOAL-SETTING


# Classroom Management

## GUIDING REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How do you create a classroom environment that fosters inclusivity, respect, and trust among your students?
2. What culturally responsive strategies do you use to manage student behavior while promoting a supportive classroom atmosphere?
3. How do you handle classroom disruptions in ways that respect the cultural and emotional well-being of your students?
4. How will you further develop your classroom management skills to ensure all students feel respected and supported?



## SELF-EVALUATION


## ADMIN. FEEDBACK


## COACTIVE GOAL-SETTING

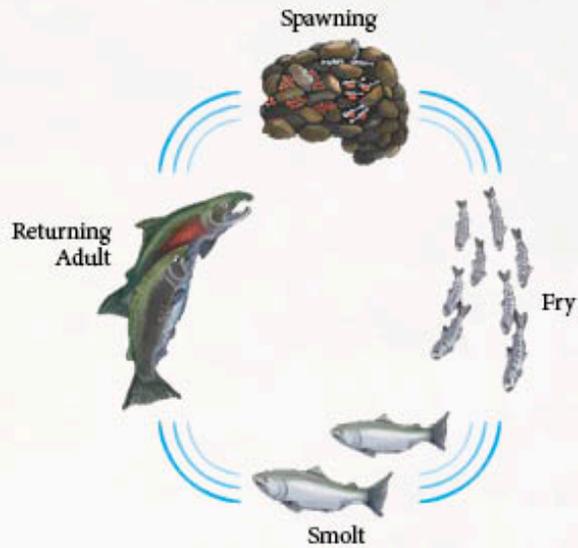





# Holistic Student Assessment

## GUIDING REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How do you implement diverse assessment strategies to capture the full range of student strengths and learning styles?
2. How do you incorporate self-assessment and reflective practices to help students take ownership of their learning?
3. What evidence do you collect to track student progress holistically, including academic, social, and emotional growth?
4. What steps can you take to enhance your use of formative and summative assessments in the classroom?



## SELF-EVALUATION


## ADMIN. FEEDBACK


## COACTIVE GOAL-SETTING





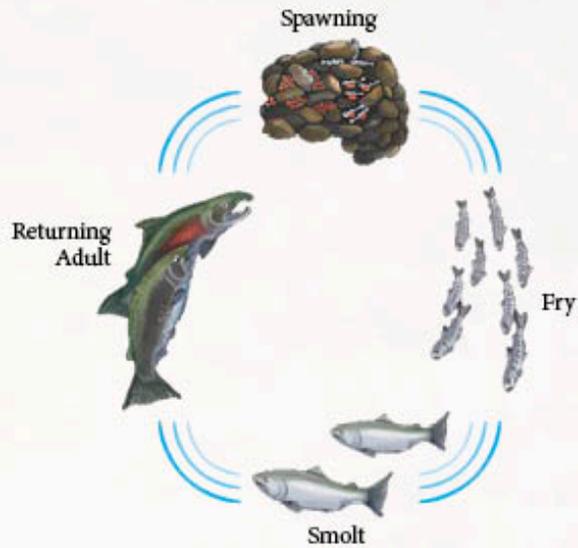

## Collaborative Growth & Leadership Development

This section highlights the importance of professional growth and leadership within the school. Teachers and administrators collaborate to set development goals, reflecting on areas for improvement and leadership opportunities. Additionally, teachers are encouraged to focus on self-care routines to ensure a sustainable balance between personal well-being and professional responsibilities.

# Professional Development Plan

## GUIDING REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How do you identify areas for your own professional growth that align with the school's vision and your personal goals?
2. What steps have you taken to engage in professional development opportunities that enhance your cultural responsiveness?
3. How do you ensure that your professional development directly impacts and improves your teaching practices?
4. What specific goals will you set to further your professional development in the upcoming school year?



## SELF-EVALUATION

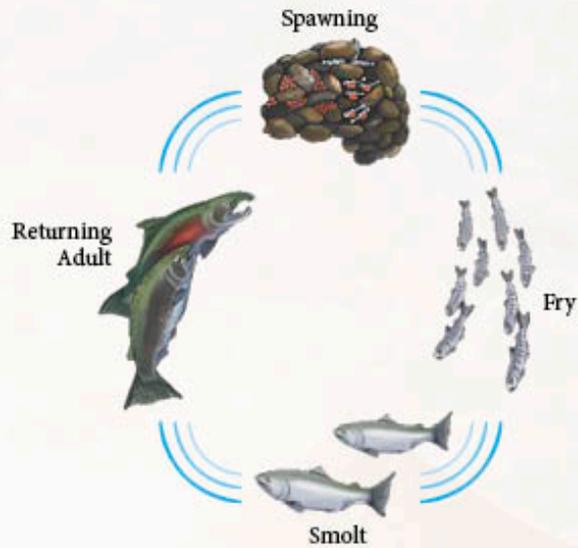

## ADMIN. FEEDBACK


## COACTIVE GOAL-SETTING


# Collaborative Leadership

## GUIDING REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How do you contribute to fostering a collaborative culture within the school community?
2. In what ways do you take initiative in supporting the school's strategic vision and collective educational goals?
3. How do you mentor or support less experienced teachers in developing their skills and understanding of culturally responsive education?
4. How will you continue to strengthen your leadership skills while supporting the collective growth of the school?



## SELF-EVALUATION


## ADMIN. FEEDBACK


## COACTIVE GOAL-SETTING

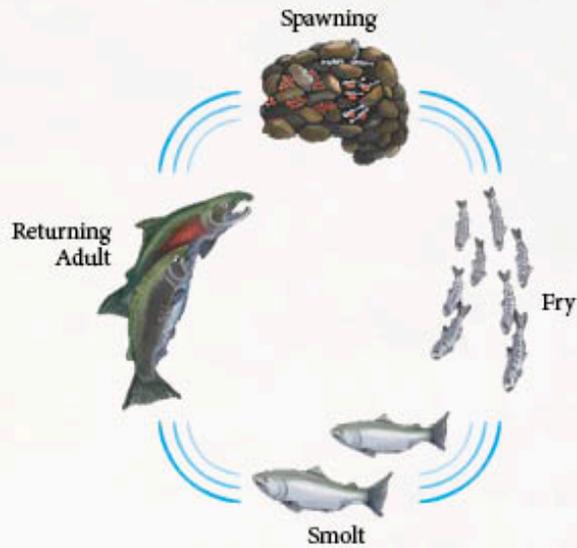





# Educator Self-Care Routine

## GUIDING REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How do you maintain a balance between your professional responsibilities and personal well-being?
2. What self-care practices do you engage in to manage stress and maintain emotional health?
3. How do you ensure that your self-care routine supports your long-term professional growth and effectiveness in the classroom?
4. What changes will you make to your self-care routine to ensure a sustainable work-life balance?

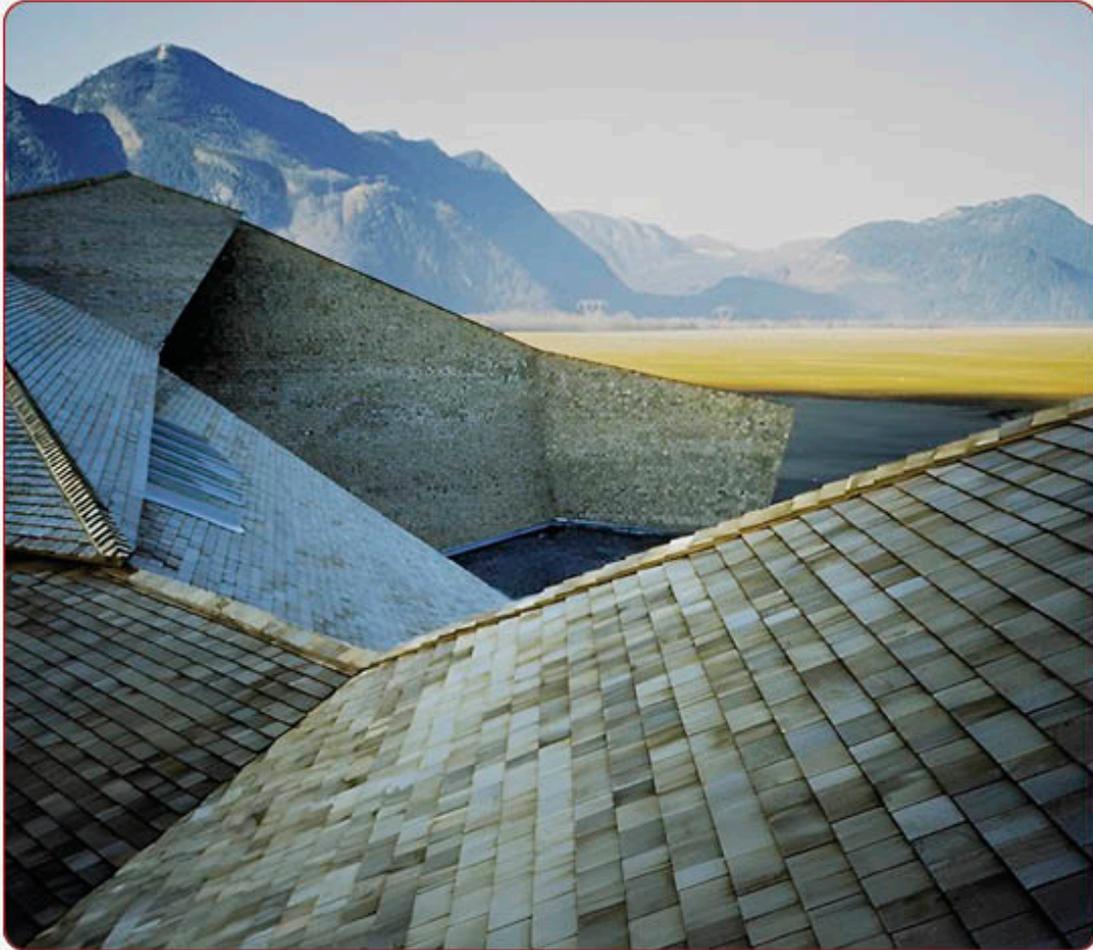


## SELF-EVALUATION


## ADMIN. FEEDBACK


## COACTIVE GOAL-SETTING



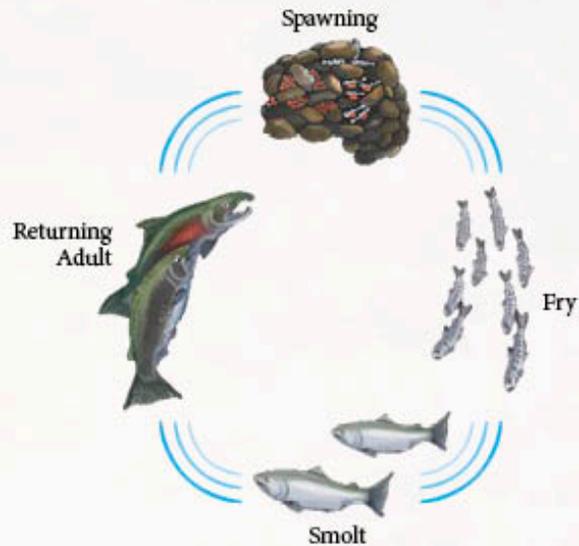
## **Educator Evaluation of Administrators**

In a reciprocal evaluation process, teachers assess the effectiveness of administrators in facilitating the teacher evaluation process. Transparency, fairness, and the promotion of growth are key metrics. This feedback encourages open communication and collaboration between teachers and administrators, ensuring continuous improvement in evaluation practices.

## Facilitation of the Evaluation Process

### GUIDING REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How transparent do you find the evaluation process, and how well do you understand the criteria being used?
2. In what ways does the evaluation process provide meaningful feedback that supports your professional growth?
3. How can the evaluation process be improved to better support your development and align with your personal and professional goals?
4. What suggestions do you have for improving the evaluation process to better support teachers' growth and the overall school community?



### TEACHER FEEDBACK


### COACTIVE GOAL-SETTING