

Six Nations Education Story

The Six Nations Education Story is important as it forms the overarching narrative, which drives the current initiative for Six Nations to recover community control over education. The full story would likely constitute a lengthy paper or even a short book. However, in the spirit of brevity, what follows is a brief version. As you read the story, keep in mind the vision for the new education system is provision of education that will revitalize our languages and ground us in our cultural values while still preparing us for life now and into the future. We will do this by exercising our right to establish and control our own educational system that provides education in our own languages and in a manner appropriate to our cultural methods of teaching and learning.

Our lifelong learning story is circular and connects the past, present and future. It begins with our Creation Story, which explains the way in which we view the world and all of creation. Our Creation



Story tells us where we came from, grounds us in our values and gives us inherent responsibilities to carry into the future. Our Creation Story has guided our people from time immemorial. Storytelling and ceremonies, derived from the Creation Story have been, and continue to be, used to transfer traditional knowledge from generation to generation.

Since time immemorial education for our people was centered on our spirituality, culture, and language.

Knowledge was passed on based on our local environmental conditions and included many of the sciences we find in contemporary educational settings. Our way of education intertwined knowledge about family, community, national and political relations with knowledge about our relations with the earth, water, sun, moon, sky, birds, animals, fish and plants. This is the holistic concept of education we are seeking to return to.

Our traditional teachings were enhanced at a point in our history when chaos ensued. At this time, the Creator sent a messenger of peace to the five Haudenosaunee nations. The Peacemaker's mission was to restore love, peace and harmony and encourage Ka'nikonhrí:io (a good mind – individual and collective) among the Haudenosaunee nations. The Peacemaker taught the Kaianerenkó:wa (Great Law of Peace), which still unites the five nations as one mind, one body and one heart and encourages us to live the values of Ka'nikonhrí:io. When we think of education today – we understand the importance of the teachings of the Kaianerenkó:wa as a pillar of lifelong learning to ensure unity, peace, strength and good mind now as well as always considering seven generations into the future.

Although we continued living and teaching in this way for quite some time the arrival of European settlers added some complexity to our ways of being and knowing. Early relations between the

Haudenosaunee nations and European settlers resulted in two significant Wampum agreements that incorporated the main tenets of the Kaianerkó:wa. The first is the Guswenta/Kaswentha (Two Row Wampum – 1613), which emphasizes the distinct identity of the two peoples and forms a mutual agreement to coexist in peace without interference in the affairs of the other.

The second is the Covenant Chain, which is a metaphor for the relationship established with the Guswenta/Kaswentha. The Covenant Chain is a silver chain that ties the settler’s ship and the Haudenosaunee canoe to the Tree of Peace (a symbol of the Kaianerkó:wa). The Covenant Chain solidifies agreement that the Haudenosaunee and the British will meet regularly to “polish the chain” to maintain and strengthen our relationship.

Although peace and friendship was the agreed basis of the relationship between the newcomers and us, we found ourselves drawn into several conflicts between the settlers. In recognition of our role as allies during the American Revolution the British granted (in 1784) six miles on each side of the Grand River for a distance of 186 miles for us and our posterity to enjoy forever.



As we settled on our new land base we began establishing our own schools. However, federal policies began to erode our source of income and various churches, and religious organizations encroached on our control over education. Subsequent federal policy such as the 1867 *British North America Act* gave lawmaking power to the federal government for “Indians, and lands reserved for the Indians” – this included education. The subsequent creation of the federal Department of Indian Affairs and the passing

of the *Indian Act* placed the governance of all parts of the lives of our people in the hands of the federal government (land, status, government, religion, education).

Despite sound opposition from Six Nations to the *Indian Act* the federal Department of Indian Affairs continued to play a significant role in education for almost another century, mainly in the form of preventing the education system at Six Nations to progress on substantial matters of teacher qualification and curriculum.

A federal policy paper from 1969, known as the *White Paper*, proposed the complete integration of First Nation Education into provincial/territorial systems. The National Indian Brotherhood (now known as the Assembly of First Nations) rejected this policy and countered with a First Nation developed policy paper titled *Indian Control of Indian Education*.

The federal government eventually adopted the policy of *Indian Control of Indian Education* in the early 1970's. However, implementation of the policy known as "education devolution" only provided First Nation control of the administration functions related to education. The federal government retained much control on how funding was used and what was to be taught.

Six Nations' position on re-establishing and maintaining a nation to nation relationship with the federal government based on treaties with the Crown prevented us from accepting this devolution process. Thus, all aspects of control over education were left with the federal government until such a relationship was re-established and a nation to nation agreement on education could be reached.

Since the early 1980's we have undertaken several initiatives by obtaining direction from the community on recovering full control over education. We have always taken the position that we would recover full control of education if adequate funding was secured from the federal government to cover all programs and services required to support our students. Unfortunately, all attempts to recover control have broken down due to a lack of federal commitment to provide the necessary funding. The last attempt broke down in 2005.

Despite our inability to secure a nation to nation agreement on recovering full control over education with the federal government the efforts of the community have resulted in the establishment of two schools under community control. The Kawenni:io/Gaweni:yo Elementary and Secondary School offers immersion programming in Mohawk and Cayuga through a curriculum based on concepts as set forth in the Thanksgiving Address. The Everlasting Tree School delivers education rooted in Haudenosaunee culture and language inspired by Waldorf teaching methods.

In 2016 a historical review on all previous activity related to recovering full control over education was completed and now forms the basis of a renewed initiative. When meeting with Indigenous Services Canada on educational issues brought forward by community run education entities it became apparent that the preference for the federal government was to work with one entity for all education related matters. This prompted activity to revitalize our efforts around recovery of education as a community

To begin we established a Lifelong Learning Task Force to discuss, as a community, how best to proceed with a new initiative. It was apparent that this new effort must include all elements of a holistic education system that meets the needs of all learners along the lifelong learning continuum. Thus, any organization, department or entity involved in the delivery of lifelong learning programming and/or services were invited to participate on the Task Force.

Funding was secured to hire staff to begin working with the community to understand the strengths and needs of the current system. Funding was also used to begin in depth research on the specific needs of the community as it relates to our languages and cultures. Additionally, the LLTF contracted the professional services of Deloitte to cost out a system that would address the gaps identified in the current learning ecosystem.

Findings from these activities reiterate findings from past studies such as; underfunding, decreased language fluency and risk of losing language and culture, lack of community and family engagement, poor student attendance, low post-secondary participation, and decreased employment opportunities. However, the new initiative has produced a potential operating model, which, in conjunction with the funding required to run the system, would enable us to fully recover control over education and address the associated gaps. The target-operating model provides a vision of how things may be structured and coordinated as we work together as a community to develop the nuts and bolts of the system.

Current Status

- We are in the final stages of developing a Roadmap or transition plan that will support a gradual transfer of control over lifelong learning from the federal government to us – once this is accepted by the Lifelong Learning Task Force it will be brought to Elected Council for approval
- Once approvals of the Roadmap have been secured there will be ample opportunity for community members to become involved in the various projects outlined in the transition plan, which will essentially begin building the system
- The LLTF – Core Team continues discussions with the federal government to obtain a commitment to work together towards a legally binding federal commitment to fund the transition to a Six Nations Lifelong Learning Education System and provide ongoing funding in perpetuity
- Please contact us with questions or requests for more information at lifelonglearning@sixnations.ca and follow us on Face Book at “Six Nations Education-Lifelong Learning Task Force”