

# Shifts and Transformations in Canadian Postsecondary Teaching and Learning

Views from Teaching and Learning Centre Leaders

2025

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## Recommended Citation

Kenny, N., Arshad, M. A., Biswas, S., Carter, J., Dyjur, P., Flanagan, K., Grant, K. A., Kaipainen, E., Martineau, C., Mason, D., Miller, S., Norman, D., Smith, E. E., Stowe, L., & Usman, F. (2025). *Shifts and Transformation in Canadian Postsecondary Teaching and Learning: Views from Teaching and Learning Centre Leaders*. Calgary, Canada: University of Calgary.  
<https://dx.doi.org/10.11575/PRISM/49576>

## Executive Summary

Teaching and learning centres (TLCs) play a critical role in helping universities advance their strategic priorities related to teaching and learning. TLC leaders have a comprehensive lens that provides insights to help academic institutions move forward in addressing the shifts we are experiencing in postsecondary education.

The purpose of this project was to conduct an environmental scan that broadly explores the shifts, transformations, and changes that TLCs are experiencing at Canada's U15 institutions (large, leading research-intensive universities). We summarized these shifts, grounded key themes in scholarly research, and included recommendations to guide the work of TLCs and postsecondary institutions now and into the future. Teaching and learning centre leaders from U15 institutions (n=22) participated in semi-structured interviews over the fall and winter of 2024/25. Our themes surfaced from guiding questions that identified emerging and enduring shifts and transformations, the impact of these shifts, key priorities, and how to best strengthen postsecondary teaching and learning across institutions.

Seven areas of focus for TLCs emerged, which are all grounded in and echoed by relevant academic literature:

- reflecting value;
- academic innovation and transformation;
- Indigenization, decolonization, and reconciliation;
- equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility;
- learning-focused;
- strategic priorities, planning, and resources; and,
- connecting, leadership, and well-being.

These seven areas of focus informed our recommendations.

## Key Take-Aways

This is a complex time for higher education, with an array of “wicked problems” creating major disruptions to the teaching and learning landscape. TLCs play a critical role in addressing the challenges and changes affecting teaching and learning in post-secondary settings, now and into the future.

Since facing these “wicked problems” is larger than any one unit, it is up to leaders and units across higher education, not just TLCs, to work together to address these challenges. Within these larger systems and contexts, TLCs are situated as integral hubs that provide connections across multiple organizational levels to support and foster a strong culture of teaching and learning. With increased value placed on their work, TLCs are also seeing an increased responsibility to meet strategic priorities set at different levels of the institution, as well as by provincial and federal systems including government and society as a whole. Given the importance and breadth of issues impacting teaching and learning, TLCs need to continue to find sustainable and responsive practices that embrace partnership with communities, networks, and partners beyond those traditionally formed in higher education settings. There is a need for both academic transformation and relational transformation to address

future priorities in higher education. TLCs should foreground strategic and relational academic leadership that commits to an ethos of compassion and care for those connected across the teaching and learning landscape.

## Summary

TLCs play a critical role as hubs and connectors for teaching and learning. Our findings highlight seven areas of focus that reveal a need for continued work across multiple organizational levels to intentionally strengthen postsecondary education and highlight the complexity of sustaining change through informal and formal processes, as well as relational and strategic academic leadership approaches. We hope this discussion paper will inspire dialogue amongst Canada's postsecondary leaders, teaching and learning centres, and the broader academic community to enhance the work of TLCs and strengthen the quality of teaching and learning across institutions.

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## Introduction

Teaching and learning in higher education are at an important time of transition and change. Universities have navigated the transformative impacts of the COVID-19 global pandemic and are now responding to emerging technologies such as generative artificial intelligence (Abdrasheva et al., 2022; Devlin & Samarawickrema, 2022; Napierala et al., 2022; Eaton, 2025). Geopolitical tensions have infused onto campuses, impacting budgets, academic processes, research, and teaching and learning spaces (MacDonald, 2024a; Moscovitz & Sabzalieva, 2023; Venne, 2024). There are calls for postsecondary institutions to be more responsive to the mental health and well-being of students, staff, and faculty (Hammoudi Halat et al., 2023; Smith et al., 2022; Worseley et al., 2022). Universities are increasingly aware of the need to address systemic barriers and to create more equitable, diverse, inclusive, and accessible academic communities, while simultaneously confronting challenges to the language and value of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) (Bhatia et al., 2025; Mugo & Puplampu, 2022; Tamtik & Guenter, 2019; Rahman & Nichols, 2025). There is pressure from governments, students, and the general public to ensure academic degrees and credentials align with and respond to societal needs for innovation, employability, and to address challenges related to climate change, energy and food security, health equity, access to education, poverty, and sustainability (Bennett, 2019; Gregory & Kanuka, 2024; Government of Alberta, 2021; Leal Filho et al., 2023; Serafini et al., 2022). Institutions are also on a journey to affirm Indigenous knowledges, perspectives, pedagogies and methodologies, and address the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) 94 calls to action throughout academic courses and programs (Louie et al., 2017; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

The U15 group of universities (U15) represent the leading research universities in Canada: the University of Alberta, the University of British Columbia, the University of Calgary, Dalhousie University, Université Laval, University of Manitoba, McGill University, McMaster University, University de Montréal, University of Ottawa, Queen's University, University of Saskatchewan, University of Toronto, University of Waterloo, and Western University. This group plays a critical role in advancing research and innovation and mobilizing knowledge "for the benefit of all Canadians" (U15 Canada, n.d.). Institutions across the U15 have also committed to the importance of teaching and learning. For example: UCalgary's *Ahead of Tomorrow* (2023-2030) strategic plan (UCalgary, 2023) includes a strategy to increase "access to impactful and future-focused education"; UBC's (2018-2028) *Shaping UBC's Next Century* strategic plan (UBC, 2018) speaks to inspiring and enabling "students through excellence in transformative teaching, mentoring, advising and the student experience"; the University of Waterloo's (2020-2025) strategic plan, *Connecting Imagination with Impact*, commits to "developing talent for a complex future" (University of Waterloo, 2020); and, Dalhousie University's 2021-2026 strategic plan, *Third Century Promise Si'st Kasqimtlinaqnipunqekl Teli L'wi'tmasimk*, will create an "exceptional student experience" (Dalhousie University, 2021). We recognize that these are bold and important goals in the face of ongoing shifts and transformations in postsecondary education.

Teaching and learning centres (TLCs) play a critical role in helping universities advance their strategic priorities related to teaching and learning. Amidst an array of "wicked problems" (Churchman, 1967; Rittel & Webber, 1973), TLCs act as responsive levers for change by providing educational development

and supporting the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) to facilitate transformative practices and inquiries that engage with the most important and urgent questions for higher education in the current moment and in the future (Bass, 2020). The work of TLCs is broad and context dependent (Forgie et al., 2018). We work to strengthen postsecondary teaching and learning across multiple organizational levels. We often engage in this work in partnership with individual educators, throughout academic departments and faculties, as well as across academic institutions and the postsecondary sector (Kenny et al., 2017; Gibbs, 2013; Wright, 2023). Bitar and Davidovich (2025, Literature Review section, para. 5) communicate a shift in the evolution of TLCs from “basic support units to strategic institutional partners” in teaching and learning.

Through our work in TLCs, we engage in activities such as:

- creating and leading research-informed resources, workshops, and courses on teaching and learning;
- initiating and leading communities of practice, conferences, and working groups on emergent teaching and learning topics;
- providing facilitative expertise and consultation for academic curriculum review, development, and quality assurance processes;
- implementing initiatives to strengthen educational leadership capacity;
- promoting, consulting on, and engaging in scholarly inquiry and research related to postsecondary teaching and learning;
- advancing equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility in teaching and learning;
- affirming Indigenous perspectives and pedagogies in academic courses and programs;
- providing expertise for teaching and learning awards and grants programs to recognize, promote, and celebrate teaching excellence and innovation;
- integrating and advancing educational technologies and platforms;
- collaborating to advance and influence institutional teaching and learning spaces, policies, organizational development processes, and strategic priorities (e.g., entrepreneurial thinking, experiential learning); and,
- fostering community-building, knowledge sharing, and advocacy through institutional, provincial, national, and international higher education networks and organizations.

These scholarly activities are supported by academic development researchers, who confirm that the work of TLCs is increasingly focused beyond individual educators, occurs across multiple organizational levels, and is heavily influenced by local, institutional, and even national contexts (Bitar & Davidovich, 2025; Forgie et al., 2018; Gibbs, 2013; Kenny et al., 2017; Palmer et al., 2010; Taylor & Rege-Colet, 2010; Timmermans, 2014; Wright, 2023).

TLCs are often described as hubs or connectors, as we intentionally work to create partnerships and connect integrated networks and communities that influence knowledge sharing, practice, leadership, and scholarship related to teaching and learning (Taylor et al., 2022; Wright, 2023). Due to the scope and breadth of the work of TLCs, leaders across the U15’s TLCs have a comprehensive lens that can provide

important insights to help academic institutions move forward in addressing some of the most relevant shifts we are currently experiencing in postsecondary education.

## Purpose

The purpose of this project was to conduct an environmental scan that broadly explored the shifts, transformations, and changes that TLCs are experiencing at Canada's U15 institutions, including what is needed to best support the work of postsecondary education into the future. We summarize these shifts, ground key themes in scholarly research, and include recommendations to guide the work of TLCs and postsecondary institutions now and into the future. We present the outcomes of this environmental scan in a comprehensive framework supported by guiding questions to help inform further reflection, conversation, planning, and action to advance our individual and collective capacity to respond to Canada's ever-evolving postsecondary teaching and learning landscape. We hope this discussion paper will inspire dialogue amongst Canada's postsecondary leaders, teaching and learning centres, and the broader academic community to enhance the work of TLCs and strengthen the quality of teaching and learning across institutions.

## Approach

We aimed to broadly address the shifts, changes, and transformations in teaching and learning in postsecondary education. We specifically addressed the work and perspectives of TLCs across the U15 group of universities in Canada. It is important to note that many of the themes that emerged extend beyond TLCs and are broadly applicable across academic institutions and the postsecondary sector.

We used the following questions to guide this exploration:

- Where are we headed? What trends, changes, shifts and transformations are we experiencing in postsecondary teaching and learning?
- What's been the impact? How have these shifts influenced the work of teaching and learning centres?
- What matters most? What's most important? What should we be paying attention to right now and into the future?
- What's needed? What are we already doing to support these changes? What are the right next steps for teaching and learning centres?

Teaching and learning centre directors from U15 institutions were invited to participate in in-person or online interviews between October 2024 – February 2025. All centre leaders participated, with a few inviting additional members of their leadership teams to join the conversation. A total of 22 centre directors and leaders participated in the interviews. All U15 institutions were represented. Interviews lasted 60 to 90 minutes and were framed around the above guiding questions. We used a semi-structured interviewing approach, which allowed for elaborating on verbal and non-verbal cues, and exploring additional questions for further probing and meaning making in partnership with participants (Kallio et al., 2016).

Written notes summarized the participants' responses during each conversation. A commitment was made to capture their input and ideas, with no associated identifiable attributes. We used thematic analysis to identify and report patterns in the information based on "a rich description" across the entire data set, rather than any one guiding question (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83).

The thematic analysis involved iterative and reflective phases of familiarizing, generating, searching, reviewing, defining, naming, and reporting on themes that we captured in the data set (Nowell et al., 2017). We transcribed emergent themes to a collaborative online note-taking tool (Padlet) with relevant descriptors and statements from our notes. We shared the themes and statements with all participants for member checking and to ensure transparent knowledge generation and sharing. We coded the themes and statements to a spreadsheet for further analysis across themes. We shared the final report with all participants prior to final distribution to ensure transparency throughout the process.

## Findings

### Reflecting on Value

#### *The Value of Higher Education*

With so much complexity facing postsecondary teaching and learning, nearly every conversation with TLC leaders surfaced the need to step back and reflect on the purpose of higher education. TLC leaders perceived shifts in this purpose and reflected that exploring this question was important to "aligning and informing their centre's work." TLC leaders observed that universities face pressures to align their work more directly to "economic benefits to society" and to "student employability." They also heard narratives from students, educators, and academic leaders on their campuses that students' expectations of a university degree appear to be moving further away from the wholistic aims and benefits of universities. What they were seeing across universities and in public discourse confirmed that the broader purpose and value of a university degree, and the many benefits of universities to knowledge generation, life, the common good, and society are not as relevant to students, governments, and the general public. They felt growing pressures to ensure "universities were relevant to society and employers."

Research confirms that universities advance critical inquiry, knowledge, and innovation for the public good (Czerniewicz & Cronin, 2023); they contribute to society, civic engagement, and social development; they provide economic benefits to local communities; they improve health and quality of life for individuals, communities, and nations; and they provide valuable opportunities for students to acquire knowledge and skills (e.g., problem solving, communication, critical thinking, collaboration) to prepare them for the workforce (Addie, 2017; Brooks et al., 2021; Chan, 2016).

Without a doubt, higher education contributes to positive economic growth and employability. In a 2021 opinion piece in the Calgary Herald, University of Calgary (UCalgary) President Ed McCauley estimated that UCalgary "delivers a \$16.5 billion economic impact and supports almost 22,500 jobs" (McCauley, 2021, para. 2) to help the local economy. According to Statistics Canada labour market outcomes for

university and college graduates from 2010-2020, the median annual wage for university undergraduate degree graduates five years after graduation is over \$17K higher than graduates with a college-level diploma (Statistics Canada, 2024). For graduates with a professional degree, the median annual wage gap between these groups increases to over \$60K (Statistics Canada, 2024). Most universities across the U15 have undergraduate degree employment rates exceeding 90%. For example, average graduate employment rates are 96.3% at UCalgary (UCalgary, n.d.), 94.9% at The University of Waterloo (University of Waterloo, 2024), and 94.5% at Queen’s University (Government of Ontario, 2024a).

Within a teaching and learning context, shifts towards student employability have increased the focus of academic programs on skills development and articulation, experiential and work-integrated learning, and flexible, personalized learning pathways. Universities understand that essential learning outcomes and experiences related to skills such as communication, leadership, collaboration, problem solving, adaptability, organization, metacognition, time management, and project management strengthen student learning experiences and success (Suleman, 2018). Post-secondary institutions have taken critical steps to integrate and align these skills-based learning outcomes throughout their academic programs. Despite these shifts, the challenge of meeting student and societal expectations of a university degree remains. TLCs can partner with academic programs and course instructors to reflect upon and integrate strategies to ensure program and course-level outcomes are aligned with learning tasks and assessment strategies that are relevant to societal issues, as well as to the future academic and professional development of students.

One of the risks of continuing to emphasize the labour market outcomes of a university degree is that the other “grand ambitions of higher education” will continue to be undermined (Chan, 2016, p. 21). We are experiencing a transactional shift in expectations of students from being learners who will contribute meaningfully to society to those who are simply there to get a degree and secure a job (Brooks et al., 2021). However, research suggests that students are aware of the broader value of higher education as contributing to their personal growth and enrichment, advancing societal development and progress, and addressing labour market needs (Brooks et al., 2021; Trowler, 2023). Universities, academic programs, and course instructors can better emphasize and communicate the broader purpose and impacts of obtaining a university degree. For example, how are we communicating the relevance of an academic degree and course subject matter to students’ academic and professional journeys, their lives, and to the needs of society?

**Recommendations:**

- Enhance discussions within and beyond university communities regarding the benefits of a university education, including contributions to innovation, discovery, society, civic engagement, employability, and the prosperity and well-being of the community.
- Maintain support for research on the impact of academic courses and programs on students' learning experiences and academic and professional development.
- Collaborate with academic programs and instructors to ensure:
  - the benefits and value of a degree are clearly articulated;

- learning activities and assessments are relevant and aligned with institutional, societal, and community priorities and values; and,
- the skills required for future careers are intentionally integrated into courses and programs and assessed by curriculum review processes.
- Strengthen experiential and work-integrated learning experiences by emphasizing the development and articulation of transferable skills through meaningful learning and assessment activities.

### *Teaching and Learning as Valued*

The U15 are research-intensive institutions, and many TLC leaders shared a need to elevate the value of teaching and learning across their university communities. Many TLC leaders felt the persistent tension between research and teaching at their institutions, sharing a need to “build a culture that values teaching, where those contributing feel they are making a difference and are being recognized.” Despite this belief, some leaders shared that their institutions were more intentionally elevating teaching and learning by reimagining teaching evaluation and assessment processes; developing clearer expectations for teaching, learning, and innovation in academic program quality assurance and curriculum development processes; redesigning course evaluation systems; rethinking how teaching and learning are positioned in tenure and promotion processes; and developing institutional frameworks for “teaching effectiveness” or “teaching excellence.”

Although a few institutions had clearly articulated academic plans for advancing teaching and learning, most interviewees saw a need to ensure institutional teaching and learning priorities were strengthened, and most importantly, that these priorities were embedded in department and faculty cultures, action plans, and decision-making processes. They saw a role for TLCs to advance these priorities in their work, and to partner with academic units to bring strategic teaching and learning objectives and actions to life. Departmental culture is a key element influencing the perceived value of teaching and learning (Owens et al., 2018; Reinholz et al., 2019; Shadle et al., 2017). It is often at this meso- or mid-level of universities where it is most difficult to influence change in teaching and learning, as set norms, traditions, assumptions, and practices (i.e., microcultures) related to academic behaviour are difficult to shift (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2015).

Some TLC leaders also recognized a need to elevate local educational leaders and leadership structures by ensuring those with demonstrated expertise in teaching had opportunities to share their knowledge and leadership with other educators. Educational leaders may hold informal or formal roles, and work to share their expertise, advocate for teaching excellence, mentor and empower others, build teaching and learning communities and networks, engage in research and scholarship to advance teaching and learning, and enact change to positively influence teaching and learning (Fields et al., 2019). When given the opportunity to influence change in meaningful ways that support knowledge sharing, build social networks, and focus on continuous improvement, educational leaders can positively influence disciplinary (or local) teaching and learning microcultures (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2015; Taylor et al., 2022). Interviewees working at institutions with teaching-stream tenure and promotion structures also identified that educational leadership roles and initiatives provide critical career progression opportunities for mid- to late-career faculty members.

To enact these changes, many TLC leaders advocated for taking a systems approach to developing strong cultures for teaching and learning. A systems approach recognizes that changes in teaching and learning are influenced across multiple levels (e.g., micro, meso, macro, mega) and through informal (e.g., significant networks, relationships, conversations, and communities) and formal processes (e.g., policies, programs, structures, resources, and committees) (Ellis, 2018; Hannah & Lester, 2009; Kenny, 2021; Roxå & Mårtensson, 2009; Roxå et al. 2011; Simmons, 2016; Taylor et al., 2022). Interviewees suggested this approach would include:

- strengthening institutional policies and processes related to tenure, promotion, and recognition;
- partnering with academic units to build educational leadership capacity and strengthen microcultures;
- creating and sustaining teaching and learning networks, communities, and working groups around strategic teaching and learning priorities; and,
- supporting individual educators in applying scholarly teaching and learning approaches and developing teaching expertise.

They also articulated that institutions and senior academic leaders should continue to reinforce learning experiences and teaching cultures that “they hope most to see at their institutions.”

Most TLC leaders recognized the potential for U15 institutions to further support and advocate for the value of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) within the context of their teaching and research priorities. A few interviewees suggested they were directly involved in institutional teaching and learning granting programs, which provided internal funding for SoTL initiatives. Engaging in scholarship, research, and inquiry related to postsecondary teaching and learning helps to advance and disseminate knowledge related to how we can improve educational practices in academic courses and programs, and how we can more broadly support teaching and learning across multiple organizational levels (Jamniczky et al., 2025). SoTL has been demonstrated to improve teaching and learning, as those who engage in SoTL intentionally change their teaching approaches to better support student learning and align their work with strategic institutional teaching and learning priorities (Brew & Ginns, 2009; Jamniczky et al., 2025; Trigwell, 2013). Additionally, SoTL often involves collaboration and partnership across disciplines and helps to support institutional research goals related to collaboration and advancing interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary scholarship (Jamniczky et al., 2025).

How do academic institutions create environments and cultures where teaching and learning are valued? Reflections from TLC leaders reinforce Myllykoski-Laine et al.’s (2023) recommendations for building a strong culture for teaching and learning in higher education. These authors recommend intentionally implementing strategies to influence:

- Value and Recognition: implement formal and informal processes and structures that provide value and recognition for teaching. This may include teaching and learning awards, grants, policies, governance structures, research-informed professional learning, leadership roles, workload assignments, and well-designed learning spaces and environments.
- Collaborative Relationships, Interaction and Knowledge Sharing: recognize teaching and learning as a shared responsibility (Shulman, 1993) and foster a collegial culture for sharing, developing,

and disseminating teaching expertise by building spaces, resources, networks, and communities for connection. This could also include strengthening opportunities for critical reflection, dialogue, innovation, scholarship, and practice through co-teaching, mentorship, and peer support.

- Pedagogical Influencers: recognize educational leadership as a critical component for teaching and learning across multiple organizational levels. Provide support, resources, recognition, and meaningful opportunities for educational leaders who actively support peer mentorship and the development of teaching communities, inspire concrete action, and influence meaningful change.

### **Recommendations:**

The following recommendations build upon input from TLC leaders and extend Myllykoski-Laine et al.'s (2023) work.

- Collaborate with academic programs to enhance the value placed on *teaching and learning* by:
  - ensuring their program's signature learning experiences are clearly articulated;
  - identifying goals for strengthening teaching and learning across academic courses and programs;
  - developing local (i.e., faculty-specific) and institutional professional learning opportunities focused on critical reflection, dialogue, innovation, scholarship, co-teaching, mentorship, and peer support related to teaching and learning;
  - developing educational leadership opportunities to foster and share teaching expertise and develop strong career pathways at the department, faculty and institutional level; and,
  - implementing or strengthening institutional initiatives that celebrate and demonstrate the value of teaching and learning (e.g., teaching and learning awards, grants, policies, governance structures, research-informed professional learning, leadership roles, workload assignments).
- Enhance the value placed on *educational leadership* within institutions by:
  - providing resources to educational leaders to develop local teaching and learning networks, professional learning opportunities, and strong microcultures for teaching and learning;
  - including educational leadership activities in tenure, promotion, workload assignments, awards, and grants; and,
  - creating intentional opportunities to support institutional networks and communities of practice for informal and formal educational leaders across career stages to connect, share knowledge, and strengthen their leadership capacity.
- Enhance the institutional recognition of the *scholarship of teaching and learning* (SoTL) by:
  - integrating, articulating, and recognizing SoTL in institutional and academic unit teaching, learning, and research plans and goals;
  - increasing capacity in SoTL and research in teaching and learning in higher education by hiring and/or developing SoTL scholars in academic units who facilitate discussions and promote teaching as a scholarly endeavour;

- providing internal funding opportunities for faculty to engage in SoTL initiatives that encourage interdisciplinary collaboration and are aligned with and help to strengthen strategic teaching and learning priorities; and,
- highlighting the potential for SoTL to strengthen student partnerships, teaching and learning practices, and interdisciplinary collaboration.

## Academic Innovation and Transformation

### *Program Innovation*

TLCs are well-recognized for their impact in helping individual educators strengthen their teaching approaches and practices (Wright, 2023; Forgie et al., 2018; Palmer et al., 2010). Many interviewees also reinforced the important role that their centres play in providing facilitative expertise and consultation to help academic units engage in curriculum review, renewal, and development, including supporting quality assurance processes. They shared that there was “more focus on program-level design and curriculum work,” including partnering with academic units to support program-level transformation and innovation. They stated that change in teaching and learning is more likely to be influenced by working with and across academic programs, rather than solely by working with individual course instructors. While engaging with individual instructors is meaningful for micro-level transformation, they saw this approach as “insufficient to influence meaningful change” in the broader teaching and learning culture. With so many emerging and complex changes in teaching and learning, interviewees also expressed a concern that “existing five-to-seven-year institutional quality assurance and cyclical curriculum review processes lag behind what is needed to support responsive change in academic programs.”

Curriculum review, renewal, and development processes encourage meaningful teaching and learning conversations, evidence-informed decision-making, and action to improve teaching and student learning across academic programs (Bens et al., 2020; Kalu & Dyjur, 2018). These processes typically involve iterative stages of visioning, data gathering and analysis, curriculum mapping, and action planning (DiPietro et al., 2022). Program-level curriculum review activities help enhance scholarly teaching and learning practices, increase collegiality and collaboration, strengthen program alignment, improve program transparency, and create ripple effects of knowledge sharing and change across institutions (DiPietro et al., 2022; Lock et al., 2018). The work of TLCs in curriculum review and development often involves consulting on quality assurance and review processes and helping to meaningfully embed strategic priorities and research-informed practices in teaching and learning (e.g., work-integrated learning; experiential learning; authentic assessment; constructive alignment; online learning; transdisciplinary learning; equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility; Indigenous ways of knowing) into new and existing programs.

### **Recommendations:**

- Advocate for transparent institutional processes, necessary resources, and achievable timelines for curriculum review and development while recognizing the complexity of these activities.
- Create opportunities and support for a continuum of ongoing, incremental program enhancement activities that occur between quality assurance cycles.

- Actively partner with students for curriculum renewal and development processes.
- Continue highlighting the potential of program-level review and revision to enhance student learning rather than merely to fulfill quality assurance mandates.
- Ensure curriculum review and development processes integrate meaningful connections to authentic teaching and learning practices within the discipline, along with institutional priorities related to teaching and learning.
- Promote partnerships among academic units, TLCs, Registrar’s Offices, and other units to provide multiple perspectives on curriculum review and development, including disciplinary context and teaching and learning research and best practices.

### *Digital Transformation and Educational Technologies*

Universities across the U15 are facing increased pressure to respond to transformations in digital spaces and learning environments. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in immediate shifts to emergency remote teaching, with educators and students using many new educational technologies to support teaching and learning. Universities have continued to embrace synchronous (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet) and asynchronous (e.g., D2L, Canvas, etc.) online learning platforms to facilitate communication and connections in academic courses and workspaces. Interviewees shared that they continue to offer many of their teaching and learning professional development workshops, courses, and communities of practice using digital platforms to ensure remote and online access for participants.

TLC leaders reflected that their centres have continued to support the integration and adoption of emerging technologies to facilitate learning across academic programs. They shared that they continue to “support integration and adoption of new technologies to facilitate learning in academic courses, including generative AI, AR/VR [artificial and virtual reality], and simulation.” Respondents shared a common reflection that most institutions across the U15 have returned to “largely in-person learning, with small pockets of technology and online innovation.” Institutions that offered existing online academic course and programs prior to the pandemic have continued to do so, without experiencing dramatic increases in the number of online program offerings.

Research summarizing reflections on learning following the pandemic (Abdrasheva et al., 2022; García-Morales et al., 2021; Kara, 2021; Tilak & Kumar, 2022) predicted that:

- digital learning tools and strategies would continue to support face-to-face learning;
- there would be enduring need for campus investments in safe, secure, and reliable digital infrastructure and educational technologies; and,
- ongoing supports would be required to ensure educator expertise and student preparedness in digital environments.

These predictions are reflected in TLC leaders’ observations about recent shifts in educational technologies and post-pandemic priorities.

Some TLC leaders recognized the potential for online and hyflex technologies to increase access to higher education, especially considering recent Canadian federal government restrictions and visa caps for international students (e.g., see MacDonald, 2024a; 2024b). Hyflex learning spaces (Beatty, 2006)

allow for onsite and remote learners to engage synchronously in learning, by equipping classrooms with microphones, cameras, and other technology to facilitate simultaneous access and active participation by both in-classroom and remote learners (Mineshima-Lowe et al., 2024). TLC leaders acknowledged that hyflex learning requires upfront and sustained institutional infrastructural investment, pedagogical supports, teaching expertise, and appropriate consideration for governance, workload, support, and recognition for educators teaching in these contexts. While many TLC leaders stated there was more institutional interest in providing hyflex learning, they did not confirm large-scale investment or uptake at their institutions and reinforced that this work would need to proceed with caution, as meaningful and equitable hyflex learning opportunities are resource intensive.

Respondents noted that their centres are increasingly engaged in institutional conversations related to investigating, securing, and procuring appropriate educational technologies and platforms to support students and educators. They acknowledged the complexity of this work, which requires the engagement of multiple institutional partners and clarity in roles and responsibility for ensuring appropriate resources and assessment, funding, security, privacy, access, and support processes related to new educational technologies. TLC leaders also expressed concern for ongoing inequities to accessing educational technologies that are not institutionally supported. Many students and educators continue to lack access to emerging technology networks and platforms (e.g., see Pelletier et al., 2024). Some U15 institutions have already developed digital learning frameworks and strategies to help address some of these challenges and identify future opportunities (McMaster University, n.d.; University of Waterloo, 2023).

Most TLC leaders were excited to further explore the potential of educational technologies to address institutional challenges and priorities related to “fiscal planning, geopolitical tensions, international student regulations, flexible learning pathways, and accessibility.” Most respondents did see potential for more blended learning opportunities across disciplines and courses to “maximize the potential of both online and in-person experiences.” Blended learning intentionally integrates meaningful engagement in in-person (human-mediated) and online (technology-mediated) teaching and learning environments (Anthony et al., 2022).

Overall, TLC leaders hoped for continued reflection on questions such as:

How can technology enable learning and the creation of academic programs which provide flexibility and strengthen student learning experiences? How might technology help address the fiscal and space constraints that so many institutions are facing? How can technology strengthen institutional commitments to globalization, ensuring meaningful engagement and interaction with global communities?

#### **Recommendations:**

- Increase capacity for hyflex, blended and online learning by:
  - Making strategic investments in hyflex learning spaces;
  - Partnering with academic units to identify and create strategic opportunities to offer academic programs that leverage hyflex, blended, and online learning modalities;

- Enhancing professional learning opportunities to strengthen teaching expertise in hyflex, blended, and online learning modalities; and,
- Strategically offering TLC programs and events using hyflex, blended, and online modalities that provide flexible access for educators.
- Strengthen institutional educational technologies and platforms by:
  - Strategically identifying institutional educational technologies and platforms that strengthen learning and teaching experiences, while ensuring equitable and secure access for all educators and students;
  - Establishing transparent institutional processes, pathways, and funding models for identifying, assessing, and acquiring new and emerging educational technologies;
  - Facilitating the development, implementation, and evaluation of emerging technologies by offering institutional support to smaller-scale pilot projects;
  - Ensuring support is available to facilitate the use of existing and emerging educational technologies and platforms, including distributed leadership and staff across academic and non-academic units;
  - Recognizing the complexity of supporting educational technologies, platforms, and practices, and including multiple institutional partners in this work;
  - Establishing collaborative staff and leadership communities, hubs, and networks to share knowledge and clarify roles and responsibilities across non-academic and academic units, enabling both central coordination and disciplinary specialization for educational technologies; and,
  - Documenting and showcasing high-quality teaching and learning experiences that have been enacted through the adoption of educational technologies and practices.

### *Generative Artificial Intelligence*

Interviewees confirmed that generative artificial intelligence (GAI) has resulted in ongoing shifts in the work of TLCs; across the U15, this work is “rapidly evolving” and encompasses a “large spectrum in thinking and willingness to embrace change.” These shifts are supported by the release of the U15’s paper for *Navigating AI in Teaching and Learning* (U15Canada, 2024). TLC leaders anticipated that GAI would continue to “be a disrupter and shake the foundation of university teaching and learning.” Most agreed that intentional responses to GAI will require a “systems approach” and “partnerships across the institution.” They saw a need to focus on priorities for ethical use; broad student, faculty, and staff engagement; information and GAI literacy; and authentic assessment.

These priorities are all supported in emerging GAI scholarship, with the addition of ensuring broad engagement that includes partners from workplaces and industry (Xia et al., 2024). It is imperative that societal partners be engaged in these conversations to ensure that postsecondary institutions develop approaches to GAI that are both “academically robust” and aligned with the needs of society (Xia et al., 2024, p. 17). Students will soon face the reality that as they enter the workforce, their ability to leverage and use GAI will be essential (Farrelly & Baker, 2023).

Most postsecondary students are leveraging GAI for personal and academic purposes; are unclear on when and how these tools are appropriate to use in academic settings; and recognize the need for

equitable (i.e., free) access across institutions (Johnston et al., 2024). Among its benefits to students, GAI presents opportunities for language tutoring and translation, reduced social isolation, reflective thinking and idea generation, enhanced self-assessment, and receiving immediate feedback in a wide range of academic settings (Farrelly & Baker, 2023; Nikolopoulou, 2024; 2025; Xia et al., 2024). GAI tools provide an important resource for students with disabilities by making educational content and tasks more accessible and inclusive (Farrelly & Baker, 2023; Nikolopoulou, 2024; 2025). GAI can help students analyze their academic schedules, manage their course workloads, and develop study schedules (Nikolopoulou, 2024). It can also provide an important personalized learning tool, as GAI tools “can analyze students’ learning patterns and adapt course content to their individual needs” (Nikolopoulou, 2024, p.104).

A few interviewees noted that their centres were actively engaged in creating custom GAI tools to support teaching and learning, while most TLC leaders reflected that their work was focused on ethical use of GAI in teaching, learning, and assessment. Interviewees confirmed that GAI was “challenging concepts around assessment of student learning...is this really what we need to teach? What is the best way to assess what we most hope students learn?” Unsurprisingly, GAI raises concerns related to academic integrity and ethical behavior in academic settings (Eaton, 2025; Xia et al., 2024). Most researchers caution academic institutions about embracing GAI “detection” tools and software, which are inaccurate and are most likely to disadvantage marginalized students (Eaton, 2025; Farrelly & Baker, 2023). Additional ethical considerations for GAI in higher education include issues such as data privacy, research integrity, environmental impact, bias, and accessibility (Eaton, 2025; Mannuru et al., 2023; Nikolopoulou, 2024; 2025). Clearly, there is a need for cautious optimism as educational institutions navigate the complexities of GAI. Most importantly, Felten and Forsyth (2025) emphasize the importance of keeping humans at the centre of the learning partnership with GAI and using AI to “augment rather than replace human expertise and agency” (p. 41).

GAI has great capacity to support educators in the design and implementation of a wide range of teaching, learning, and assessment tasks. For example, GAI can assist educators in generating content, designing practice questions and mock exams, developing case studies, recommending resources, creating simulations, completing routine administrative tasks, answering student questions, coaching and tutoring learners, and providing general course information (Nikolopoulou, 2024; 2025). GAI has elevated conversations about the need to reform assessment in higher education, with a focus on promoting relevant, authentic and deep learning, critical thinking and problem-solving skills development, and active student engagement (Xia et al., 2024). There is an ongoing need in higher education to develop educator expertise in centering the importance of assessment and in integrating meaningful, diverse, and ethical assessment practices in academic courses and programs (Xia et al., 2024).

There was a common concern shared by TLC leaders that university processes, policies, and systems could not keep up with the pace of change happening in the GAI space. They reflected, “universities are struggling to adapt as quickly as students and educators” and “we need a systemic response and appropriate institutional resources.” They acknowledged, “we soon won’t know a world without GAI,” so it is important that institutions work to ensure educators, students, and staff are able to use and

leverage GAI ethically and meaningfully in their work. TLC leaders also remarked on both the potential and challenges related to how staff in their centres were leveraging GAI in their work, again reflecting a sense of uncertainty for institutional supports related to staff professional training, funding, and access to GAI.

### **Recommendations:**

- Establish flexible and responsive institutional and cross-institutional infrastructure (physical, digital, governance), systems, working groups, and steering committees to guide principles, practices, and standards concerning the ethical use of GAI for staff, students, educators, and academic leaders across institutions.
- Engage students, educators, academic staff, industry, and external partners broadly to create frameworks and strategies that support GAI literacy and its ethical use in academic institutions.
- Review and ensure academic integrity policies, processes, and practices describe and support ethical use of GAI across the teaching, learning, and research ecosystems.
- Leverage GAI to enhance existing teaching and learning platforms, learning management systems, and data analytics tools.
- Incorporate GAI tools to enhance accessibility and develop personalized learning pathways for students in academic programs and courses.
- Provide equitable access to robust GAI platforms and educational technologies for educators, students, staff, and academic leaders.
- Develop dynamic resources and programs in TLCs and academic units to support the development of teaching expertise and skills related to the ethical use of GAI and authentic assessment practices.
- Provide ongoing professional development and community opportunities for educators and support staff to learn about and deeply explore appropriate applications of GAI tools in their courses and work.

### *Transdisciplinary Approaches*

Most conversations related to transdisciplinary approaches in teaching and learning across the U15 are focused on strengthening transdisciplinary *research* opportunities. However, many TLC leaders recognized that their institutions are also placing increased focus on developing interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary learning experiences in academic programs and courses. They shared that much of this focus is driven by the need to address complex or “wicked problems such as climate change, food and housing insecurity, sustainability and poverty.” Wicked problems are uncertain, complex, messy, and require engaging with multiple disciplines and partners and “learning across boundaries” (McCune et al., 2023, p. 1529). Wicked problems emphasize student learning experiences and outcomes related to teamwork, collaboration, integration, open-mindedness, communication across disciplines and sectors, creative problem solving, possibility-thinking, conflict resolution, respect, and resilience (Yeung et al., 2021; McCune et al., 2023).

Some TLC leaders saw a role for their centres to facilitate program-level curriculum development discussions to help academic programs meaningfully integrate transdisciplinary learning. They also saw a

role in building teaching expertise and strategies to help support learner preparedness to address wicked problems (e.g., group work, problem solving, facilitation, and decision-making). At the same time, interviewees experienced institutional structures, funding, and disciplinary silos that get in the way of creating meaningful transdisciplinary experiences through academic courses and programs. They grappled with the fact that while “there is potential for pedagogical innovation, institutional structures and silos can get in the way.” Multiple TLC leaders shared the need for systemic shifts in policies, structures, and processes to facilitate transdisciplinary learning throughout academic courses and programs. These institutional shifts require engagement with university and faculty-level governance, as well as partnership with academic and non-academic units.

**Recommendations:**

- Elevate the importance of transdisciplinary approaches in teaching and learning and ensure these approaches are reflected in institutional teaching and learning priorities.
- Identify and break down structural barriers to facilitate transdisciplinary undergraduate and graduate teaching and learning experiences (e.g., co-teaching, teaching assistant support, interdisciplinary course codes, workload assignments, revenue-sharing and tuition models, and funding sources for transdisciplinary teaching and research projects).
- Develop professional learning opportunities to strengthen transdisciplinary teaching expertise (e.g., designing learning outcomes, activities, and assessments that address wicked problems and foster transferable skills articulation and development).
- Meaningfully integrate transdisciplinary learning opportunities into academic programs and courses by further emphasizing their importance through the existing course design, curriculum development and review, and quality assurance processes.

*Work-integrated and Experiential Learning*

With increased focus on employability, skills articulation, and creating high-quality student learning experiences, academic institutions have moved towards providing more work-integrated (WIL) and experiential learning (EL) opportunities. WIL, EL and undergraduate research (UR) have been demonstrated to enhance student engagement and learning; support personal, social, and career development; and strengthen community engagement (Burch et al., 2019; Corwin et al., 2015; Dolan, 2016; Flanagan et al., 2024; Kuh, 2008; Stirling et al., 2024). Interviewees acknowledged that these experiences are not new to universities “especially within the context of professional degrees.”

Some TLC leaders stated that they were actively working with academic units to intentionally embed WIL, EL, and/or UR experiences in academic courses and programs. They saw “increased focus on skills articulation, employability and career development” across academic programs. Curricular or short-term/small experiential learning (EL) opportunities are instructor-created and instructor-driven. They provide students with EL competencies such as career readiness, complex problem solving, communication, and teamwork without the burden of having to sign up for an extra program or extend their degree programs. Small EL activities are time-bounded, focused, and lower-risk, making them adaptable across disciplines and accessible to diverse student populations. This type of EL meets students where they already are—in the classroom.

Respondents shared a concern related to the importance of ensuring equitable access to these high-impact learning opportunities across academic programs, as opposed to solely emphasizing student engagement in WIL, EL, and UR through co-curricular activities. Bangera and Brownell (2014), Stirling et al. (2024), and Stowe et al. (2022) advocate for reducing barriers to engagement in WIL, EL, and UR for equity-deserving and marginalized groups, underscoring that quality EL must address issues of equity and inclusion through strategies such as integration into required academic courses in students' early years of their university experience.

Interviewees also acknowledged ongoing tensions in academic perceptions of WIL, EL, and UR, which many educators believe conflict with or take away from the development of disciplinary content expertise. They wondered, "how palatable is [EL/WIL] for the academic community?" Research suggests that when intentionally designed, these experiences enhance, rather than detract from student learning experiences and engagement (Burch et al., 2019; Corwin et al., 2015; Dolan, 2016; Kuh, 2008; Stirling et al., 2024).

Some TLC leaders spoke to ongoing provincial pressures to identify and track WIL and EL experiences as part of institutional performance metrics (e.g., Government of Alberta, 2021; Government of Ontario, 2024b). As pressures to provide more WIL experiences at Canadian universities mount, an ongoing challenge for academic institutions is ensuring strategies for developing sustainable employer, industry, and community partnerships to support meaningful WIL engagement across diverse academic programs and contexts (Stirling et al., 2024). TLC leaders saw value in emphasizing quality versus quantity EL experiences across the curriculum and cautioned against viewing student engagement in EL as a "checkbox activity." Flanagan et al. (2024) provide an accessible framework (A.I.R.) for high-quality EL (defined by Authentic experience, Intentional pedagogical design, and Reflection), which provides a useful reference for TLCs and academic institutions moving forward.

### **Recommendations:**

- Collaborate with academic programs to intentionally integrate more flexible or short-term WIL, EL, and UR experiences in required first- and second-year courses, ensuring meaningful and equitable access.
- Provide educators with resources (e.g., teaching or learning assistants, space, funding) to help them meaningfully embed EL into their courses.
- Recognize educators who are advancing EL, WIL, and UR in academic courses and programs through institutional reward structures (e.g., grants, awards, tenure and promotion).
- Create multiple pathways and entry points for students to engage meaningfully in EL activities across all years of their academic programs.
- Explore and implement micro-credentials to encourage the development of learners' EL-based skills, complementing existing academic courses and programs, while rewarding and tracking students' engagement in EL and WIL activities.
- Partner with academic units and educational leaders to research and share the impacts and benefits of engagement in WIL, EL, and UR in academic courses and programs.

- Create professional learning opportunities to foster teaching expertise in designing, implementing, and assessing high-quality EL experiences.
- Identify, support, and enhance existing curricular EL and UR experiences that may not be recognized as such.
- Explore the relationship between EL and land-based learning and provide meaningful opportunities for community engagement to increase land-based learning opportunities for students and educators.

### *Meaningful and Authentic Assessment*

Assessment is critical to the design of academic courses and programs (Fook & Sidhu, 2010; Gibbs & Simpson, 2005; Sokhanvar et al., 2021). Authentic assessment contributes to the ongoing and practical application of student learning tasks to *real-life*, whether that be to their field of study, future academic experiences, workplace, or to society (Fook & Sidhu, 2010; Sokhanvar et al., 2021). Authentic assessment improves student learning, engagement, and skill development (e.g., communication, collaboration, critical thinking and problem solving, knowledge application, self-awareness, and self-confidence) (Sokhanvar et al., 2021). Meaningful and well-designed authentic assessments are described as realistic and cognitively challenging, and help students evaluate and judge their own learning progress (Villarroel et al, 2018).

TLC leaders spoke to the potential of framing authentic and meaningful assessments as essential to pedagogical innovation and transformation across academic programs. They confirmed that more work within their centres was dedicated to supporting research-informed approaches to student assessment, meaningful feedback processes, alternative grading strategies (e.g., ungrading and specifications grading), and accessibility in assessment (e.g., universal design for learning). A few interviewees confirmed that their institutions were developing or “changing institutional principles, policies, and procedures” to help transform student assessment practices. For example, UCalgary shares a comprehensive research- and community-informed approach to developing institutional principles for the assessment of student learning, which also reflects the university’s commitment to parallel processes and ethical space in order to support cross-cultural dialogue and meaningful representation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews (Ermine, 2007; UCalgary, 2025).

All respondents reflected on how emerging technologies, such as GAI, were challenging the very foundation of how assessment and academic integrity are viewed and practiced across their universities. They also grappled with the reality that incorporating authentic assessment practices can pose challenges for educators and academic programs, as many associated strategies require more resources to meaningfully plan, implement, and evaluate student performance, “especially in large class sizes.”

### **Recommendations:**

- Partner with academic units to identify and integrate meaningful and authentic assessments as a central component to their signature pedagogies (Shulman, 2005) and as core to pedagogical innovation and transformation in academic courses and programs.
- Amplify TLC initiatives and resources to support research-informed feedback and assessment approaches.

- Strengthen TLC initiatives and resources to support assessment practices in large class sizes.
- Explore and incorporate strategies for sustainable assessment practices and supports across academic courses and programs.
- Develop or revisit institutional principles that are research- and community-informed to guide student assessment principles across multiple organizational levels (e.g., courses, academic programs, units, and the institution).
- Reflect institutional commitments to mental health and well-being; sustainability; Indigenization; and equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility in assessment practices.
- Develop flexible and responsive programs and resources to support the ethical use of GAI and other educational technologies in the design and implementation of student assessments.

### *Flexible program structures*

Conversations related to program innovation also highlighted a trend towards flexible program structures and microcredentialing. Some provincial governments have released their own microcredential frameworks to guide related program initiatives (e.g., BC Ministry, 2024; eCampus Ontario, 2021). Stackable learning and microcredentialing typically focus on developing skills within a particular discipline that most often align with workplace competencies (Bloomberg, 2024). Laddered programs are designed to build from one credential to another, offering increased flexibility for students to continue their studies at some point in the future. Many TLC leaders anticipated increased interest in alternative and flexible credentialing structures, especially in the context of professional degree programs and graduate education. They highlighted the potential of flexible and laddered learning opportunities (e.g., certificates and diplomas leading to degrees) in meeting the needs of learners with existing work and life commitments and “lifelong learners, with interests beyond traditional undergraduate and graduate degrees.” Interviewees also saw opportunities for universities to expand online, evening, and weekend course offerings to further meet the needs of learners.

Some leaders shared that their institutions were already targeting or exploring the development of new flexible and online certificates and degree programs for graduate students and for upskilling and reskilling in continuing education, lifelong learning, and professional degrees. They did note existing structural, administrative, and institutional barriers to broadly embracing flexible and innovative credentialing structures, stating that “university structures make it difficult to navigate flexible, stackable learning opportunities.” Some of these barriers include governance approvals, admission requirements, access to institutional resources to support students enrolled in microcredential programs (e.g., library, IT), and including microcredentials on academic transcripts.

While interviewees acknowledged that universities were more interested in extending access to “flexible and agile” learning opportunities, they were less certain about the role TLCs could play in supporting this shift. They also questioned whether society or industry professionals understood the value of alternative academic credentials. Some TLCs were already engaged in curriculum development work to design flexible, stackable academic programs. However, many viewed work related to upskilling, reskilling, and lifelong learning as aligned more directly with their continuing education units.

Acknowledging financial pressures, interviewees expressed tensions from the academic community in “scaling up new programs with flexible structures, while having to pause and scale back other academic programs.” Microcredentials can complement and extend program offerings for students and strengthen links to industry and community; however, in comparison to university degrees, they don’t appear to offer major viable revenue streams (McGreal & Olcott Jr., 2022). With continued budget constraints and uncertainty, it is still unclear how and if alternative credentialing frameworks will play a prominent role across the U15.

### **Recommendations:**

- Continue to explore flexible programming and credentialing structures (e.g., stackable diplomas and certificates, laddered programs, microcredentials) and learning opportunities, especially within the context of professional degrees and graduate education programs across a variety of modalities (e.g., in person, online, blended, hyflex).
- Collaborate across institutional units such as the Registrar’s Office, Information Technologies, TLCs, libraries, and student services to reduce existing structural, administrative, and institutional barriers for flexible and innovative credentialing structures.
- Adopt and support an institutional platform to manage and issue microcredentials for both credit- and non-credit programs.
- Explore additional opportunities to schedule academic courses in evenings and on weekends to provide additional flexibility for learners.
- Engage in research to assess the impact of flexible and stackable credentialing programs on the teaching and learning experiences and outcomes of students and educators, as well as their sustainability and financial viability.

### **Indigenization, Decolonization, and Reconciliation**

Most Canadian universities have published strategic plans that articulate a commitment to Indigenization to fulfill the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s (TRC) Calls to Action (TRC, 2015) in postsecondary education (Raffoul et al., 2022). All interviewees in this study articulated a responsibility to addressing the TRC’s 94 Calls to Action (TRC, 2015) and affirming Indigenous perspectives, methodologies, knowledges, and pedagogies in higher education. They shared a “need to move forward towards action in meaningful ways and embed this work in a good way.” This work includes creating postsecondary teaching and learning environments that create ethical space and honour Indigenous worldviews and ways of knowing (Antoine et al., 2018; Louie et al., 2017; Ermine, 2007). The TRC Calls to Action emphasize the “responsibility of post-secondary educators to reflect Indigenous cultures and knowledges in all aspects of education and work, in consultation with Indigenous people, to promote understanding and good relations in teaching and learning” (Flanagan et al., 2024, p. 59).

Many TLC leaders interviewed recognized an “ongoing focus on Indigenization and decolonization of teaching and learning theories and practices” across higher education. They saw an associated need for more partnerships with academic and non-academic units across the institution and with Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, peoples and communities. They reaffirmed the systemic nature of this work and emphasized the importance of “continuing to meaningfully support decolonization, transformation

and Indigenization across the curriculum.” Importantly, they also reflected on the need to continue to decolonize and Indigenize educational development practices and the work of TLCs generally.

The term *Indigenization* is interpreted and enacted in multiple ways in academia. Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) describe Indigenization in postsecondary institutions in Canada as comprising a three-part spectrum: on one end is “Indigenous inclusion”, in the middle “reconciliation indigenization,” and on the other end “decolonial indigenization” (p. 218). *Indigenous inclusion* consists of increasing Indigenous participation in the institution, primarily by encouraging Indigenous faculty, staff, and students to adapt to the culture of the academy. *Reconciliation Indigenization* sees Indigenization as creating a common, reconciled understanding of the relationships between Indigenous and Eurocentric knowledges, as well as between academic institutions and Indigenous communities. At the other end of Gaudry and Lorenz’ (2018) spectrum is *Decolonial Indigenization*, which demands transformational reformation of the academy where knowledge production is based on “balancing power relations between Indigenous Peoples and Canadians” (p. 219).

Antoine et al. (2018) use three separate but interrelated terms to describe the processes involved in education for Reconciliation in postsecondary education. They conceptualize Indigenization as “a process of naturalizing Indigenous knowledge systems and making them evident to transform spaces, places, and hearts” (Antoine et al., 2018, p. 6). The authors further emphasize that decolonization is the process of deconstructing and dismantling colonial ideologies of superiority as well as valuing and revitalizing Indigenous knowledges and approaches. This includes interrogating our understanding of knowledge, knowledge production, and problematizing dominant discourses. Reconciliation means “addressing past wrongs done to Indigenous Peoples, making amends, and improving relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to create a better future for all” (Antoine et al., 2018, p. 7). Because reconciliation is deeply relational work and requires building understanding across worldviews, it is important to frame all efforts toward reconciliation accordingly.

Cree scholar Willie Ermine’s (2007) vision of an ethical space in which to engage in the work of reconciliation is foundational to resetting the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and Canada. Ermine (2007) proposes that we can reconcile our contrasting worldviews by employing a “new partnership model of the ethical space, in a cooperative spirit between Indigenous peoples and Western institutions” under new rules of engagement (p. 194). Ermine contends that an ethical space “is formed when two societies, with disparate worldviews, are poised to engage each other” (p. 193). Ethical space acknowledges the diverse views of human societies and creates new ways of thinking freed from “the archaic ways of interaction” (Ermine, 2007, p. 194) of the past. Ermine acknowledges the difficulty of establishing such a framework. It requires us to configure the ethical, moral, and legal principles of engagement “in cross-cultural cooperation, at the common table of the ethical space” (Ermine, 2007, p. 201).

Although some TLCs have Indigenous-focussed teams and positions, many interviewees acknowledged it was difficult to permanently fund, recruit for, and retain positions focussed on decolonization and Indigenization. Educational developers working in this space have broad responsibilities such as: building awareness of Indigenization; fostering strong relationships with Indigenous Elders, Knowledge

Keepers, peoples and communities; consulting with educators on the work of decolonization and Indigenization in academic courses and programs; contributing to strategic documents, committees and focus groups; and, creating networks, communities, initiatives and resources related to Indigenous perspectives, knowledges, methodologies, and pedagogies (Raffoul et al., 2022).

Indigenous educational developers face these challenges and more in their roles. In particular, the work of Indigenization “is exponentially falling on the shoulders of Indigenous academics and non-academic staff” (Raffoul et al., 2022, p. 167). This exceptional responsibility for Indigenous EDs is further compounded by the millennium-long history of the University as a site of colonial knowledge production and perpetuation, as well as modern constructs such as academic freedom, collective bargaining, and policy-driven relations (Raffoul et al., 2022). Additional challenges for Indigenous EDs include lack of dedicated funding to initiate and/or sustain effective Indigenization and decolonization work, and the impossible expectation that they are “the all-knowing source of Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, axiologies, and pedagogies” (Raffoul et al., 2022, p. 167). TLC leaders must consider all of these factors and their impacts on Indigenous EDs themselves and the overall efficacy of Indigenization at the institutional level.

Raffoul et al. (2022) provide several recommendations for postsecondary institutions to support Indigenization and address many of the issues they raise (a full description of these recommendations are summarized on pages 167-170 of their work). For example, they share:

- Hiring Indigenous people across faculties, departments, and units must increase, including additional Indigenous educational developers.
- The work of Indigenous EDs should be focused on the work of Indigenization as much as possible.
- Support should include collaborative efforts to help shift faculty and leadership mindsets related to their understanding and value of Indigenization, and their approach to teaching and learning.
- Institutions can develop frameworks that support collaboration and community building between universities and Indigenous communities and invest in campus-wide personal and professional development focussed on local Indigenous epistemologies.
- This work requires increased resources and support for educational development and must remain distinct from equity, diversity, and inclusion, and internationalization priorities.

Indigenous scholars such as Battiste (2013) and Donald (2016; 2021) remind us of the diversity of Indigenous knowledges and the importance of connecting to traditional oral knowledge, relationality, land and experience-based learning, ceremony and nurturing each student’s learning spirit through education. As such, educational development must be situated within local cultural, historical, and treaty relationship contexts, but also within the context of larger political, cultural, and legal arenas nationally and internationally. Yochim and Martineau (2023) contend that *knowing where you are* is a critical starting point for educators on the journey to understanding Indigenous Peoples and histories in and of *this place*. It is a decolonizing approach to Indigenization that considers place a common relative and, as such, an ethical space in which to learn about, from, with, and through Indigenous worldviews.

Given that advancing Reconciliation through teaching and learning in Canadian postsecondary education is complex and complicated work, how can TLCs continue to move forward in good ways? Moving forward must account for the socio-political messiness of decolonization, attend to the sensitivities of Indigenization, and address the limits imposed by institutional resource allocation. It includes defining both the nature and scope of transformation envisioned by the institution. Gaudry and Lorenz' (2018) three-part spectrum and Antoine et al.'s (2018) three interrelated processes provide some foundation for determining an institution's focus, aims, and level of commitment to transforming postsecondary education. Educational development with respect to Indigenous ways of knowing is context-dependent, beginning with the ways of knowing, doing, and being over time of the peoples of this place. Indigenous education is grounded in principles that also apply to educational development in postsecondary education.

Institutional commitments to Truth and Reconciliation are essential to supporting TLCs in continuing to move reconciliation forward in postsecondary education. They provide necessary direction, context, and accountability for individuals, units, and other campus communities. In 2015, Universities Canada, representing 97 universities across Canada, introduced 13 principles on Indigenous Education to address underrepresentation of Indigenous students in higher education. The principles represented the commitment of university leaders to address the unique needs and aspirations of Indigenous students in postsecondary. In 2023, Universities Canada published a reaffirmation of its commitments to Truth and Reconciliation. These commitments include:

- respecting and making space for Indigenous expertise, knowledges and cultures in policies, structures, and governance;
- supporting Indigenous student success;
- advancing the Indigenization of teaching and learning;
- ensuring research is respectful, mutually beneficial, and collaborative;
- developing strong engagement with Indigenous communities; and,
- continuing to support Indigenous Peoples within Canadian universities (Universities Canada, 2023).

Educational developers and TLCs have increasing access to Indigenous knowledges, perspectives, and pedagogies from Indigenous Peoples from which to learn. Each institution occupies unique territory inhabited by specific Peoples, which is a foundational consideration. While there are some aspects of culture and experience that are common to many Indigenous nations, there is so much more that is specific, local, and place-dependent. Learning *about* Indigenous people should now be synonymous with learning *from* Indigenous people. The most important relationships for postsecondary institutions to rebuild are those with the Indigenous Peoples whose territories they occupy. Indigenous scholars are leading this learning by exploring concepts and principles of teaching and learning through their own worldviews.

In the context of southern Alberta, for example, postsecondary institutions acknowledge that they are in the traditional territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy comprised of the Siksika, Kanai, and Piikani Nations, the Tsuut'ina Nation, the Stoney Nakoda Nations: Bearspaw, Chiniki, and Goodstoney, and the homeland of the *Otipemisiwak* Métis Nation within Alberta. The University of Calgary's (2017)

Indigenous Strategy, *ii' taa'poh'to'p* was developed under the leadership of an Indigenous Task Force representing First Nations and Métis communities throughout the province and beyond. It is founded on “Indigenous perspectives of the universe which are governed by dynamic cycles of transformation and renewal” (p. 6) and is organized around achieving transformation and renewal through four visionary circles: Ways of Knowing; Ways of Doing; Ways of Connecting; and Ways of Being. The foundation of *ii' taa'poh'to'p* as an institutional strategy is the following principle: “Together, we share this land, strive to live together, learn together, walk together, and grow together ‘in a good way’” (p. 2). This is an example of how postsecondary institutions can work together with and under the leadership of Elders, Indigenous academics, leaders, and communities to articulate their responsibilities and commitments to Truth and Reconciliation. Transformation and renewal of our understanding of Reconciliation and work towards it are part of an ongoing process.

Flanagan et al. (2024) present a new framework for experiential learning that better reflects their university’s commitments to Truth and Reconciliation. Through extensive consultation and dialogue with Indigenous and settler colleagues, they created a new, streamlined definition: “Experiential learning is learning by doing, being, connecting, and reflecting” (Flanagan et al., 2024, p. 62). While simple, this definition is a “new, practical, holistic, and reconciliatory framework” (Flanagan et al., 2024, p. 61) that is inclusive of and fundamentally tied to Indigenous worldviews and pedagogies. It extends the conceptualization of experiential learning beyond a focus only on *doing*. Learning by *being* results from immersive experiences in specific contexts, and “recognizes individuals as whole beings with intellectual, emotional, social, physical, and spiritual dimensions” (Flanagan et al., 2024, p. 63). Learning by *connecting* encompasses connections between human beings, networks, communities, and ideas, but also connections beyond humanity. It can include connecting to the land, the ancestors, and to other forms of life in the natural world, in keeping with the understanding that all of life exists in relation, a core Indigenous principle for learning. Learning by *reflecting* is where experiences are given meaning as we make sense of them through reflection. Reflection can be formal or informal, and assessed or not, depending on the learning objectives. Reflection is an essential aspect of Indigenous perspectives of learning as wholistic and life-long.

Many Indigenous scholars are examining education through their own knowledge systems and cultural perspectives to help inform and guide Indigenization. *Siksikaitstapi* (Blackfoot Confederacy) scholar Gabrielle Lindstrom (2022), developed a guide to the principles articulated in *ii' taa'poh'to'p*, to assist curriculum developers in understanding how to approach Indigenization, decolonization, and reconciliation in teaching and learning in good ways. Lindstrom interprets the concepts, connects them to Indigenous epistemologies, and explains their relevance and importance, as the following example demonstrates:

The *ii' taa'poh'to'p* concepts of transformation, renewal and ways of being are relevant because they provide a conceptual and conscious entry point for reflecting on change and growth as a natural part of learning and coming into new ways of developing knowledge. Ways of being denote how our identity is inextricably woven into our understanding of knowledge. (Points for Critical Reflection section)

This guide includes questions as points for personal and professional reflection on each of the concepts and circles in *ii' taa'poh'to'p*, as well as activities and scenarios to help curriculum developers reflect, learn, and begin to build ethical relationships and processes in which to engage with Indigenous epistemologies. Lindstrom (2022) also includes guidance on cultivating relational accountability, practicing reciprocity, and engaging in parallel processes to validate curriculum that recognize “the knowledge, authority and expertise of Indigenous peoples as self-determining entities in the curriculum development process” (Points for Critical Reflection section). Lindstrom’s insights from her *Siksikaitsitapi* worldview are invaluable for TLCs and EDs working in Treaty 7 territory.

Tiffany Prete (2021), also a *Siksikaitsitapi* scholar, presents important teachings with respect to integrating traditional Blackfoot educational practices into postsecondary education. Prete brings together *Siksikaitsitapi* human development theory, pedagogy, and her own teaching practices to provide deeper understanding for educational development. Based on teachings from other Blackfoot scholars, Prete explains the educational practices of her ancestors prior to colonization as a wholistic pedagogy designed to teach a way of life:

Chambers and Blood (2010) described Siksikaitsitapi pedagogy as seeking ‘to unite what is to be learned with how it is learned’ (p. 1). They further add that Siksikaitsitapi pedagogy is ‘more than teaching and learning . . . [it] is about a way of living, being, and learning’ (p. 1). (p. 373)

Prete identifies ways in which Blackfoot pedagogy is different than Western education both in terms of emphasis and methods. Rather than focusing on what knowledge is attained and to what degree, Blackfoot pedagogy emphasizes the gifts, talents, and abilities gifted to people by the Creator and how to best develop and use them as part of *Niipaitapiiyssin*, a *Siksikaitsitapi* way of life.

The work of these scholars is a sampling of how Indigenization can impact our understanding of teaching and learning in postsecondary contexts. TLCs can learn from Indigenous scholars about their knowledge and education systems, as well as from settler scholars and educators who are engaged in the work. The task for TLCs is not to become experts on specific Indigenous worldviews, but to learn enough from Indigenous teachers to understand how best to support inclusion of Indigenous worldviews and pedagogies, and to understand that the goal of education for Indigenous Peoples is to perpetuate a good way of life. Below are recommendations based on what we have learned through this work to date.

### **Recommendations:**

Many of these recommendations reflect and build upon the work of Raffoul et al. (2022).

- Meaningfully and respectfully recruit and hire Indigenous faculty and staff to lead educational and curriculum development initiatives that advance Indigenous perspectives, pedagogies, knowledges and protocols in academic courses and programs. Ensure hiring and recruitment processes honour and respect Indigenous oral traditions, protocols, and processes.
- Provide robust resources and support for Indigenous faculty and staff working in TLCs that recognize the importance of managing workload, connecting to community, practicing reciprocity, land-based learning, and honouring Indigenous Ceremony, oral traditions and protocols.

- Create teaching and learning spaces and environments (e.g., indoor, outdoor, online) that honour Indigenous Protocols, and ways of knowing, being, doing and connecting.
- Build and foster meaningful and reciprocal relationships with Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and communities that affirm local traditions and Protocols.
- Ensure all TLC staff engage in personal and professional learning related to truth, reconciliation, and Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, being and connecting.
- Affirm and honour Indigenous perspectives, pedagogies, knowledges and protocols in the work of TLCs, acknowledging that the work of educational and curriculum development is largely grounded in Western/Eurocentric scholarship and frameworks.
- Ensure Indigenous epistemologies and research approaches are affirmed, supported and recognized through existing scholarship and research programs focussed on teaching and learning (e.g., grants, SoTL initiatives, conferences, journals, knowledge dissemination networks and channels).
- Partner with institutional offices that support Indigenous Engagement to develop initiatives that support and recognize educators and academic units in affirming and honouring Indigenous perspectives, pedagogies, knowledges and protocols in academic courses and programs (e.g., Indigenous curriculum and research grants, community partnerships, Indigenous teaching awards, land-based learning grants and initiatives).
- Partner with academic and non-academic units to affirm and honour Indigenous perspectives, pedagogies, knowledges and protocols in academic courses and programs.
- Recognize and develop parallel pathways and processes that honour Indigenous oral traditions in teaching and learning initiatives and recognition processes (e.g., conferences, course surveys, teaching awards and grants programs, curriculum review, quality assurance, tenure and promotion processes).
- Affirm the importance of truth, reconciliation, and the TRC's 94 Calls to Action and honour the distinctness of this work from EDIA initiatives (see Raffoul et al., 2022; Major, 2024).
- Develop strong, collaborative relationships between TLCs and offices, departments, or other units dedicated to leading and supporting decolonization and Indigenization.
- Support and resource Indigenous leadership and program development around land-based learning opportunities.

## Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility (EDIA)

Many Canadian universities have plans communicating their institutional commitments; student recruitment goals; programmatic supports for students, staff and educators (e.g., curriculum adaptations and new course offerings); research and scholarship priorities; and institutional climate strategies related to EDIA (Tamtik & Guenter, 2019). Bhatia et al. (2025) explored EDIA trends including anti-racism practices across the U15 and found that practices were varied, situated, and dependent upon institutional capacity. They highlighted recommendations such as broader integration of EDIA across all institutional levels, expanded programming and professional development, a clearer focus on metrics, reporting and policy implementation, and enhanced knowledge sharing across institutions (Bhatia et al., 2025).

TLC leaders saw more of their work dedicated to supporting EDIA in teaching and learning. In some universities, work on EDIA was conceptualized as also including decolonization (EDIA-D) and anti-racism (EDIA-A). Participants reinforced the importance of engaging in systemic approaches to advancing EDIA across postsecondary teaching and learning environments, which involves comprehensive and intentional transformation across all institutional levels. They shared concerns that “many senior and executive leadership positions are still occupied by dominant, non-equity deserving groups.” A few leaders acknowledged ongoing tensions related to EDIA with considerations in higher education such as:

How do international visa caps on graduate student admissions impact our commitment to EDIA in higher education? How will we continue to advocate for and create globally-engaged curricula across academic programs? How will ongoing budget constraints and political platforms impact institutional priorities related to EDIA?

Some centres saw a need to prioritize areas such as “intercultural compassion” and “intercultural competencies.” Compassionate intercultural education “...provides a systematic approach to developing and nurturing common values/virtues and the critical skills (practical wisdom) needed to learn, understand and appraise one’s own and competing world views” (Papadopoulos, 2017, p. 77). It includes cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, cultural sensitivity, and cultural competence (Papadopoulos, 2017). Intercultural teaching competence encompasses an instructor’s ability to engage with students “who are linguistically, culturally, socially, or in other ways different from the instructor” to enhance their learning (Dimitrov et al., 2014, p. 89). Dimitrov and Haque (2016) further emphasize that “instructors who are interculturally competent are able to enhance student learning by bridging differences in the classroom and fostering meaningful relationships with and among students” (p. 3).

Research also emphasizes frameworks and approaches for inclusive teaching. Dewsbury (2025) describes how “inclusive teaching is a potentially transformative mindset and approach to reimagining education” and provides a humanist and agentic pathway for inclusive teaching based on building trust, embracing differences between potential and readiness, and focusing on the importance of context (p. 1). Cuenca-Carlino et al. (2022) present a framework for inclusive teaching excellence based on the science of learning, course design, evidence-based pedagogy, classroom climate and culture, feedback and assessment, and data-informed reflection. Their framework informs the structure of academic development activities and advocates for “change in the way that teaching is valued, assessed and rewarded” (p. 344). Case (2016) offers a model for intersectional pedagogy that:

- Conceptualizes intersectionality as a complex analysis of both privileged and oppressed social identities that simultaneously interact to create systemic equalities;
- Teaches intersectionality across a wide variety of oppressions;
- Aims to uncover invisible intersections, analyzing the consequences of that invisibility for the privileged and the oppressed;
- Analyzes power in teaching about intersectional theory;
- Involves educator personal reflection on intersecting identities, biases, assumptions, and the ways instructor social identity impacts the learning community;

- Encourages student reflection and writing about their own intersecting identities and careful consideration of how those identities shape their own lives;
- Promotes social action to dismantle oppression through student learning that extends beyond the classroom walls;
- Values the voices of the marginalized and oppressed by avoiding claims of equal validity awarded to all perspectives; and,
- Infuses intersectional studies across the curriculum including a wide variety of disciplines as well as courses not typically associated with diversity content. (p. 9)

Interviewees confirmed that most TLCs had increased their focus on “accessibility, neurodiversity initiatives, and universal design for learning (UDL).” Dwyer et al. (2023) provide a comprehensive and systemic framework for promoting inclusion of neurodivergent students, staff, and faculty on postsecondary campuses. Their framework includes teaching and learning priorities related to universal design, providing educational spaces that recognize and accommodate sensory discomfort and stress, improving transitional supports into higher education, and offering flexible modalities for instruction and assessment (Dwyer et al., 2023). UDL emphasizes multiple means of engagement, representation, action, and expression, and “...strives to make the learning experience as effective as possible for all learners” (Dyjur & Jivani, 2024, p. 7). Many centres provide programming and resources related to UDL within the context of academic courses to reduce barriers to education and strengthen student engagement (La et al., 2018). Recognizing the broader applicability of UDL frameworks, Dyjur and Jivani (2024) released an innovative guide to support UDL in curriculum review, program development, and institutional approaches.

While UDL and neurodiversity frameworks provide practical strategies for improving student learning experiences and engagement, research highlights the many barriers that students with disabilities face in higher education (Lilywhite & Wolbring, 2022). These barriers include attitudinal, structural, and technological barriers that impact identity, motivation, and engagement in academic spaces (Lilywhite & Wolbring, 2022). Perceptions and use of language related to accessibility and accommodations in universities as a *burden* or *legal obligation* remain problematic (Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012; Wolbring & Lillywhite, 2021). Wider systemic changes to improve awareness; reexamine policies; change pedagogical, curriculum, and technological approaches; and reframe accommodation and our response to ability-difference are needed (Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012; Wolbring & Lillywhite, 2021).

Bhatia et al. (2025) report that many U15 institutions have embraced anti-racist policies and strategies in the last five years. Becoming a key strategic priority within universities, anti-racist practices were encouraged across all institutional levels, including teaching and learning communities. As part of the commitment, many TLCs created specific positions to support anti-racist pedagogy across faculties. This begins with faculty members engaging in critical self-reflection, examining their social positions and how these are reflected in their teaching practices. Usman (2022) designed a comprehensive learning module to help educators increase their knowledge of racism, examine their positionality, explore implicit biases, and implement anti-racism strategies in the classroom.

Many TLCs acknowledged that they were called upon to help educators navigate difficult conversations, especially following tensions emerging from encampments on many university campuses in 2024 (Venne, 2024). These campus conversations emphasized “creating spaces for respectful civil discourse and productive disagreement and dissent.” TLC leaders reflected that this work includes developing skills such as deep listening, productive exchange, and facilitation that help to create “safe, brave, accountable, and responsible spaces to engage in civil discourse.”

As Finley and Tiede note, civil discourse

is more than a technique for bridging political and ideological differences. The ability to listen and dialogue across differences and to engage in respectful disagreement is also a foundational skill for collaborative problem solving and teamwork. That skill helps to foster strong communities, whether those communities are part of a locale, a campus, or a workplace. (2025, p. 37)

Most faculty agree that discussion of controversial topics, where disagreements often emerge, should be actively encouraged in academic courses, with an emphasis on being intentional about psychological safety and respectful debate (Finley & Tiede, 2025). Psychological safety helps mitigate interpersonal risks inherent in learning by ensuring people feel safe to offer ideas and perspectives, admit mistakes, ask for help, or provide feedback without fear of ridicule or punishment (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Bhatia et al. (2025) importantly reinforce that institutions must also develop zero tolerance violence policies that extend beyond physical violence, preserve human dignity, and create spaces for respectful dialogue, activism, and advocacy.

Some interviewees shared that their centre engaged in the work of developing capacity for civil discourse in partnership with their EDIA offices and units. A few leaders recognized the weight of this work which often “creates tensions for TLC staff navigating complex conversations and spaces,” especially as many EDIA-focused roles are held by individuals who identify as belonging to underrepresented equity-deserving groups. Broadly, TLC leaders acknowledged the systemic complexity of advancing EDIA in teaching and learning and advocated for increased support and capacity for educational developers with these responsibilities.

### **Recommendations:**

- Elevate the importance of systemic approaches to advancing EDIA in teaching and learning by:
  - Ensuring that TLC work and programming provide opportunities for educators to increase their awareness, knowledge, and teaching expertise in EDIA;
  - Strengthening TLC work, programming, and partnerships related to accessibility and neurodiversity/inclusion through UDL, educational spaces, and transitional supports;
  - Reducing attitudinal, structural, and technological barriers for students, staff, and educators with disabilities, including improving awareness, re-examining policies, and reframing accommodation and our response to ability-difference;

- Partnering with EDIA offices and academic units to offer programming and resources to help develop teaching expertise related to civil discourse and respectful dialogue;
- Encouraging faculties to examine theory, structure, and the practice of racism and power relations embedded in history and academic disciplines; and,
- Providing additional support, resources, and capacity for educational developers with responsibility for advancing EDIA in teaching and learning.

## Learning-Focused Culture

### *Student learning*

Resoundingly, TLC leaders celebrated the importance of focusing on student learning, engagement, and success in higher education. TLC leaders shared that improving student learning is “foundational to the purpose and work of TLCs” and “we need to continue to create cultures and environments where student learning deeply matters.” Indeed, building capacity for strengthening student learning and success is at the centre of the mandate for most TLCs (Wright, 2023).

TLC leaders acknowledged that the needs of students are shifting towards ensuring employability and confirmed that the pandemic impacted how students are engaging in their academic courses. For example, they shared:

Students’ needs are shifting with more of a focus on wanting to be prepared for their future careers and workplaces. There is more emphasis on skills articulation and development. Students want and expect a job after they graduate. How are we preparing them for that?

Some interviewees highlighted post-pandemic struggles in student’s readiness for university, noting that “the pandemic shifted the culture of student engagement.” Student academic skills related to time management, organization, communication, independent learning, and socialization were all impacted by their experiences during the pandemic (Kara, 2021; Napierala et al., 2022). Many institutions have responded with more focus on students’ academic skills development within curricular and co-curricular spaces. TLC leaders reinforced the importance of “investing in educators’ professional learning and development as it relates to teaching and learning to improve student learning experiences and reduce attrition rates.”

TLCs have specifically responded to the need for additional student academic skill development with more pedagogical programming and resources related to metacognition, collaborative and active learning, critical reflection, feedback literacy, student engagement, and authentic assessment. Metacognition is a particularly effective pedagogical approach to strengthen student learning and academic skills development (Dyjur, 2025). Metacognitive teaching and learning strategies help students develop awareness of, reflect upon, and improve how they learn, thus improving both their academic performance and their ability to learn into the future (Rivas et al., 2022; Stanton et al., 2021). TLCs could put additional focus on supporting student metacognition as an essential component to developing teaching expertise.

TLC leaders felt that “students need relational pedagogies” which emphasize care and connection with each other, with faculty members and teaching assistants, and with staff across the university. A few interviewees reinforced elements related to pedagogies of kindness, compassion, and care in higher education. Pedagogies of kindness, compassion, and care all emphasize that learning goes beyond content and extends to our individual and collective development as human beings in a relational community (Denial, 2024; Felten & Lambert, 2020; Goralnik et al., 2012). Relationships are the foundation of student learning experiences. Students’ interactions with their peers, faculty, teaching assistants, and staff improve their learning outcomes and university experiences (Felten & Lambert, 2020). Creating relationship-rich postsecondary learning environments includes ensuring students experience genuine welcome and deep care; are inspired to learn; develop webs of significant relationships; and have opportunities to explore questions of meaning and purpose (Felten & Lambert, 2020).

Denial (2024) introduces a pedagogy of kindness as kindness toward the self (as educator); kindness and the syllabus; kindness and assessment; and kindness in the classroom. Pedagogies of kindness are grounded in justice, a belief in students, discipline and intentionality, and ongoing practice (Denial, 2024). Pedagogies of compassion emphasize noticing suffering or disadvantage; a commitment to addressing and mitigating suffering; the promotion of wellbeing and flourishing; and a concern for the whole student as a person (Killingback et al., 2024). Pedagogies of care articulate the importance of emotional engagement in learning experiences, acknowledging that “people experience emotional reactions to situations before they can engage events and ideas intellectually” (Goralnik et al., 2012, p. 416). Importantly, exploring the connections between emotions, relationships, and experience are foundational to frameworks for meaningful experiential learning (Flanagan et al., 2024). Integrating meaningful experiential learning opportunities could provide pathways into offering more teaching and learning experiences grounded in relational pedagogies of care, connection, and kindness.

A few TLC leaders saw emerging conversations related to wholistic student experiences at their institutions, where “institutions are more mindful of wholistic student experiences, which recognize students as whole beings and people.” Wholistic models of education recognize different multi-faceted dimensions of human development such as students’ intellectual, cultural, disciplinary, social, independent, emotional, ethical, physical, self, spiritual, and aesthetic development, as well as their identity and their sense of meaning and purpose in life (Kuh, 2018; Patel, 2003; Miseliunaite et al., 2022). Wholistic forms of education often emphasize experiential learning, social interaction, reflection, and transformation, and centre the entire university experience and community (Kuh, 2018; Patel, 2003; Miseliunaite et al., 2022).

Although TLC leaders recognized emerging narratives around wholistic student learning in academic spaces, they were less clear on how it was defined in their institutional contexts. Morcom (2017) notes that wholism “is a fundamental assertion that permeates many Indigenous philosophies of education” (p. 122). They further share,

Ideally, education encourages intellectual development in terms of knowing, but also involves emotional development, in terms of heart-felt understanding and personal connection, physical

development in terms of applicable skills, and spiritual development in terms of honouring teachings and connecting to knowledge. (Morcom, 2017, p. 125)

Canadian U15 institutions can draw upon this work and further affirm Indigenous perspectives, methodologies, and pedagogies as they define and implement wholistic models of education.

**Recommendations:**

- Continue to reinforce high-quality and accessible student learning experiences as central to the mandates of TLCs.
- Incorporate student academic skill development in TLC work, programming, and teaching expertise/effectiveness frameworks (e.g., metacognition, growth mindset, collaborative and active learning, critical reflection, feedback literacy).
- Explore and implement frameworks for relational pedagogies, including pedagogies of care, compassion, and kindness to strengthen teaching and student learning experiences.
- Further define and implement wholistic models of education that recognize students as whole beings.

*Student partnerships*

Some TLC leaders reflected on the importance of engaging students as partners in the work of their TLCs, and more broadly in teaching and learning (e.g., through SoTL initiatives, curriculum/course review and development processes). They reflected on ensuring that “student voices were included at all levels of decision-making” and continuing “to work with students as partners in teaching and learning within and beyond TLCs.” They saw benefits to supporting meaningful work experiences, employability, as well as academic and professional skill development for graduate and undergraduate students. They also communicated the many benefits of partnering with students in their centres’ initiatives, including connecting directly to student experiences, improvements in staff engagement, new perspectives for committees and working groups, strengthened scholarship, and improvements in the quality of project outcomes. They did take stock of the challenge of funding student partnerships in their centres given current budget constraints.

Working with students as partners embraces and recognizes the many benefits of students partnering with faculty and staff in teaching and learning (Breland et al., 2023; Grant & Arshad, 2024; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). Student partnerships are formalized (i.e., paid) and are connected to teaching and learning activities such as the scholarship of teaching and learning, academic course and program design, and faculty and graduate student development (Jamniczky et al., 2025; Mercer-Mapstone et al. 2017). For TLCs, students can engage in partnerships to lead research projects, coordinate and support programming, provide learning management system and educational technology support, and engage in a variety of educational development tasks (Roy et al., 2023). Felten et al. (2019) aspire to a future where working with students as partners in the work of academic development is a “first principle” (p. 193). Student partnerships in TLCs positively impact institutional and departmental teaching and learning cultures, bring students’ perspectives into TLC work, and contribute to student professional and academic development (Grant & Arshad, 2024).

## Recommendations:

- Partner with academic units to create programs and opportunities to meaningfully support student partnerships in teaching and learning based on research-informed practices (e.g. undergraduate learning assistants, peer mentorship programs).
- Encourage, resource, and integrate student partnerships into institutional teaching and learning initiatives (e.g., teaching grants, teaching awards, conferences, strategic projects).
- Fund and provide opportunities for student partnerships within the context of the work of TLC initiatives and programs (e.g., student representatives on committees, co-op students, research assistants).

### *Educator learning*

While TLC mandates centre strongly on strengthening student learning experiences, this work involves a wide range of approaches that includes improving teaching expertise and capacity (Taylor & Rege-Colet, 2010). TLC leaders saw a continued need to focus on and invest in educators' professional learning to ensure they can respond to emerging teaching and learning issues and create relevant, engaging, and impactful learning experiences for students. They saw institutional investments in supporting and recognizing educators' professional learning as a key to creating a culture that values teaching and learning.

In addition to supporting educators' professional learning, TLCs are uniquely positioned to inform the development of teaching identity in educators through their programming. Brownell and Tanner (2012) hypothesized that faculty without this identity may be less willing to engage in pedagogical innovations. The term educator is used broadly, as many leaders noted that interest in their "faculty development programming often extends beyond those in formal faculty positions." Centres see many participants attending their programs, including academic staff, graduate students, postdoctoral scholars, sessional instructors, as well as staff supporting instruction (e.g., laboratories, field work, seminars, land-based learning) and staff engaged in instructional activities outside of academic courses (e.g., student success, continuing education programming). For many graduate students and post-doctoral scholars, professional learning at a TLC may be the first opportunity to explore and develop an identity in teaching.

One common challenge that TLC leaders noted was that educators face more demands on their time and find it more difficult to engage in intensive educational development programs. Many centres have responded by creating more asynchronous resources, which educators can reference at any time. They have also continued to offer many of their professional learning programs (e.g., courses, workshops, communities, networks, conferences) using online or hyflex approaches which allow all or some participants to engage remotely.

A few centres were "working more directly with academic units" and partnering with them to offer discipline-specific and tailored programming. Many interviewees saw strengths in "creating communities, networks, programs, resources, and interactions that meaningfully engage and support faculty." Some emerging teaching and learning topics included entrepreneurial thinking, experiential

learning, civil discourse, online/blended course design, generative AI, authentic and alternative assessments, accessibility, and teaching in large-enrollment courses. With anticipated increases in course-based graduate programs, some leaders anticipated a need for more educational development initiatives “focused on graduate student education.”

Although interviewees noted more demand for “just-in-time” programs and supports, they were unsure of their enduring impact on shifting educator practices and beliefs. The impact of educational development activities is complex and varies by context (Amundsen & Wilson, 2012). However, educational development initiatives are shown to have positive impacts on creating community; strengthening educators’ self-efficacy and reflection; changes in educators’ teaching and learning practices; shifts in teaching, learning, and educational leadership beliefs; and impacts on student learning and engagement, with more intensive programming (i.e., offered over more than one day or more than one time) often having more sustained impact (Beach et al., 2016; Chism et al., 2012; Nowell et al., 2020; Stes et al., 2010; Vreekamp et al., 2024).

TLC leaders reflected on the importance of “modelling research-informed teaching and learning strategies” in the programming their centres offer. They highlighted the importance of ensuring their programming was research-informed, provided opportunities for social connection, connected authentically to the experiences of educators across disciplines, and ensured participants were able to reflect on and apply what they had learned to improve teaching and student learning in their local context. These reflections are consistent with scholarly literature which suggests that professional learning opportunities are most effective when they are social (e.g., provide opportunities for interaction, knowledge sharing, and community building), situated and relevant (e.g., provide opportunities for participants to reflect upon their learning within the context of their own experience and practice), and constructed (e.g., provide multiple opportunities for individual and collaborative meaning-making) (Vreekamp, 2024; Webster-Wright, 2009).

#### **Recommendations:**

- Recognize engagement in educational development initiatives, professional learning opportunities, and intentional critical reflection related to teaching and learning in academic recognition and reward structures (e.g., grants, awards, tenure and promotion).
- Partner with academic units and educators to assess and develop accessible and impactful professional learning programs that are most relevant to the needs of educators.
- Partner with academic units to promote a disciplinary culture shift, such that there is both a sufficient level of status attached to teaching and a critical mass of individuals who have professional identities that include teaching.
- Model research-informed principles for teaching and learning in the work and programming of TLCs.
- Provide a variety of context-appropriate TLC programming and resources that present multiple modes of engagement (e.g., remote, online, in-person) across various time commitments (e.g., asynchronous resources, workshops, courses, conferences, institutes) and acknowledge diverse

roles (e.g., graduate student, postdoctoral scholar, staff, faculty, educational leaders) and career stages (e.g., early, mid, and late career educators).

- Partner with academic units to strengthen educational development and professional learning opportunities related to graduate student education and postdoctoral scholars.
- Partner with academic units and educational leaders to lead customized and discipline-specific educational development initiatives and professional learning opportunities.

### *Learning spaces*

Some TLC leaders shared that their centres were engaged in conversations, partnerships, and committees related to the design of learning spaces (e.g., active learning classrooms). These conversations largely centred around creating more technology-enabled and flexible learning spaces across campus. Interviewees recognized an ongoing need to maintain current learning spaces and infrastructure “to bring them up to minimum standards for use” and “to strategically modernize and create adaptable, flexible spaces that best support student learning.” They also recommended having “physical and prominent teaching and learning spaces that bring students, staff, faculty and leadership together to collaboratively strengthen teaching and learning cultures and identities.” Watson and Kenny (2021) confirm the importance of physical learning spaces as artifacts and symbols of an institution’s vision for teaching and learning.

Active and flexible learning spaces improve student-instructor relationships, strengthen student engagement and collaboration, and support learning-centred teaching approaches (Baepler & Walker, 2014; Holec & Marynowski, 2020). Learning space investment, renovation, and design involves consultation with multiple institutional partners, clear governance structures, and principle-based design approaches (Finkelstein & Winer, 2020). Educause has created a learning space rating system that provides guidance to assess how learning spaces support modalities of learning and teaching, including active learning (Educause LSRS Team Members, 2020). While it may not be fiscally possible to redesign every classroom learning space to be highly flexible, active, and technology-enabled, focusing on principles such as collaboration, community, flexibility, transparency, access, and inclusion can help institutions reconsider the design, use, and maintenance of all postsecondary learning spaces (Finkelstein et al., 2016; Kenny & Watson, 2021).

### **Recommendations:**

- Align design standards with institutional commitments to teaching, learning, and research-informed approaches to the design, planning, and use of learning spaces.
- Strategically invest in learning environments that foster flexible, active, collaborative, accessible, inclusive, sustainable, and technology-enhanced learning approaches.
- Establish cross-unit working groups and committees to formulate principles for and provide guidance on funding allocation, planning, and the utilization of flexible, active, and technology-enhanced learning spaces.
- Create research-based resources and supports to enhance teaching expertise regarding the use of flexible, active, and technology-enhanced learning spaces.

- Incorporate research-informed principles for teaching and learning in the planning and (re)design of all academic learning spaces (e.g., flexibility, student engagement, active learning, collaboration, community, accessibility, inclusion).
- Provide equitable access to flexible/active/technology-enhanced learning spaces for students and educators across disciplines and academic programs.
- Provide adequate staff and resources to support and maintain learning spaces.
- Establish governance and secure ongoing funding to support the continued development and renovation of learning spaces and the associated technical infrastructures across the institution.

## Strategic Priorities, Planning, and Resources

### *Funding Constraints*

Interviewees grappled with ongoing funding constraints and budget concerns impacting Canadian higher education (e.g., Wong, 2024). They noted the challenges universities were facing related to visa caps for international students, limits or freezes on domestic student tuition fees, and constraints related to provincial and federal funding. They perceived that the ripple effects of these constraints have been felt across academic programs, with increasing competition for resources, growing class sizes, less teaching assistant support, early and unfilled retirements, and reductions in academic program offerings. They acknowledged the proliferation of a “deficiency and scarcity mindset” across higher education. Many interviewees shared that their institutions have experienced “reduced support staff capacity, and more centralization of supports and services for academic units and programs.” TLC leaders feared ongoing funding constraints would impact important institutional priorities related to teaching and learning, as well as areas such as truth and reconciliation, Indigenization, and EDIA.

Most TLCs had faced direct challenges related to institutional budget constraints where, “We are feeling pressures to do more with less.” This budget reality is not new to Canadian TLCs (Forgie et al., 2018). However, many respondents noted a marked shift from their experiences during the pandemic when many received strategic financial resources to amplify their work, as they were seen as “first responders” in supporting online and remote teaching and learning (Naffi et al., 2020). TLC leaders were now seeing more unfilled roles following staff retirements, an increased number of limited-term staff positions, reductions in program offerings, and a need to explore additional sources of funding for their work. For example, some TLC leaders were actively seeking funding through external sponsorships for conferences and events, internal and external research or program grants, and philanthropic donations to support their work and strategic priorities.

While some centres experienced growth during the pandemic due to an increased institutional focus on teaching and learning, they were now experiencing contraction and structural reorganization to continue to meet the emerging needs of the academic community. Multiple leaders noted shifts in their structures to align with demands related to learning technologies and instructional design, EDIA, Indigenization, experiential and work-integrated learning, and entrepreneurial thinking. Many centres have struggled with employee retention and high employee turnover due to a growing number of limited-term and contract-based positions. As academic units continue to face budget constraints, centres with faculty in seconded positions have also found it increasingly difficult to successfully navigate and negotiate faculty

secondments and fellowships. As a result, they've had to pause some of their programs associated with faculty secondments and fellowships. TLC leaders anticipated ongoing funding challenges into the future, which results in "feelings of uncertainty and instability" in their centres.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Prioritize institutional priorities and goals related to truth, reconciliation and Indigenization, and EDIA, despite funding challenges.
- Explore external research funding and partnerships to support TLC priorities and fund students as partners in TLC work.
- Collaborate with university partners to investigate advancement and philanthropic opportunities that will fund strategic projects and initiatives aligned with institutional teaching and learning priorities.
- Work with TLC leaders and teams to align organizational structure with institutional teaching and learning priorities.
- Advocate for base-funded, permanent staff positions within TLCs, particularly in relation to supporting core institutional priorities regarding teaching and learning.

#### *Strategic Planning and Prioritization*

TLC Leaders noted that ongoing budget constraints, coupled with numerous ongoing and emerging priorities, required "stepping back, understanding, and aligning with strategic institutional priorities in teaching and learning." Following the pandemic, many leaders saw stronger institutional prioritization of teaching and learning at their universities. The "credibility and profile of their centres, and teaching and learning more generally had increased over the pandemic." They were now experiencing more demand on their centres to expand the scope of their work to help address other emerging priorities and were seeking "prioritization that allows us to be resilient, agile, and flexible."

Internally, their centres felt an "ongoing sense of busyness" with trying to juggle multiple priorities (e.g., experiential learning and work-integrated learning; curriculum renewal; student engagement; sustainability; entrepreneurial thinking; mental health and well-being; Indigenization; EDIA; GAI; online, blended, and hyflex learning; learning technologies; and, authentic assessment). As many emerging teaching and learning priorities cross boundaries of responsibility between TLCs and various academic and non-academic units, TLC Leaders saw a need for further clarity in roles and responsibilities. They also noted, "The challenges we are navigating are *big*, and will take time, ongoing effort and iterative, forward movement." They held a common fear that "if everything is a priority, nothing will be a priority." They saw a need for "principled pragmatism, which would ensure TLCs have clear values and principles to guide their work and help determine where to strategically invest their time and activities."

Interviewees noticed tensions between institutional and senior leadership priorities and what they were hearing from the needs of educators "on the ground." Those working in TLCs have often felt pulled in an intermediary role between divergent structures and epistemological beliefs of academic administrators and educators (Green & Little, 2013). TLC leaders sensed that senior leaders were more directly involved in setting specific strategic priorities, expectations, and accountabilities for TLCs than they had been in

the past. Some leaders sensed a decreased sense of autonomy in setting direction for their centres. Forgie et al. (2018) noted the importance of having senior administration committed to taking note of and supporting the work of teaching and learning. Taylor and Rege-Colet (2010) also emphasized the role that TLCs can play in noting patterns within and beyond institutions, providing scholarly expertise in facilitating change and building teaching and learning capacity, and helping to influence and inform institutional teaching and learning priorities.

In thinking forward, TLC leaders reflected on questions such as:

How do TLCs navigate such complex and important priorities? How do we manage increased expectations and workload on a shrinking budget? How do the shifts and emerging priorities we are experiencing relate back to evidence-based practice and the foundational work of teaching and learning? How do we help establish these boundaries? What work could help to advance multiple institutional priorities at once?

TLCs have and should continue to evolve over time (Forgie et al., 2018; Kolomitro & Anstey, 2017). To influence systemic change, Timmermans (2014) describes thinking and acting strategically by aligning TLC initiatives and partnerships with institutional priorities as a core way of knowing and being for academic developers. TLC leaders all recognized a need to be more strategic in what they took on in order to focus on work that would make a difference across multiple levels (i.e., to the institution, to academic units, and to individual educators). They saw a need to “be thoughtful about exercising [our] influence – what work will help to advance multiple institutional priorities related to teaching and learning.” Many centres had reoriented their work to focus on program-level support and decision making, which would have more sustained and systemic impacts on student learning, educator’s teaching approaches, local teaching and learning microcultures and networks, and the overall impact of academic programs. These shifts towards transformation and continuous improvement at a broader scale (Forgie et al., 2018; Gibbs, 2013) are consistent with TLC leaders’ previous reflections on the importance of aligning with institutional strategic priorities and supporting curriculum review, renewal, and development initiatives across academic programs.

Some TLCs were taking the time to “reimagine their vision, mandate, values, and priorities” and to develop new strategic plans. These leaders had brought or were planning to bring staff across their centres together to make decisions about what “we can and can’t do.” At the same time, many TLC leaders confirmed that they or some of their staff were involved in strategic planning, prioritization, and decision making for teaching and learning in partnership with the institution and other academic units through various committees, task forces, and working groups. The role of TLC leaders and staff in influencing strategic planning and decision making in teaching and learning across multiple organizational levels (e.g., Gibbs, 2013; Taylor & Rege-Colet, 2010) is important to note as TLCs are often uniquely positioned to see gaps, opportunities, and challenges across the institutional landscape and postsecondary sector.

TLC leaders emphasized the importance of having a “theory of action or change” that would ground their strategic planning, identify intended change, drive their priorities, and lead to meaningful action and impact. A “Theory of Change integrates underlying assumptions about professional learning, program design elements and sources of evidence of value,” thus providing clear direction for continuous review, improvement, and communicating effectiveness (Amundsen & D’Amico, 2019, p. 196). This approach aligns strongly with recommendations to guide planning and impact evaluation for educational development, which “should be framed with reference to the intention and outcome of the initiative, the processes and activities planned to realize that outcome, and the evidence that best demonstrates success in achieving it” (Kolomitro & Anstey, 2017, p.195). Miller-Young and Poth (2022) further describe creating a Theory of Change as critical to developing a sustainable approach to strategic planning for TLCs.

### **Recommendations:**

- Evolve and strategically align TLC work and programs with institutional teaching and learning priorities, research-informed educational and curriculum development processes, and context-specific needs of the academic community.
- Extend TLC work beyond individual educators to involve engagement with departments and faculties, facilitate knowledge sharing across academic units, and foster participation in committees and working groups.
- Advocate for TLC input and involvement in organizational change and institutional decision-making processes related to teaching and learning.
- Revisit TLC vision, mandates, values, and priorities to ensure alignment with institutional teaching and learning priorities, emerging topics in teaching and learning, and a Theory of Change.

### *Communicating Impact*

TLC leaders saw a need to ensure that senior leadership and academic units understood their work, impact, and “what we are doing.” Many TLCs were focused on reporting and communicating the impact of their work and had set up new systems and processes for “streamlining data gathering and reporting.” Although a few centres had staff positions specifically dedicated to program and centre evaluation, they acknowledged the importance of doing this work with a realistic understanding of the shrinking resources available within their centres. TLC leaders reinforced that impact extends beyond quantitative metrics to include showcasing the innovation that is already happening, and sharing narrative accounts of success and transformation that “spread stories of learning and impact.” Ellis et al. (2020) propose a helpful guide to centre assessment that includes five planning questions based on purpose, audience, use, effect, and sustainability, as well as five principles including being defensible, wholistic, prioritized, collaborative, and adaptable.

Demonstrating impact for educational development activities is complex and often conceptualized in terms of changes or shifts in culture, thinking, beliefs, intentions, and practices captured through quantitative and qualitative sources of data evaluated and integrated over time (Jones et al., 2017). TLC

leaders saw the potential of this work as having a ripple effect across the academic community in how best to demonstrate impact in teaching and learning. They acknowledged the challenge of ensuring evidence of impact was shared in ways that were meaningful to audiences including students, educators, academic units, and senior administrators. They also reinforced that this work requires, “documentation over time to see and communicate progress and impact.” Raffoul et al. (2023) caution educational developers against becoming part of an often self-imposed “audit culture,” further recommending that centres stay true to the values of educational development (e.g., enhancing teaching and learning, meaningful and authentic influence, scholarly approaches, continuous reflection, iterative change, networking, student partnerships, faculty engagement, ethics, transparency, and collective growth) as they engage in processes to evaluate and communicate their impact.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Develop sustainable and adaptable systems and processes for communicating TLC impact and influence that align with intended centre outcomes and goals.
- Evidence TLC impact beyond quantitative metrics to incorporate narrative accounts of success, transformation, and the implications for teaching, learning, and curriculum approaches, practices, and beliefs across multiple organizational levels (e.g., individual educators, academic units, the institution).
- Share evidence of TLC impact meaningfully and accessibly (e.g., digitally, verbally, graphically) with multiple audiences (e.g., students, educators, academic units, and senior administrators).
- Utilize information gathered through program and centre evaluation processes to inform critical reflection, learning, and improvement across TLC teams.

## Connecting, Leadership, and Well-being

### *Centres as connectors*

As TLC leaders focused on the multiple competing priorities they were facing in their centres, there was collective recognition that they could not address these priorities in isolation: “No one unit can support the work of teaching and learning, including the complexities we are currently facing.” They emphasized the role that TLCs have in ensuring collaboration and partnership with academic and non-academic units across universities. They saw increased need to focus on the foundation role of “centres as connectors, hubs, and partners for contributing to and facilitating meaningful change in teaching and learning.” They saw their strength in “continuing to lead from the middle.”

In speaking to the TLC’s role of connector, they saw this as a “connector of people, connector of expertise, and connector of knowledge sharing across disciplinary boundaries.” These partnerships and connections often happen through informal conversation, collegial dialogue, problem solving, and academic projects or through more formal structures like working groups, task forces, committees, and events (Taylor et al., 2022). Engaging with community through meaningful relationships, partnerships and connections is at the heart of academic development and TLC work (Blackmore & Blackwell, 2006; Taylor & Rege-Colet, 2010; Timmermans, 2014; Wright, 2023). The work of TLCs is often centred on the establishment of trust- based relationships and informal networks, which are maintained through

“complex webs of institutional relationships” (Bitar & Davidovich, 2025, Discussion section, para. 7). TLC leaders often navigate institutional spaces by adapting to context and acting strategically to influence change across multiple organizational levels (Timmermans, 2014).

TLC leaders stated that as many current shifts in higher education often involve work that extends beyond teaching and learning (e.g., Indigenization, EDIA, research, community engagement, fund development/advancement, entrepreneurship, work-integrated learning), there is need for role clarity, boundary setting, and new leadership skill development. They expressed tension in being “pulled into many emerging discussions and priorities” and expressed that it was “challenging to set boundaries around the work of TLCs.” It was critical for TLCs to be clear on what they have control and influence over, despite the ongoing uncertainty that surrounds the academic community.

As universities continue to emphasize strategic institutional priorities related to teaching and learning, leaders felt TLCs could “provide expertise and representation on governance committees to help influence institutional conversations related to teaching and learning.” TLCs leaders acknowledged their unique position in seeing and communicating patterns of activity and change in teaching and learning across disciplines and faculties (e.g., Taylor, 2005). They recognized that TLCs don’t necessarily need to be leading work in teaching and learning, but they should be there to help “influence and advocate for change and raise awareness of research-informed and scholarly practices for teaching and learning.” TLCs often provide expertise for and support work in establishing visions, policies, and procedures to strengthen teaching and learning practices, spaces, governance, reward, and recognition structures across postsecondary institutions (Gibbs, 2013; Taylor & Rege Colet, 2010).

TLC leaders also saw additional opportunities to “create communities and networks” and “work with educational leaders” to meaningfully engage faculty across academic units. These reflections align with research supporting the importance of strengthening relationships and contributing to significant conversations and networks of knowledge sharing, practice, and leadership across academic institutions (Hannah & Lester, 2009; Roxå et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2022). This work is particularly important in affecting change at the local level (i.e., in departments and faculties) where microcultures and leadership approaches can either support or hinder meaningful change in teaching and learning practices (Trowler et al., 2005; Kenny et al., 2016; Kenny & Eaton, 2022). Christensen Hughes & Mighty (2010) further reflect that leaders at this level can often present one of the most significant barriers to the shifts most needed in academic cultures. Placing increased and intentional attention to developing educational leadership capacity across faculties, departments, and working groups will be key to affecting change in teaching and learning into the future.

Relationships are at the centre of educational experiences (Felten & Lambert, 2020), and TLC leaders reinforced the importance of “keeping people at the centre of our work” as we continue to navigate organizational change. They drew attention to the foundational values and affective dimensions that drive the work of TLCs, such as adaptability, relationships, respect, and trust. They saw an ongoing need to focus on wellbeing across the academic community, for students, faculty, staff, and postdoctoral scholars. They shared common reflections related to “taking a relational approach to our work.” They

acknowledged that the people they encounter across the academic community are tired and burnt out. It's ever more important that we "commit to people and relationships."

They worried that genuine change and transformation in teaching and learning would not happen unless "people feel that they matter." One of the most important factors associated with student confidence in their learning during the pandemic was their sense of connection with their peers, their professors, and their course learning communities (Guppy et al., 2023). Social connection and relationships help create and sustain environments of belonging and community across higher education. How we connect and relate to each other in higher education matters. When we foreground compassion, authentic listening, and reciprocal and respectful dialogue in our interactions, we centre well-being for all (Compton & Gilmour, 2022).

### **Recommendations:**

- Partner with academic and non-academic units to advance teaching and learning priorities and research-informed teaching and learning approaches.
- Develop informal and formal processes to connect and share teaching and learning knowledge and practices across disciplines (e.g., communities and networks of practice, conferences, committees, working groups).
- Work with institutional partners, academic leaders and TLC staff to transparently discuss and establish boundaries for the work of TLCs.
- Advocate for the importance of TLC representation on governance committees, task forces, and working groups that influence institutional processes and practices related to teaching and learning. Continue to provide expertise and raise awareness of research-informed teaching and learning practices through such representation.
- Develop networks and communities that intentionally connect educational leaders across disciplines to advance their work, provide a space to discuss challenges and opportunities, and strengthen educational leadership capacity.
- Explore and reinforce the foundational values of TLCs (e.g., collaboration, partnerships, relationships, adaptability, respect, equity, inclusion, truth, reconciliation), recognizing that relevant values will emerge based on institutional context.

### *Educator well-being*

TLC leaders reflected that educators across the academic community were more frequently communicating their experiences of burnout. The role of being an educator has become more complex in recent years. Many educators are facing additional administrative tasks related to their roles due to reductions in support staff. TLC leaders shared, "instead of feeling the pressures of shifting to emergency remote learning, educators are feeling overwhelmed and exhausted from having to respond to so many additional expectations in their teaching." These additional pressures often related to issues such as shifts in expectations for assessment, generative AI, academic integrity, work-integrated learning, student mental health and well-being, and ensuring conditions for civil discourse. Increased workload demands, fatigue, uncertainty, and ambiguity, as well as inadequate reward, communication, recognition, and support can lead to more stress and burnout in academic environments (Hyatt, 2022;

Koster & McHenry, 2023). In some instances, TLC leaders had experienced an increased prevalence of narratives “of teaching as a burden or load” across the academic community, noting further that “there are no parallel conversations regarding research loads.”

Overall, TLC leaders recommended that institutions place stronger focus on educator well-being. Addressing educator burnout and well-being in higher education is complex and should be strategically addressed across multiple organizational levels (McDermott et al., 2020). Strategies for addressing faculty well-being may include organizational resources, rewards and support, workload management, autonomy, trust, community connections, leadership, and feedback, as well as transparent communications and wellness opportunities (Koster & McHenry, 2023; Hyatt, 2022, McDermott et al., 2020).

#### **Recommendations:**

- Elevate the importance of educator well-being by:
  - Collaborating with other units to develop communities, networks, and working groups to explore, support, and research educator well-being;
  - Normalizing conversations about educator well-being, and developing psychologically safe spaces (Edmondson & Lei, 2014) to discuss challenges and strategies for addressing educator well-being, including reducing stigma and normalizing help-seeking;
  - Integrating educator well-being into professional learning programs for academic leaders, department heads, and educators;
  - Partnering with academic units to open conversations that revisit how academic workloads specific to teaching and learning are allocated across academic units, including considering how class size, high-impact pedagogical approaches, and program year are incorporated into teaching assignments and workloads; and,
  - Integrating educator well-being meaningfully into TLC teaching and learning resources, supports, and professional learning opportunities.

#### *TLC staff wellbeing*

Some TLC leaders noted that the ongoing “complexity of issues facing TLCs was impacting staff wellness and wellbeing.” They acknowledged, “the additional workload [TLCs] experienced during the pandemic does not seem to have eased but has shifted to other emerging and evolving priorities.” Educational developers’ wellbeing is impacted by interactions with their colleagues, leadership from their supervisors, perceptions of support from the institution, and their workplace environments (Kolomitro et al., 2020).

TLC leaders reflected that although hybrid work provided flexibility for staff, it had also impacted day to day connections, collaboration, and spontaneous interactions in their centres. Some TLC leaders noted successes such as staff collaborating to co-lead TLC programming and initiatives. Mitchell (2023) found that hybrid work environments afford many benefits (e.g., flexibility, access, productivity, global learning, mental health) and that some employees adapt well in these spaces, while others struggle to find the same sense of organizational community and social connection. They further suggest that no technology

can replicate face-to-face communication or spontaneous conversation, idea generation, and problem solving; and it's critical for managers and leaders to intentionally foster team collaboration and interaction in hybrid work environments (Mitchell, 2023).

TLC leaders also perceived shifts in collegiality across the academy and stated that staff were "increasingly facing challenges with microaggressions in their interactions with academic staff." They acknowledged that TLC staff often navigate a marginal space between policy and practice and may be caught in the middle of institutional power dynamics (e.g., Green & Little, 2013).

Interviewees recognized the need to further support equity-deserving and underrepresented folks in educational development and TLC spaces. Worldwide, women in their 40s and 50s provide the highest level of representation in TLCs; at a much higher rate (>70%) than elsewhere in higher education (Green & Little, 2016; Berhagen & Gravett, 2017). While it is suggested that women are drawn to educational development, as they are other relational, caregiving and service-oriented professions (e.g., nursing, elementary education, social work), their positioning at the peripheries of change often results in increased marginalization as a result of perceptions of having to fulfill the "stereotypical norms of femininity" (Bernhagen & Gravett, 2017, Section 6, para. 4).

TLC leaders' reflections on staff well-being support research which found that "when educational developers lack a collegial and trusting environment, are without challenging work that aligns with strategic plans, are under-resourced, and overwhelmed by busy work or continual re-direction, their well-being is hindered" (Kolomitro et al., 2020, p. 15). Addressing workplace well-being for TLC staff requires an integrated approach that acknowledges interconnections between individual action and attention to wellness, unit approaches to strengthen leadership and management, and supportive administrative and institutional practices (Kolomitro et al., 2021). It also requires conversation and action related to equity, diversity and inclusion in educational development and higher education more broadly (Bernhagen & Gravett, 2017). To better enable performance and organizational learning, there also appears to be space for universities to reinforce psychological safety, where people can offer ideas, admit mistakes, ask for help, and provide feedback without fear of ridicule or repercussion (Edmondson & Lei, 2014).

### **Recommendations:**

- Support hybrid work arrangements that provide balance and foster workplace flexibility and well-being in TLCs.
- Develop regular and intentional opportunities to foster spontaneous conversation, idea generation, problem solving, and team collaboration and interaction.
- Provide additional opportunities for staff to co-lead and collaborate on TLC projects and initiatives to foster interaction, knowledge sharing, and build capacity.
- Engage in dialogue and provide training and support to address the harmful impacts of microaggressions across postsecondary institutions.

- Foster TLC work environments that promote trust, collegiality, innovation, and autonomy, and reinforce the value and contributions of staff work as it relates to larger institutional teaching and learning priorities.
- Provide access to professional learning opportunities to strengthen leadership skills and approaches (e.g., workshops, courses, one-on-one or group coaching, certificates, communities of practice) for TLC directors, leaders, and staff.
- Provide training and resources related to equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility, as well as fostering psychological safety in TLC workspaces and across the academic community.
- Assist TLC staff in setting reasonable boundaries around their work, while maintaining some autonomy and encouraging strength-based projects.

### *Leadership*

TLC leaders themselves felt the weight of complexity and importance of recent institutional conversations related to teaching and learning, and highlighted a need for “hope, community building, and collaboration.” Participants shared reflections such as: “Hopeful mindsets, intentions and values help us situate our work, what we want to accomplish, and inspire us to act as stewards to move forward.” McGowan and Felten (2021) shared a heuristic for enacting hope through: 1) instilling a sense of personal agency; and 2) establishing a vision of possible pathways or purposeful steps forward. In her book *Hope Circuits: Rewiring Universities and Other Organizations for Human Flourishing*, Riddell (2024) emphasizes hope-based leadership approaches connected to wonder, decentering expertise, sitting with discomfort, and systems-level thinking.

TLC leaders were grounded in strong beliefs that education is the foundation from which to move forward in many of the local, national, and global issues we are facing. They also reinforced the need for increased collaboration across their centres, although at times this “can be challenging with respect to roles, responsibilities, funding, reporting, and leadership.” Respondents acknowledged shifts in their own leadership approaches and practices towards more “listening, hopefulness, compassion, and intentional connection.” They were committed to demonstrating “compassion and care for people, and who they are as human beings” through their daily leadership practices. They shared a hope for more “value-based leadership approaches” across higher education. Many TLC leaders had established personal support networks with other provincial, national, and international leaders. They noted a stronger need for leadership networks across the U15 to help them navigate the challenges and opportunities we are facing in teaching and learning. Trust-based relationship building, partnerships, and collaboration are foundational to the leadership approaches of TLC leaders (Bitar & Davidovich, 2025).

We learned many lessons related to leadership during the pandemic that we should carry forward. Beilstein et al. (2021) highlighted the importance of demonstrating care and support for employees, open communication, informed decision making, repetition of key messages, trust, using errors and mistakes as learning, and establishing safe and open feedback channels. Reflecting on the importance of shared leadership, Bleich and Bowles (2021) reinforced the importance of academic leaders forming

webs of relationships and networks of problem-solvers and decision-makers to help tackle complex and multidimensional challenges. These authors saw key leadership competencies through the development of self-awareness, relational capacity, a systems approach to action, and an ability to see things through the eyes of other people (i.e., empathy). Post-pandemic reflections often confirmed “a need for universities to become more caring,” including taking action to become more equitable, compassionate, courageous, and connected (Bassa, 2022, p. 285). Mehrotra (2021) advocates for centring an ethic of care as a pedagogical anchor, where sharing power, co-creating meaning, prioritizing flexibility and humanity, and valuing learners and educators as whole people are paramount.

Bass (2020) frames the challenges we are facing in higher education within the context of a complex, urgent, and wicked problem, where learning systems are intricately tied to broader ecosystems. Bass further identifies the need for taking an “ecosystemic approach” to transforming higher education. Through an ecosystemic approach, leaders recognize the importance of interconnection, context, adaptability, transdisciplinary partnerships, sharing processes and products, and addressing complexity across multiple levels (Bass, 2020).

Based on research (e.g., Bass, 2020; Bassa, 2022; Beilstein et al., 2021; Bleich & Bowles, 2021; McGowan & Felten, 2021; Mehrotra, 2021; Riddell, 2024) and reflections from TLC leaders, Figure 1 presents a model for relational and strategic academic leadership. This model summarizes the key interrelated elements of academic leadership that are needed to lean into the challenges we are facing and to strengthen postsecondary teaching and learning into the future.



**Figure 1:** a model summarizing key attributes and components of relational and strategic academic leadership to strengthen teaching and learning in higher education into the future.

**Recommendations:**

- Establish intentional leadership pathways and supports for TLC leaders, directors, and staff.
- Reinforce the importance of strategic and relational leadership approaches in teaching and learning.
- Establish stronger networks of support for U15 TLC directors, leaders, and staff to share knowledge; discuss challenges, successes, and hopes; and strengthen leadership capacity.

**Conclusion**

This report explored shifts and transformations in post-secondary education from the view of teaching and learning centre leaders at Canada’s U15 group of universities. TLC leaders emphasized the critical role that their centres play as hubs and connectors for teaching and learning. TLCs foster communities and networks of knowledge-sharing, practice, scholarship, and leadership for teaching and learning.

Through our conversations, seven key areas emerged (see Figure 2) which are all grounded in and often echoed by relevant academic literature, and informed our related recommendations:

1. reflecting value;
2. academic innovation and transformation;
3. Indigenization, decolonization, and reconciliation;
4. equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility;
5. learning-focused;
6. strategic priorities, planning, and resources; and,
7. connecting, leadership, and well-being.

Our conversations surfaced many ongoing challenges and uncertainties, illuminated narratives of possibility, hope, and success, and clarified some key strategies for moving forward. We recognize that there are many recommendations provided through this report. Several recommendations extend beyond the context of any one TLC, as we learned from TLC leaders of the importance of creating sustained change in teaching and learning across multiple organizational levels. Not all recommendations will be relevant to each institution or centre, and we encourage readers to reflect upon, identify, and adapt those that are most meaningful and important to their unique context.

Figure 2 reveals a need for ongoing work across multiple organizational levels (micro, meso, macro, and mega) to intentionally influence and integrate change in higher education. Interviewees highlighted the complexity of creating and sustaining change through informal and formal processes, as well as strategic and relational academic leadership. Such processes relate to institutional structures and policies; honour Indigenous worldviews; ensure equity, inclusion, and respect; and establish networks, conversations, and communities focused on teaching and learning. TLC leaders also drew attention to the importance of strategic and relational academic leaders who demonstrate care, respect, self-awareness, courage, and hope. This work is messy and contextual, and it is tough. However, these findings provide strong insights on where and how we can best direct our energies to strengthen postsecondary teaching and learning into the future.

Universities are learning organizations. The work that happens at universities changes lives and improves societies. Relationships are at the heart of what we do and who we are. Although the pace of change impacting universities is rapid, change is inevitable. We are at a crossroads, where we are leaning into our own complex, challenging, and “wicked problems” (Bass, 2020). Our work further highlights the importance of formal and informal networks of teaching and learning practice, leadership, and scholarship across academic programs and organizational structures in sustaining an institutional culture that values and prioritizes ongoing learning. Meaningful change in higher education requires intentional partnership between academic and non-academic units, cross-institutional networks, and action on teaching and learning initiatives that leverage diverse expertise and perspectives. Without collaboration, institutions risk implementing fragmented solutions that fail to address the interconnected nature of the complex challenges we currently face.

While experiencing numerous *academic transformations* across higher education, we are also seeing a need for *relational transformation* to enhance teaching, learning, and wellbeing. This will require us to re-examine our relationships across the academic community — with students and colleagues, with GAI and educational technologies, with our teaching and learning structures, with processes and spaces,

with society and industry partners, with surrounding communities, and with the land, environment, and natural world. Such transformations require a collective ethos that values the importance of humanity, care, connection, collaboration, trust, hope, and respect.

While this study represents the perspectives of teaching and learning leaders at one point in time, the findings have broader implications and applicability. TLC leaders provided practical, research-informed insights and pathways to navigate the complexities we are experiencing in teaching and learning. Beyond specific strategic actions, these findings reinforce that influencing change starts with building meaningful relationships, communities, and networks. It also involves leaders who leverage our collective strengths, help us lean into challenge and discomfort, break down systems of inequity, affirm diverse ways of knowing, demonstrate humility, and meaningfully influence the change we most want to see.

Teaching and learning activities connect all units, learners, educators, researchers, and staff across our universities. It is critical that universities develop clear pathways for adapting to uncertainty and moving forward in meaningful and impactful ways. The recommendations provided throughout this report provide direction for creating and curating these pathways in ways that supports each institution's unique context.



**Figure 2:** Shifts and transformations in postsecondary teaching and learning (middle) that emerged through conversations with leaders from teaching and learning centres across Canada’s U15 group of Universities. Findings highlight a framework to create and sustain meaningful change across multiple organizational levels (bottom: micro, meso, macro, mega) (e.g., Simmons, 2016; Kenny & Eaton, 2023), through a variety of informal and formal processes (left) and strategic and relational academic leadership approaches (right).

## Guiding Questions for Reflection into the Future

The outcomes of this work are intended to provide a basis for further dialogue, reflection, and action across Canada's postsecondary sector. Below are some guiding questions for reflection based on this work that could be adapted and used for further inspiration.

- What are your greatest hopes and aspirations for teaching and learning over the next 5-10 years at your institution? Where do you most hope your institution will be in 5-10 years? What will students, staff, faculty, alumni, and local communities be doing, saying, and experiencing?
- How might your institution balance responding to immediate challenges (budget constraints, technological shifts, student needs, educator well-being) while maintaining a longer-term vision for teaching and learning?
- Which of these areas (Reflecting Value; Academic Innovation & Transformation; Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Being, Doing & Connecting; EDIA; Learning Focused; Strategic Planning, Priorities & Resources; Connecting, Leadership, & Well-being) are most relevant and important to your centre's or institutional context?
- How could your centre or institution foster meaningful collaboration across academic and non-academic units to address the many complex and interconnected challenges identified throughout this paper?
- How do we balance the need for academic and digital innovation with our commitments to humanity and collective well-being?
- Which recommendations are you already enacting or align with strengths in your institutional or centre context? Where is there energy that you can already leverage?
- Where are there gaps? What areas would you most like to strengthen?
- What are some key recommendations, actions, or activities that you could implement over the next year, few years, or decade to influence meaningful and sustained change?
- How are TLC aims articulated in alignment with institutional priorities and values?
- Whose voices are reflected in the conversations that informed this report? Whose voices may be missing from these conversations?
- How do (or could) you demonstrate and communicate the impact of teaching and learning initiatives in ways that recognize available resources and align with the values and objectives of your work/unit?
- How do teaching and learning initiatives within and beyond your TLC address change at multiple organizational levels (micro, meso, macro, mega)?
- What formal and informal processes support (or could best support) sustainable change in teaching and learning at your institution?
- What would a systemic approach to teaching and learning transformation look like at your institution (e.g., individual educators, academic units, institutional structures)? What does the 'system' of teaching and learning need most? What initiatives, processes, or communities might have the greatest sustained impact?
- How might your centre or institution prepare academic leaders for what is ahead?

- How could your centre or institution demonstrate a commitment to relational and strategic academic leaders that centres care, hope, and well-being?
- How might you strengthen cross-institutional collaboration to address the complex challenges and opportunities we are experiencing in teaching and learning higher education?
- What key shifts in institutional culture, policies, and practices would best support teaching and learning transformations identified as crucial for the future of postsecondary education?
- What is the right next step for you? for your centre? for your institution?

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