Underlying many discussions on Northern research is a misconception that the North lacks the knowledge, skills and resources to lead and conduct research. This misconception is not always explicit but is apparent in assumptions about who leads research in the North (typically southern researchers and institutions) and the need to build Northern capacities. Such assumptions overlook what capacity already exists in the North. Northern research institutions and colleges represent a significant force in challenging these misconceptions. At the territorial/provincial level, this includes institutions such as the Yukon Research Centre at Yukon College, Aurora Research Institute at Aurora College, the Nunavut Research Institute at Nunavut Arctic College, and the Labrador Institute (a division of Memorial University). These institutions have unique histories but were broadly established between the 1960s and 1990s to fill a number of roles, including providing vocational training, administering research licensing, and advising on policy and decision-making. Over time, these roles have continued to evolve. To add to this, numerous community-based institutions have also been created, such as the Arctic Institute of Community-Based Research, the Tlicho Research and Training Institute, and the Qaujigiartiit Health Research Centre.

Together, these Northern research and education bodies have become a critical part of the existing capacity to lead and co-produce Northern research and education and are uniquely positioned to respond to the research needs of Northern peoples. They do so from a place of building on the strengths of Northerners, rather than filling a deficit. In other words, they recognize that capacity already exists and needs to be supported.

With this in mind, we brought together six representatives from four research institutes and colleges across Northern Canada in a roundtable discussion to hear about their perspectives on key issues in Northern research and education. We asked the participants three main questions:

1. What role are the Northern research institutes and colleges playing as conduits for bridging gaps in opportunities between North-south and Indigenous/non-Indigenous contexts? How is your institute breaking down the barriers to Northerners taking the lead on research and education?

2. What are the Northern research institutes and colleges doing to engage Northern youth as the next generation of Northern researchers? What do you think will inspire the next generation of Northern researchers?

3. There has been an ongoing conversation in Canada about reconciliation and the calls to action made by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). We are wondering what role do Northern research institutes and colleges play in creating space for this conversation, and what is your institute’s vision for reconciliation within research and education?

An expansive conversation followed, touching on themes of partnership and collaboration, sovereignty in research, Indigenizing research, changing colonial mentalities, and much more. Here we present an edited transcript of the discussion from Question 3, related to reconciliation within research. What appears here is only a sample of a much larger and thought-provoking conversation with an incredible group of Northern researchers, educators, and administrators. The entire roundtable discussion has been turned into a three-part podcast series. It is available online, along with a full transcript, at www.northernpublicaffairs.ca.

The participants in the roundtable discussion included:

**Dr. Ashlee Cunsolo**, Director of the Labrador Institute of Memorial University in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Labrador

**Dr. John B. Zoe**, Chairperson for the Tlicho
Ashlee: I think this is the key huge question that we are all grappling with in so many ways. I’ll speak in particular from the university perspective about what is happening in Canada. I think since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission came out and released their Calls to Action there has almost been this frantic race to find ways to meet what the TRC outlined for universities. One of the things that has been really fascinating for me to see is the speed at which many universities, who did not previously have relationships in the North or a presence in the North, are suddenly looking to find ways to put programs in the North or build small infrastructure in the North for satellite campuses. They are trying to do so really quickly without the relationship-building and without the opportunity to really listen to see if that is what people want. Certainly, in the year and a half that I have been the Director of the Labrador Institute, it is increasingly ramping up from universities all over Canada, trying to find ways to, at the best of times, partner. And other times, they almost just come in and plant themselves here because, as some people have told me, it is more accessible than other parts of the North because it’s easier to get to. So, there has been this, in my mind, alarming trend of this movement to try and forcibly reconcile in many ways, which I see as problematic and contravening a lot of what the TRC is calling for.

When you shift to the Northern research institutes and colleges and presences that are already there, I think our existence all predates the TRC and then continues on and is a testament in many ways to the process of reconciliation. I think what the TRC offers all of us is the continued reminder that we can do better; that we can be more responsive, more accountable; our relationships can be stronger; our understandings of what research and education can be can continue to shift to be more reflective and responsive to the people with whom we work and the traditional homelands where our institutions are located. I think these Northern places that we occupy really push forward the reconciliation conversation in Canada, and I think it goes back to reclaiming that space to become an inspiration of reconciliation for other places. Not that we have all of the answers, and not that we are all doing perfectly because certainly we are not here in Labrador, but I think that it’s an opportunity to be able to highlight to other parts of the country, and other organizations and institutions, about what is possible when you have a Northern-based and Northern-focused research or education program or institute.

I think it’s a really exciting time. I think it’s put a lot of attention on the North, and I think in general there is a lot of attention on the North for a whole variety of reasons beyond research and education. It’s an opportunity for Northern leadership in research and education. In terms of our institute’s vision for reconciliation, this is something that we’re working on together with the three Indigenous nations and organizations in Labrador. We’re about to start a one year to 18-month-long process around a strategic task force to re-envision the future of the Labrador Institute in general, with deep partnerships with the three Indigenous organizations in particular, so we can reimagine what education and research would look like. Also, we are looking at how an institute like ours can not only support research and education, which is key to our piece, but also influence policy and understanding at the broader levels and discussions around reconciliation, colonization and decolonization, and Indigenization within the higher education realm.

John: One of the things that we’re very aware of is that the way of life for Canada has been developing in the landscape for the last 150 years, but it hasn’t taken into consideration what was there before. When we talk about what happens next, what happens next is that we have a dialogue, and in that dialogue, we talk about collaboration between independent institutions of government. Most of the policies on how governments operate and how institutions are told to go forth on these principles, it’s those principles that we want to have an impact on because past practices were about taking and
not reinvesting. What we are interested in is the reinvestment part, which means that we need to build capacity, we need to engage in meaningful research and whatever we develop is towards some kind of a policy development that can go in the mainstream mentality in the ways research is done through policy development.

What we are doing now is very experimental, but we want to capture what has worked so far because any time that you’re looking at changes, these are the places that it starts. It is a dialogue as to how we move forward. In that discussion of how we move forward, is a list: we want to be partners, we want to collaborate, we want to have a process of reconciliation. This is where the rubber hits the road, this is the reality that we are in now, we need to recognize that. We need to work towards some development of engagement, whether it’s called policy or whatever it might be, but we need some sort of understanding that we are on a new path toward reconciliation and collaboration and partnership where parties bring what’s important to them – something that contributes towards rebuilding the communities, rebuilding what is readily available for Canada and even on the world stage.

What we have still is our language, culture and way of life. We still have that intact, it’s just that it’s not recognized outside of our own realm because the institution of the Indian Act is a cloud that is very hard to let absorb into the air and let it disappear. Because it is institutionalized we need to talk about it and much of the impacts of it happen to the youth. We need to capture that dialogue and create platforms towards a greater understanding. That is what research is about. We’re going to have to research how things have become the way they are today and how to not re-experience the conflicting ways of doing things and the ways of life that might be foreign to us that were there before. The only way that we can take care of it, is that we come to an understanding as to how to move forward through a dialogue. It’s places like this that it happens, where initially we have a discussion and new thought processes and make it public for consumption. It doesn’t have all of the answers, but it raises some issues that give knowledge to the youth who are up in the front. This is not about revenge, this is about how do we change how things were done in the past so that our views are taken into consideration towards a greater understanding and maybe even towards some direction in how things are done in the greater society. *Maksii.*

**Jonathon:** I can say that we are certainly just scratching the surface of a really important dialogue here. I will reiterate and agree with Bronwyn’s point that the Northern institutions are here and are continuing to engage in this: basically, creating space for the conversations on a daily basis. Part of the reason I’ve been so excited to be in this role, and why I came to [the Aurora Research Institute] (ARI) years ago and why I am still here now, is that research licensing for the NWT has maintained and retained the spirit of collaboration, of partnership and good-faith dealings while communicating about any research project in the NWT. Of course, the conversations are not always something where people walk away with all of their ideas agreeing. But in the spirit of good faith collaboration and dealings, it has essentially, as far as I’ve seen, been a regulatory process with the intent of the inclusion of respect: for respecting and honouring of treaty relationships. The backbone to the research license process that I’ve been involved with has been around since the ‘70s and it has done well to remain dynamic to the changing landscape within the NWT as a new land claim agreement is put in place. It’s inspiring to work in that every day.

In the area of the TRC, I believe Ashlee mentioned that these institutions have been around since before the TRC and of course, are continuing on now. Just working in a role that at its core has the intent to respect and honour treaty relationships, I think is a big part of going forward. As Ashlee mentioned, some institutions are racing to develop their Northern or Indigenous partnership arrangements to be consistent with the TRC. That certainly is not ideal, but it’s better than not at all. Going forward and working in the best possible ways to do things as respectfully as possible and, as John mentioned a few times, doing research that is meaningful. I’ve heard other staff in the T’llich Training and Research Institute saying if researchers come with the mindset and ask, “How can I help?” and develop a research project around that, then that is going to be a little bit more meaningful within the area.

**Pertice:** I think that in terms of reconciliation, I think this is a big wake-up call for each one of us within our institutions to consider true reflection about our processes and what we’re doing. A lot of programs, they really essentialize students, and we build our programs on treating all students the same, as being fair, when in actual fact we need to think about that because people come with different histories and different environments. David spoke about education in a small community and the lack of math and science. So, we bring our students in and they do not all have the same baseline education. I consider myself a Northerner and I want our children, whether they are Indigenous or non-Indigenous, to
return to the North, to work well with each other, and respect each other. Before, it was really settlers who were influencing a great deal of the decision-making. We need to change that up now, and that will be a part of our new story.

One of our strengths is that we have a contextual understanding of the North because we have been here for a long time, we have been a part of the processes. I think if we put that with a reflective process in understanding our history, our engagement is going to change. We will be on a new path. I think the other thing is that we need to maintain research integrity and I think we are doing that by making changes to our ethics approval process to include public representation of Indigenous and local people. I think we have good interactions with the community and I think that we have a good process for local knowledge mobilization. Those are the things to take forward into the future.

Bronwyn: I’ve been thinking about this question a lot, because I have been thinking, as Pertice alluded to, what is my role as a white woman who has transplanted to the North because of a largely colonial research upbringing? How do I feed into this conversation? How does the role of my institution feed in? One of the things that I’ve come to realize is that I think our public academic institutions are one of the safest places that we can be having this conversation around reconciliation. I think that we have an obligation to create safe space for conversation around reconciliation in research and education. We can ask hard questions, we can express complicated truths, we can talk about where and how we failed, we can talk about the aspirations we have, we can talk about what is my role as a white female transplant to the North. I can ask these hard questions in my public academic space because I think that we are neutral, we are trusted, we’re arms-length and that makes us places where these conversations should be happening.

In terms of a vision for reconciliation in research and education at Yukon College, I think one of the ways that Yukon College is building ourselves going into Yukon University is that we’re developing in three niche areas/three pillars. We’re working on climate change, sustainable resource development, and self-determination. That third pillar, self-determination, is the idea that we can focus on conversations around how First Nations self-govern and are self-determining. Our first degree will be a Bachelor of Arts in Indigenous Governance, specifically around [Image of two people downloading climate data from a weather station near Old Crow, Yukon.]

Vuntut Gwitchin Elder Joel Peter and Yukon College researchers Louis-Philippe Roy and Katerine Grandmont download climate data from a weather station near Old Crow, Yukon.
that question, and we developed that concept in direct response to the needs of Yukon First Nations. So, even through this transition, we’re embedding those needs, those questions and the need to build capacity to support reconciliation into the program that we offer.

We’re now looking at how we build Indigenization across our institutions because that is part of reconciliation, how we work it into our governance model, which is really challenging. I think to really achieve reconciliation in research and education, we have to have an institution that reflects Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing and it has to be threaded all the way through who we are, in order for us to be able to work authentically on reconciliation through the research that we do and the education that we offer. On the research side, we’re going right back to Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow, which is the document that Yukon Indian Chiefs took to Pierre Trudeau in 1973, as a foundation for moving forward on self-government in the Yukon. So, they spoke specifically about research. I should pass it over to David to talk about that if he wants to, but that document is really guiding the way that we think about research in the context of self-government and reconciliation.

**David:** I guess I’ll have the last swing at the bat. In regard to looking at reconciliation in research, I think the position that I have currently as an engagement advisor here at Yukon College, is a true reflection of the college’s efforts to work with First Nations in a meaningful way. Upon taking on this position, one of the things I was asked to really focus on was the TRC Calls to Action, and #65 in particular, in which, “we call upon the federal government, through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, post-secondary institutions and educators, and the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation and its partner institutions, to establish a national research program with multi-year funding to advance understanding of reconciliation.” So, one of the bases of my employment is to essentially look at ways of honouring that particular call to action and to see if there is any tie-in to Yukon College, and potentially Yukon University, moving forward. As Bronwyn mentioned, there are a lot of mechanisms that we currently have in place. For example, in 2013, we had our first draft of a Yukon First Nations engagement protocol that relates to working with First Nations on research.

Bronwyn also mentioned Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow, the 1973 document that was presented to Pierre Elliott Trudeau. It had a section that talked about research: the need for meaningful research, the need for First Nations to be more involved in research. So back in 1973, those chiefs had the foresight to see a need for a University of the North and I want to honour that. I think that is something that is so special for those particular chiefs at that particular time to see the need for a University of the North to keep our children in the North, to build capacity for the North. Part of my role with the college is to work with our current mechanisms that we do have and I’ll list a few of them. As researchers come in, one of the things that we try to promote is First Nations 101. First Nations 101 gives a basic understanding of the self-government realm that we currently operate here within the Yukon context, and it also provides them with a basic understanding of Together Today for our Children Tomorrow. After that, if they want to get more of an understanding going forward about Yukon First Nations’ history, we have a course called “Yukon First Nations’ History” and that goes into great detail of the history of colonialism and how Yukon First Nations essentially came to be and how they operate under the self-government umbrella.

Looking at different ways of actually working with First Nations has been quite a challenge and one of the things that we’re hoping to do is look at ways of consolidating our research efforts when it comes to working with First Nations. One way we’re hoping to do that is through a President’s advisory committee, exclusively on research projects. This will be called the “Yukon First Nations Research Advisory Committee,” which we hope will look at ways of engaging Yukon First Nations, talking about their research priorities, and looking at other ways that the college can be a partner in assisting them with solving their questions.

The banner that the college and the research centre currently operate under is “solving Northern problems by looking at Northern solutions.” I think that involving First Nations at the earlier stages and working along with them in the different areas that research can provide has been very beneficial and I think that the more we involve them, as we go forward, in different areas, the better off that we will be. I think that we’ve done a lot of good work here at the college in regard to working with Yukon First Nations, and [we] provide ways for them to talk about the questions that they have and together look for solutions.

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