

# APPENDIX C - Youth Knowledge

## The Dene Ts'ı́lį School: a Cross-Cultural, Land Based Model

The 2017 Winter (February) and Fall (August-September) on the land Dene Ts'ı́lį Schools (DTS) were sponsored by the ʔehdzo Got'ı́ne ǵots' ǵ Nákedı (Sahtú Renewable Resources Board – SRRB) and the Ne ǵ K'ə Dene Ts'ı́lį (Living on the Land) Forum, with funding from several governmental, non-governmental and academic partners. Over a period of 16-18 days, each school supported young Dene and Métis participants aged 18-30 to join the Dəocha (Bennett Field) site on Sahtú Də (Bear River) between Tulita and Délı́ne. Students and instructors slept in tents, while Elders were on site in the two cabins. Camp participants ate together, met each morning to discuss site safety, and ran a series of classes, workshops, and research sessions. In between scheduled activities, students participated in Dene Ts'ı́lį activities of their choosing, such as sewing, helping with camp maintenance, working on hides, or harvesting. While the concept of Dene Ts'ı́lį was broadly defined for the first DTS, the thematic focus of the second school was safety. Recognizing that students are accustomed to structured learning in schools and often are not experienced on the land, the approach was consciously cross-cultural.

Each class or theme had two instructors: one Dene knowledge holder, and one academic teacher or researcher. For example, in a boat safety course, the academic instructor (Audrey Giles, University of Ottawa) delivered a course for certification, while an Elder (Jimmy Dillon) taught hands-on boat operation. In addition, the camp wove Dene Kedə into its Dene Ts'ı́lį focus by using Dene Kedə in meetings, translating course terms, and holding workshops on Dene Kedə revitalization tactics. Finally, several youth volunteered to do interviews with the *Dene Kedə to Dene Ts'ı́lį* research team. The report that follows is a synthesis of youth knowledge, interviews, workshops/focus groups, and participant observation from the Fall camp (August-September 2017), in light of the literature review on Dene Kedə and Dene Ts'ı́lį programming over the last 50 years of history in the Sahtú region.

Young Dene and Métis have experienced Dene Kedə and Dene Ts'ı́lį in their schools, homes, communities, and on the land. Many are searching for opportunities to continue growing as



Photo credit: Jessica Dunkin

### **Máhsı to the Fall 2017 Dene Ts'ı́lį School Students!**

Cheyanne Betsidea  
Naomi Gully  
Sonny Gully  
Cheyann Kochon  
Carmen Lennie  
Shelby Lennie  
Cara Manuel  
Shannon Oudzi  
Sydney Oudzi

individuals, as adult second language learners, and as learners of traditional skills. Students feel that living with Dene language and culture is an important piece of their identities and heritage, and they have suggestions for programs and types of assistance that would help them. In addition, feedback following the Dene Ts'ı̨ı̨ school showed that students had a desire to see more programs like it, with significant on-the-land, Dene Ts'ı̨ı̨, and Dene Kedə content in the future.

## Memories of Dene Kedə and Dene Ts'ı̨ı̨

The youth who participated in the Dene Ts'ı̨ı̨ School grew up in the 1990s, a time rich with language and culture revitalization programs, as well as shifts in ways of life, legislation, and land use. Their experiences provide living testimony to the endurance and effectiveness of the types of programs surveyed in the literature review. As young learners, their first memories about Dene Ts'ı̨ı̨ and Dene Kedə come from family and school. Some of them have accessed language documentation resources to continue their learning; most have grown up listening to Dene radio stations; they hear elders speaking the language to each other in the community; and they have had important life experiences on the land. The summaries and quotations that follow offer glimpses into the connections between young leaders and their historical contexts.

### *The Importance of Dene Kedə and Dene Ts'ı̨ı̨ for Young Adults*

Dene Ts'ı̨ı̨ students were very passionate about their language and ways of life and the importance of learning more about each. Interviewees believed that the two were linked: language was important because it connected them to their heritage, allowed them access to a different worldview, and made them better community leaders.

*I feel most comfortable speaking English but I would be totally proud of myself if I learned to speak my language better. It makes me feel part of my heritage and my culture and who I am. (Shannon Oudzı, Colville Lake)*

*It's totally cool, people speak and I wish I could do that—they say that in a different language things are funnier, they say it's funnier in Slavey. I believe that and I wish I understood. (Shelby Lennie, Tulita)*

*It brings out the best in us! They say if we don't learn it now we won't learn it in the future, there will be no-one to help us. That is why I'm trying to get it all now, while we're young, because it will take years before we can speak it fluently. I started doing this when I was five and I am still learning. (Carmen Lennie, Tulita)*

### *Dene Classes Kindergarten to Grade 9*

When asked to describe a memorable Dene Kedə learning experience, nearly all talked about school. For most, their time in Dene classes introduced them to the idea of language learning and its importance, but didn't teach them how to put sentences together. Most of them remembered some basic vocabulary (most commonly said were “numbers,” “colours,” “animals,” and “calendar words”) but commented that they couldn't use a lot of it in everyday conversation.

Dene Ts'ı̨ı̨ School students wished aloud that Dene language classes could continue past grade nine, commenting that the language was “just starting to catch on” and get easy to speak before they entered high school:

*The way it is structured is that you take Dene K'e classes from kindergarten and then it stops at Grade 9. I was getting really good at it and then it stopped. After Grade 9 I wasn't practicing it anymore, and if I knew what I know now I would have done learning on my own. That's where it kind of stopped for me. (Cara Manuel, Fort Good Hope)*

In addition, some students would have liked to have more of an immersion component in their K-9 programming.

*Instead of Slavey classes, they should do classes in Slavey. They should be able to have the youth learn the language in high school too. (Cheyanne Betsidea, Délıne)*

*Maybe a Slavey class with just only Slavey, no sewing, nothing else. Right now in Colville Lake when they have Slavey class they do colouring, sewing, drawing, and they talk English too. (Sydney Oudzi, Colville Lake)*

A student from Tulita, Shelby Lennie, added that while they had the option to take Dene in high school in their community, she wished it was mandatory because she didn't know to "take it seriously" until later in life.

### *Family*

In addition to learning from classes in K-9 programs, students had memories of speaking Dene language with family members and listening to them speak in different settings, including on the land. Many of these memories referred to figuring out what a Dene word or phrase meant, or figuring out words through an activity or process:

*I used to know how to say "grab me coffee..." My grandma she used to ask me to get her coffee and only put it half, because she puts half milk, half coffee, and a little bit of water. (Sonny Gully, Fort Good Hope)*

*They taught us in school but I learned more when I went trapping with my brother. I went out with him for the first time when I was 9 years old and he talked a lot of Slavey to me. But as I got older, I just kind of... see all the other youngsters don't talk Slavey so I backed off away from it or something. (Sydney Oudzi, Colville Lake)*

*When I was really young my cousin and I always used to practice visiting with my grandma and my grandpa... I always hear kids saying granny and zehtsá so I wanted to start saying that too, calling my mom's aunty and uncle my granny and zehtsá, and they would teach us how to make the sign of the cross in Slavey, or how to say thank you. (Shannon Oudzi, Colville Lake)*

### *Dene Kedá in the Community*

Students were regularly exposed to the language in their communities, in grocery stores, at events and meetings, in the streets, and over the radio. Some commented that it was mostly Elders and older adults who spoke the language in public:

*At my house, near the store, when Elders see each other they communicate in Slavey. When I go visit my grandma, they always speak Slavey. Some of the Elders speak straight up Slavey, they don't understand English, and someone will have to translate for them for us to understand what they are saying. (Shannon Oudzi, Colville Lake)*

*It's more common with Elders. And, what I find more common is that adults are able to speak the language, and it usually has to do with your upbringing or how strong it is within families. There are also radio programs. And at meetings as well they also have an interpreter, every time. (Cara Manuel, Fort Good Hope)*

Students have also been exposed to some written language through pamphlets, resource books, and school. Some find language documentation as-is to be a very useful language-learning tool while others feel they need an opportunity to learn more about reading and writing in Dene.

### *Law and Policy*

Most Dene Ts'ı̨ School participants recognized the fact that the Northwest Territories has official Indigenous languages; however, they did not show strong or clear personal connections to Official Languages law or policy. This being said, a number of youth knew their regional language coordinator or were familiar with the work of the Teaching and Learning Centres, and thus grew up with the impacts of evolving Northwest Territories languages policy whether or not it was recognized explicitly as such. When asked about what kinds of external law or policy support could be provided to help them revitalize their language, several interviewees half-joked that a law mandating language use would be very helpful:

*I feel like they should make another Dene law of learning to speak your language, because no one is interested in it nowadays. (Carmen Lennie, Tulita)*

### *Media*

Community Radio and CKLB was the number one media source of language exposure for Dene Ts'ı̨ school participants. Interviewees commented that they heard the language over the radio frequently, and that many of the recordings played preserved important cultural histories:

*[I hear on the radio] recordings from back in the day, like 1990 or something, of elders talking and telling stories. It's pretty awesome. (Shannon Oudzi, Colville Lake)*

Participants were aware that some people used Dene language on social media, but often had not seen it much themselves. However, some Dene Ts'ı̨ students wanted to begin using Dene fonts and other social media tools:

*In our dialect there is not much that is out there on social media. GNWT has a Facebook page where they are just starting to have 10 or 12 different dialects saying "GNWT" or something like that. But for our dialect there hasn't been much produced in social media or apps, yet, but I would like to be the person who makes that movement. (Cara Manuel, Fort Good Hope)*

*As far as Facebook goes I'm not too sure, I think there are a couple pages but I haven't subscribed to them yet. I haven't used Slavey on it yet. (Shelby Lennie, Tulita).*

### *Exposure to Other Languages*

Several students had encountered another Dene language or dialect, or another Indigenous language, and felt that this made it more difficult for them to learn their own local variety of Dene Kede. One student took Chipweyan in high school and found that it made her process of learning her own language more confusing. Others encountered similar challenges when living in different communities:

*I've kind of lost the language too. I learned it in Behchokò for a while so every time I talk Slavey I get mixed up with that language, so I can't speak it much anymore, I start saying the same thing in both languages. I want to get my own language back. I got teased a lot too because I had a really bad accent. I just got over it like a month ago; it is really hard when people tease you about it. (Carmen Lennie, Tulita)*

The Dene Ts'ı̨ school involved students from multiple dialects, and as such, some were hesitant to participate in language games and lessons because they felt that their language was not reflected. Some participants requested that there be an Elder from each dialect available, and that all Dene language resources be clearly representative of each Dene Kedə community present. The students were not alone in their concerns about maintaining the integrity of each dialect: some older participants voiced their uneasiness about the idea of North Slavey standardization, saying that some of their community members wanted to merge all of the different dialects, and that this would remove each one's unique land-based knowledge.

The Fall 2017 Dene Ts'ı̨ School tried several different ways of accommodating all language speakers, including a schedule translated into each Dene Kedə dialect, and an evolving school “dictionary” that labeled each term with the originating dialect. One game that worked well did not rely on the facilitator knowing all Dene dialects: each participant said a word in Dene Kedə, paired with an action or gesture that gave the rest a hint to what it meant. The circle had to guess what they were communicating.

## Challenges to Language Learning

### Self Consciousness

In addition to aforementioned challenges (for example, a lack of highschool Dene education, and having many dialects in one place), students identified a few key barriers to learning Dene language as adults. One was fear of being laughed at: some students felt worried (particularly about pronunciation), nervous, or uncomfortable trying to speak Dene in front of others:

*I get uncomfortable like there is a ball in my throat that won't come out, something stopping me. I feel some shame, like I might say it wrong. There have been times when I have been wanting to communicate with elders and my pronunciation wasn't on point, and the thing is it's kind of tricky. You could say... some words are almost spelled out the*

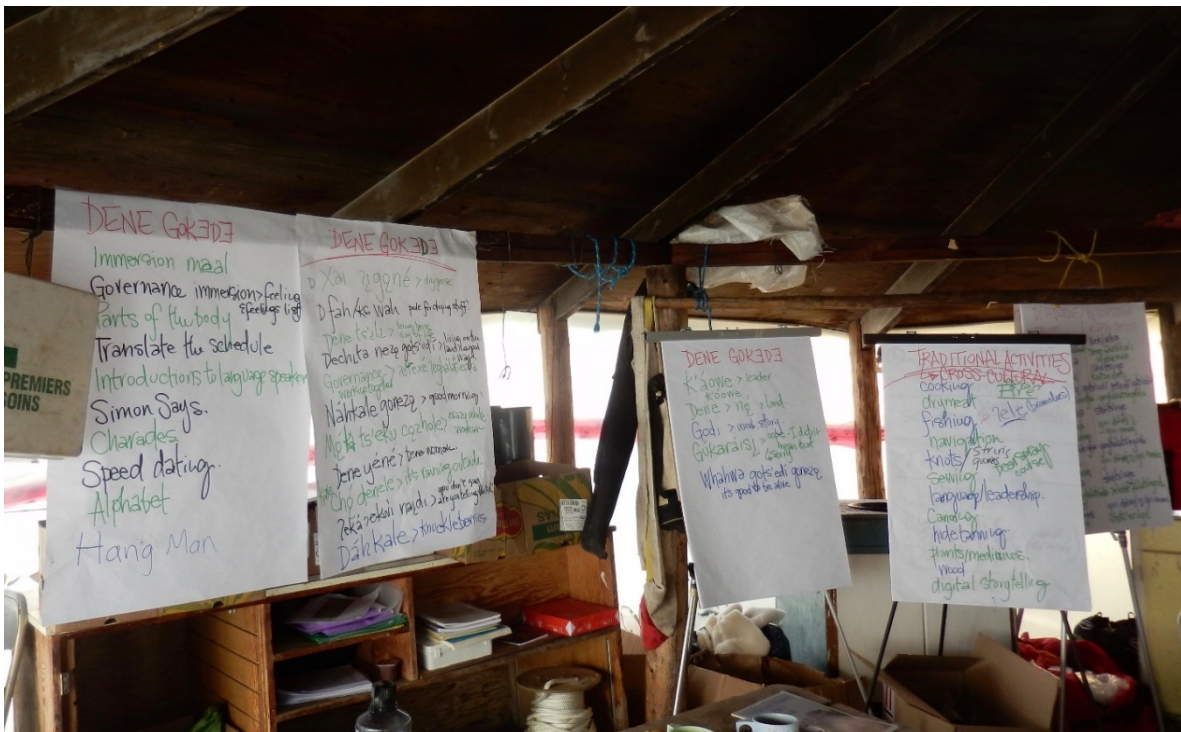


Photo credit: Faun Rice

*same but if a little click or something is off it will turn into something completely different. When that happens it makes me feel really discouraged. Elders don't mean to make you feel discouraged, but it doesn't feel good when they are laughing at you. I know I shouldn't take it wrong but it really does feel discouraging. (Cara Manuel, Fort Good Hope)*

There was much talk about this at the camp: one Elder voiced the strong opinion that youth ought not to be ashamed of their language, and many older Dene Kedə speakers reflected on how they would try to remember not to laugh when younger people practiced the language. It seemed that the close quarters and opportunity for frequent intergenerational interaction allowed for conversations and discoveries that would not normally occur within a community.

#### *Motivation: Feeling Overwhelmed*

Several students commented that people their age were interested in learning their language, but that it was hard to find the energy to face such an overwhelming task. They felt that people their age found it difficult to really commit, for several reasons. Some youth identified substance abuse as a key challenge to language learning:

*The obvious challenge is alcohol. It consumes people. It's a huge factor; I know so many people I didn't get to go to school with anymore because of alcohol... they lose interest, they think that it might not be important to learn their language and culture. (Shelby Lennie, Tulita)*

Another student raised the point that young adults might feel the size of a language to be unmanageable:

*Maybe they are not really into it or aren't focused or don't have the patience to learn it. Maybe they just think it takes so much time, intimidated by all the things to learn. It gets overwhelming. [They have to] try not to think about it so much and just do it. That makes it easier for me. (Carmen Lennie, Tulita)*

#### *Preserving Dene Ts'ı̨łı̨*

In addition to the overwhelming task of learning a language, some interviewees talked about the feeling that preserving Dene heritage (in a broader sense) for the future was falling on their shoulders. Some framed this task as important and necessary, but also as immense and challenging. It is possible that this sense of improbable magnitude makes it more difficult for youth to become involved in heritage and language preservation:

*Not very much, but there are a few young people who are interested in learning and I think that's really good. But most of the youth nowadays are focused on alcohol or drugs, or whatever. But I feel like, because pretty soon our elders are going to be gone and we're going to have to take over, and that's why I'm trying to learn now because they will leave us. It's going to be good to have, so I can teach my kid some day and they can teach their kids, I want to keep it in my family. But I would encourage people to try to learn it for themselves and their future families too. Because one day, we are all going to be in charge of our community." (Carmen Lennie, Tulita)*

*I wouldn't mind to get stories from some of the elders in Colville Lake, like how it used to be growing up the hard way, and what it was like traveling by dog team from town to town, how they had to walk from here to there, how they knew when and where to fish, all these things. How it's different from then today, how life was living on the land 375 days*

*a year, how they survived on their own with their own knowledge, independent and providing for their families, taking care of one another as Dene people. But there are barely any elders left in Colville Lake, there are some but they are getting, yeah... it's sad. I am thankful for [a teacher who did some recordings with elders] because he took the time to go to those elders and get their stories and I think that was very inspiring, and I wish I could have did that but I don't know, I wasn't thinking about that at that time. (Shannon Oudzi, Colville Lake)*

### *Accessibility of Language Learning Resources*

A number of youth did not know of any programs designed to help them as adult second language learners. Furthermore, most students did not know about existing Dene language apps, texts, and other resources. A few students had more access to these tools and brought some of them to the school.

## Youth Suggestions: Further Integration of Dene Ts'ı̨ı̨ and Dene Kedə in Education

As demonstrated in the quotations that began this section, young adults learning to speak their language connect it with learning more about their heritage. Dene Kedə offers one of many pathways to becoming more immersed in Dene Ts'ı̨ı̨, and interviewees commented that this could be better reflected in their education.

### *Dene Kedə Unlocking Aspects of Dene Ts'ı̨ı̨*

Some interviewees felt that becoming more knowledgeable in Dene Kedə would unlock or bring out important components of Dene worldview and values. This spirit within Dene Kedə was seen as hard to describe using English and an English worldview:

*I always wondered how is it different, I know that there is a different worldview that comes with Dene K'e compared to Western knowledge and teachings, and I'm so interested to learn more about that worldview as a person who speaks Dene K'e and has the values that come with it. (Cara Manuel)*

*I think it's important because it's where we come from, it's who we are as Native people. It brings out the best in us, and it would be good to share that with other people. It brings out our... what is the word... all our culture and traditions, all that... I can't find the right word. What I'm trying to say is, it brings out the best in me. (Carmen Lennie)*

### *Desire for more Dene Ts'ı̨ı̨ content in Dene Kedə learning*

Along with the recognition that Dene Kedə and Dene Ts'ı̨ı̨ were intertwined came the comment that Dene Kedə and Dene Ts'ı̨ı̨ could be better taught together. Primarily, this showed itself through comments about ideal language learning settings. One student commented that during grade school, he felt like they learned more about sewing than about Dene Kedə, and that he had learned the language best by going out on the land trapping with his brother. Another noted that it was very important to have Dene Kedə present not just in the classroom, but also in one's home and personal life:

*I also want to write the words of plates, bowls, and everything, so that it is right there in my home. It would also be good to structure learning through chapters, like 'Chapter One, Kinship and Family.' Elders always tell me you used to call people by kinship terms rather than their names. There are so many teachings that go with the language... There need to be mentors, maybe Elders who voluntarily you could go to or call for practice...*

*...There should be a language teacher in high school that is credited, and it needs to be innovative and interesting where you use language and culture and dene history to get a sense of how important the language is, if you can connect those things. To also let the students know that it is going to be up to us to take it upon ourselves to revitalize it in ourselves and homes and as a nation. I would love to see it also in post secondary education. (Cara Manuel)*

## Big-Picture Lessons from the Dene Ts'ı̨ School: The Value of On-The-Land Programming

### *Pride and Self Confidence*

The Fall 2017 Dene Ts'ı̨ School aimed to provide a safe space for youth to explore their Dene identity; build youth leadership skills; and transmit cultural knowledge between generations. Within these broad goals, students and instructors had the opportunity to set their own priorities and plans.

On one of the first days of the Dene Ts'ı̨ School, a Dene participant cooking for the camp offered to teach everyone to make drygeese. Those who participated—mostly young women with a few exceptions—were posting pictures to social media with their “first drygeese,” and throughout the camp it was clear that learning and improving bush skills (from hunting and trapping to preparing foods, fires, and tents) was a significant source of pride for students. Taglines such as “bush life, best life” were populating Facebook, and it was clear that Dene youth valued the skills they were practicing.



*Making drygeese with elder Camilla Rabisca. Photo credit: Jessica Dunkin.*



Similarly, all camp participants had an opportunity to create a “digital story” – a video narrative built from images, footage, voiceovers, and found sound or music – facilitated by Jessie Curell of Handson Media Education<sup>1</sup>. A number of these digital stories were about living the Dene way, keeping a close relationship with the land, and keeping their elders’ skills and traditions alive.

While all students seemed to identify Dene Ts’ı̨ı̨ with Dene traditional activities, there was also a more subtle and dynamic sense in which people at the school talked about Dene Ts’ı̨ı̨. Students, instructors, researchers, and camp staff alike reflected on being on the land as an essential component of Sahtú life and the challenges that come with it.

### *Dene Ts’ı̨ı̨ and Dene Kedá as Healing*

As some recent research has observed (e.g. Redvers 2016; Gordon 2014), the meaning of “on the land” is shifting—particularly for youth—to entail demarcated events or occasions rather than a continuous way of life. On the land *programs*—the word “programs” is telling—are one way of introducing Dene Ts’ı̨ı̨ to each new generation. Redvers contends that these programs support healing and resilience, improving cultural, social, physical, and psychological wellbeing, along with intergenerational transmission of knowledge (and language transfer). Gordon, similarly, argues that on the land programs help preserve and pass on Dene epistemology, which acts as a healing force in the face of colonial trauma.

The small group of youth who attended the Dene Ts’ı̨ı̨ Fall School had varying experiences on the land: some had spent a long time trapping, hunting, and lived in the bush regularly, while others



Feeding the fire ceremony with Walter Bezha. Photo credit: Deborah Simmons.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.handsonmediaeducation.com/>

had passed most of their lives in town. The youth from Colville Lake seemed to have more bush experience than the rest, which has been recognized as a traditional strength of the community. However, it seemed that nearly all participants associated being on the land (whether as part of a “program,” or as a part of daily life) with opportunities to heal.

Both in person and in their digital stories, Dene Ts’ı̀ı̄ participants commented on the restorative power of being on the land. People of all ages and backgrounds felt that the remote location of the school helped them stay sober and substance free, allowed them to reflect on their lives and actions, and gave them the space they needed to make strong choices. Interviewees also linked language and ways of being as both inextricably interconnected with alcohol and substance abuse, as was discussed in the section on challenges to language learning.

Some youth discussed learning more about Dene Kədə and Dene Ts’ı̀ı̄ as part of a personal transformation that goes side by side with connecting more to one’s heritage, community, and land. Students who chose to come to the Dene Ts’ı̀ı̄ school made the choice for a reason: a number appeared to be in the process of becoming stronger leaders and community advocates, and commented that this was a part of healing and growing stronger as a person. In this sense, Dene Ts’ı̀ı̄ and Dene Kədə gave youth ways to rediscover their homes:

*I had to make a lot of life changes recently and it really made me step back... I spent a lot of time running away from this place and when I came back I realized that was pretty selfish of me, and that it is a really important part of who I am, and how I grew up, how I was raised, how vital it is.... (Shelby Lennie, Tulita)*

Some students shared similar themes in their digital stories. Carmen Lennie’s story concluded with the following:

*Going out on the land is also very important to me. It helps me heal and helps me grow as an aboriginal woman. It really helps to bring out the best in me that I never knew I had. It's a place where I feel at home. It's a place where I feel comfortable to let things go. It's also a place where I finally learned to make peace with my mistakes. I am so proud of the person I am today and so grateful to still be here to prove to everyone that I've got this and there's no turning back. The day I put down the bottle was probably one of the greatest choices I've made. Now I can be myself and live again. The moment I realized that I stop looking for my worth in others, I found the worth in myself, and now only look for others worthy of me....*

Sonny Gully’s digital story is named my traditional life.” In it, he talks about how he is a proud hunter and trapper:

*I like to live on the land more than in town.  
Every time I go back to town, there’s drinking.  
Drinking takes advantage of people.  
It’s causing a lot of problems at home.  
I like more of a sober lifestyle, and I get that on the land.*

### *Dene Ts’ı̀ı̄ and Gender*

The young women present had a strong interest in what it meant to be a Dene woman, and were very engaged in activities such as preparing a hide, preparing traditional foods, and sewing. In addition, however, young women took the opportunity provided by a context outside of their communities to go hunting, learn about navigation, and expand their skillsets. Some of the women

appeared to feel freer to inquire and explore in a camp setting than they would have at home. It is possible that the relationship between Dene Ts'ı́ı and gender will shift and change with the next generation of young leaders.

## The Experience of Developing an On-the-Land Program: Moving Forward with Dene Ts'ı́ı Youth Programming

One of the key successes of the Dene Ts'ı́ı school was the strength of participant feedback. Instructors and students alike shared their ideas about how to improve the program for its next iteration, what challenges they encountered, and what worked well. The Dene Ts'ı́ı instructor team (comprised of both Dene and non-Dene members) learned a great deal from all participants.

The experiment of having cross-cultural instruction teams produced interesting results. Dene Ts'ı́ı and Dene Kedə revitalization programs are rooted in longstanding Dene heritage and history. In addition, the youth who participate them have grown up with institution-based education. The teaching, learning, and assessment styles of each instructor varied, and it was difficult to wed the different needs of each member of a cross-cultural team, particularly when a certificate program required a certain curriculum. This hurdle was present from the very beginning of the camp when instructors and researchers representing academic institutions found it awkward to explain why they needed students to read and sign waivers or permissions forms related to university-approved ethical protocols rather than community protocols. In the future, school protocols around oral consent may be developed.

Despite—and perhaps because of—intercultural communications, the diversity and wealth of knowledge present at the camp produced fruitful and new conversations with each casual encounter. Part of the diversity present at the school was the combination of settler and Dene participants; and indeed, this produced several in-depth conversations about the importance of heritage, the dubious history of settler research and education, and the best way to balance voices leading the school's direction. The honesty of these conversations was fruitful, and raised valuable questions about how to best organize the future programs.

A pedagogical challenge the organizing team encountered was how to present the theory and history behind the school in an engaging way that moved beyond a simple retelling and became interactive or collaborative. Indeed, the question of how to present Dene Ts'ı́ı as a living, lived-in concept, rather than the theoretical inspiration for programming and publications, is an important and iterative project. In their reflections on the camp, students valued activity-based achievements and memories, such as working on hide, hiking, or cooking, in addition to achievements like earning their wilderness first aid certifications. How to best balance different genres of learning—and integrate theory more strongly into practice—bears more reflection for the next program.

In addition to helpful commentary about the school's organization, students also commented that they valued the opportunity to come to the school, that it gave them time and space to reflect on Dene Ts'ı́ı, and that they would like to see more programming like this in the future. The value of on-the-land programs as spaces to heal re-emerged in much of the feedback.

## Key Lessons and Opportunities

### *Create Judgment-Free Spaces*

Young adults will learn best in communities, classes, homes, and on the land programs where the people around them are supportive and understanding. This goes both for language programming

(wherein self-consciousness can be a real barrier) and for Dene Ts'ı̄l̄ı̄ programming, where a safe and healing space allows participants to really focus on what they are learning and not be caught up in everyday concerns. One part of the DTS setting that contributed to this was the absence of Internet. Youth and instructors alike enjoyed the chance to get away from digital media.

#### *Redefine Learning Settings and Structures*

DTS participants commented on the importance of extending Dene into all aspects of life, in addition to classroom education. Overall, there was a desire for more opportunities—both in number and diversity—for young people to learn about their language and culture once they are no longer in grade school. Casual community classes, evening gatherings, practice sessions, on-the-land immersion programs, master-apprentice type programs, and others can provide the step-by-step learning some youth prefer, while some are seeking out more interactive and activity based learning opportunities.

#### *Extend Dene Kedə and Dene Ts'ı̄l̄ı̄ Presence in Schools*

A Dene language program that continues into highschool and/or college, with some classes that immerse students in the language instead of allowing them to speak English would help youth learn and preserve Dene Kedə early. In addition, more attention to how Dene Ts'ı̄l̄ı̄ programming can be included in education (including on the land curricula, support for teacher education, etc.) is merited, both based on the literature review and on the Dene Ts'ı̄l̄ı̄ School experience.

#### *Promote Intergenerational Learning*

The Dene Ts'ı̄l̄ı̄ School created a space where different generations interacted in ways they typically would not in town. Close proximity to Elders, teachers, and Dene Kedə speakers allowed youth to grow comfortable sharing concerns about feeling self-conscious practicing Dene Kedə, and these conversations in fostered a change of thinking in some older participants.



Photo courtesy of Jessie Curell

# Dene Kedə to Dene Ts'ı́ı́ Interview Questions

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## Context

The following are questions that interviewers will seek to address in semi-structured interviews. The detailed methods for eliciting responses will be developed collaboratively with community researchers, individually and collectively. The goal is to assess community strengths in language revitalization.

## Interview Participant Information

1. Home community
2. Role  Youth  Adult  Elder
3. Gender  Woman  Man

## Questions

### *Dene Kedə (“Dene language”)*

1. What language do you feel most comfortable speaking?
2. Where do you hear Dene language **spoken**? Check all that apply.  
 Home  School  Work  Play  Bush  Handgames  
 Community events  Church  Radio  Social Media like Facebook  
 Other (add details)
3. Where do you see Dene language **written**? Check all that apply.  
 Home  School  Work  Play  Bush  Handgames  
 Community events  Church  Radio  Social Media like Facebook  
 Other (add details)
4. Is there anyone else who speaks Dene language in your family? Check all.  
 Older brother(s) or sister(s)  Parents  Older aunt(s) or uncle(s)  
 Grandparents  Great-grandparents  Younger brother(s) or sister(s)
5. What is the importance of Dene language for you?
6. Do you know any Dene language? If so, what are three words that are important to you? What do they mean?
7. What are three ways to keep Dene language alive?
8. What are three things that make it hard for young people to understand, write, and speak Dene language?

### *Dene Ts'ı́ı́ (“Being Dene, Dene Ways of Life”)*

9. What has been your most powerful experience in Dene ts'ı́ı́? When did this happen? Who made it happen?

10. What do you think are Dene ts'ı́ı́ strengths in our community? Name three kinds of Dene ts'ı́ı́ knowledge or practices that the community is best at keeping alive.
11. Who are your Dene ts'ı́ı́ heroes? Name one youth, one woman, one man, and one elder and say what you admire about them.

*Concluding Remarks*

12. Do you have any other comments or suggestions about the past, present and future of Dene kedə or Dene ts'ı́ı́?
13. Do you have any questions or concerns that you would like to see addressed about Dene kedə or Dene ts'ı́ı́?