

Opening Many Doors: A Final Report on Creating Conditions for Success of First Nation, Métis and Inuit Students in the Simcoe County District School Board

**Internal Evaluation: the Urban Aboriginal¹ Education Pilot Project
Simcoe County District School Board**



Prepared by

Haig-Brown Research & Consulting
179 Glendonwynne Road
Toronto , Ontario, M6P 3E8
August 2010

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Haig-Brown Research & Consulting

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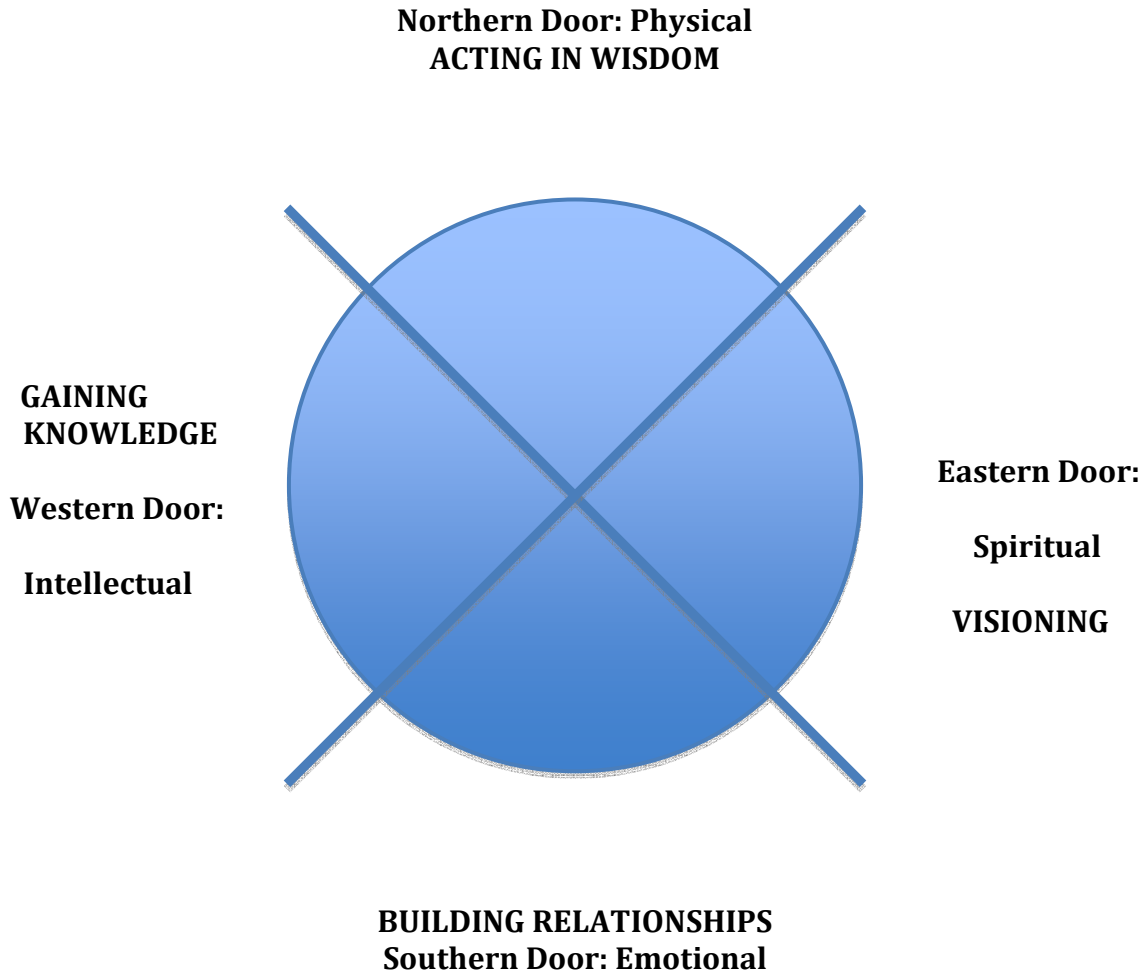
This internal evaluation of the Urban Aboriginal Education Pilot Project was contracted by the Simcoe County District School Board. Following a Circlework Model of Planning and Assessment, the report addresses three central questions, 1) How true to the guiding principles has this project been? 2) How successful was the project team in implementing the aspects laid out in the original plan? and 3) What is the model that results from assessment and analysis of this pilot project? The study was conducted by an independent research firm, Haig-Brown Research & Consulting. It involved the use of circlework focus groups for teachers and students, individual research conversations/interviews/electronic interviews with parents, and sub-Steering committee members, informal conversations with UAEPP staff and others, policy analysis, documentary evidence, and surveys with teachers, students and parents.

The results of the study indicate an overwhelmingly positive response to the outcomes of the project in relation to its original goals and to the refinement of the approaches to achieving them and extending them beyond the schools involved with the pilot. The components of the project included: the Principal of First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education, the Itinerant Resource Teachers, the Child and Youth Workers, culturally-designated space and new resources for the libraries. Not a single person involved in the study suggested that the project should not be continued. At the same time, the report contains many important suggestions for enhancing, strengthening and sustaining the momentum that the UAEPP has created.

The strongest recommendation comes from the teachers and is supported keenly by the community people involved. If teachers are going to do the work of enhancing the success of First Nation, Métis and Inuit students and infusing First Nation, Métis and Inuit content and process across the curriculum in order to inform all students, they are seeking support. It should come in the form of rigorous, on-going, culturally-sensitive professional development. Ideally the work should be conducted for the most part by First Nation, Métis and Inuit resource people who are knowledgeable of traditions, histories and current realities of the relationships amongst all Canadians. An Elder guiding the process is seen as integral to a culturally appropriate continuation of working to meet the goals of the Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework. Focusing Board and school improvement plans on the initiative should ensure the achievement of the original goals for similar and expanded projects. Adequate funding is essential.

This report concludes with the outline of a model for other school boards interested in implementing a similar approach to this work, and with a series of recommendations for strengthening what is seen as an already sound project.

**I. CIRCLE WORK MODEL OF PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT
URBAN ABORIGINAL EDUCATION PILOT PROJECT**



This model, based in the Medicine Wheel, is one representation of the development of the Urban Aboriginal Education Pilot Project in the Simcoe County District School Board. It began with a mutual **vision** based locally but building on the goals of the Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework. **Relationships** amongst all the major players formed the basis for planning. Students, parents, community leaders, teachers, administrators and ministry staff all joined together to plan the best approaches to formulating and implementing the plan. Over time, the directions of the plan were assessed and evaluated and refined as the various participants gained **knowledge** of one another, of First Nation, Métis and Inuit civilizations and the impact of their practices. Always the work moved in the direction of coming to **act in wisdom** in relation to First Nation, Métis and Inuit students and ultimately to all students within the schools. Assessing such actions completes this process and simultaneously starts again as **re-visioning** informs the next cycle of an endless process of renewal.

II. THE PROJECT

A. Background

In December 2007, in response to a call from the Aboriginal Education Office of the Ministry of Education, Simcoe County District School Board (SCDSB) submitted a successful proposal to participate in the Urban Aboriginal Education Project. Superintendent of Education, Janis Medysky, and the Facilitator for Aboriginal Education, Angela Bosco, took the lead in this proposal. Once approved, they immediately gathered together a strong committee made up of members of local Aboriginal and teachers' organizations. Several meetings later, by September of 2008, with the watchful guidance and contributions of this recently established sub-Steering committee, a fully fledged plan was in place. A major goal of the project was to develop a *model* for First Nation, Métis and Inuit education based in best practices that could be used by other boards as appropriate. Within the Board itself, the project sought to meet the goals of the 2007 Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework.

The call from the Aboriginal Education Office had come in direct relation to the recently developed Framework. Subtitled "Delivering Quality Education to Aboriginal Students in Ontario's Provincially Funded Schools," the vision of this document and the pilot project is to enhance First Nation, Métis and Inuit student success in Ontario schools as well as to engage all students in deeper knowledge and appreciation of "contemporary and traditional First Nation, Métis and Inuit traditions, cultures and perspectives."ⁱⁱⁱ Specifically the Board sought to:

A major goal of the project was to develop a *model* for First Nation, Métis and Inuit education based in best practices.

- 1) increase the capacity of the education system to respond to the learning and cultural needs of First Nation, Métis and Inuit students;
- 2) provide quality programs, services and resources to help create learning opportunities for First Nation, Métis and Inuit students that support improved academic achievement and identity building;
- 3) provide a curriculum that facilitates learning about contemporary and traditional First Nation, Métis and Inuit cultures, histories, and perspectives among all students, and that also contributes to the education of school board staff, teachers and elected trustees;
- 4) and develop and implement strategies that facilitate increased participation by First Nation, Métis and Inuit parents, students, communities, and organizations in working to support academic success.^{iv}

In addition to the Framework, the proposers of the project took account of the recommendations of a recent local report, the Urban Aboriginal Task Force's *Barrie/Midland/Orillia Final Report*. Commissioned by the Ontario Federation of

Indian Friendship Centres, the Ontario Métis Aboriginal Association and the Ontario Native Women’s Association, this report raises significant concerns in relation to education for Aboriginal children and youth. The authors write:

How true to the guiding principles has this project been?

Racism in schools was cited as a major problem both in terms of lack of curriculum in courses where Aboriginal students can ‘meet themselves’ in a positive manner and interaction with non-Aboriginal students. Aboriginal history and contemporary issues are increasingly being taught in a more appropriate way in schools, but a great deal remains to be done.^v

How successful was the project team in implementing the aspects laid out in the original plan?

The report goes on to point out concerns around relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, issues of bullying and over all feelings of discomfort with school, and the need for a review of the curriculum to increase the amount of Aboriginal content.

What is the model that results from assessment of this pilot project?

B. Proposal

Beginning in March of 2008, the sub-Steering^{vi} Committee fleshed out the original proposal into a well-developed plan. A final draft in September 2008 has served to guide the implementation of the pilot project. Articulated goals include identifying the needs of Aboriginal students in the Barrie area and

developing a program of best practices to inform the SCDSB schools with the potential of informing other urban communities as well. The following guiding principles have informed the project throughout its implementation:

- Foster and promote Aboriginal student success
- Promote respectful relationships among all participants
- Incorporate Aboriginal traditions of holistic education & worldview
- Foster parental/family/community engagement
- Provide professional development for SCDSB teachers
- Be collaborative, supportive and inclusive^{vii}

It was decided to focus the project on four schools as a starting place—a pilot—for major transformation in First Nation, Métis and Inuit student success. The proposal also includes a long-term vision of building capacity over four years to expand the successful aspects of the project to all schools in the SCDSB.

The components of the Pilot Project as laid out in the plan include a Principal of Aboriginal Education; elementary and secondary resource teachers; three “Aboriginal Youth Program Workers”; resources; meeting space for Aboriginal students; staff development; parent/community information sharing; and a

research component. In addition to articulating a model for Urban First Nation, Métis and Inuit education, these components will provide a frame for the internal evaluation report. Three questions focus this report:

How true to the guiding principles has this project been?

How successful was the project team in implementing the aspects laid out in the original plan?

What is the model that results from assessment and analysis of this pilot project?

C. Components of the Urban Aboriginal Education Pilot Project, SCDSB.

As the project came to a close in June 2010, one year later than initially proposed, the components of the original plan are evident in the schools involved with the project. As will be outlined later in this section, there are also some enhancements to the original plan most notably the extension of the funding from one year to two and, with that, the extension of aspects of the project to include additional schools for at least some of the components. Efforts to involve First Nation, Métis and Inuit staff and advisors have been a significant goal, one that has met with considerable success in supporting student well-being.

**Principal of
First Nation,
Métis and
Inuit
Education**

Simply put in the words of Superintendent of Education, Janis Medysky,

IRTs

The UAEPP has allowed for specific focus on FNMI education in several schools in the urban centre. We were able to include additional schools in the second year of the project. The project has allowed schools—staff and community to focus on a group of students who are often overlooked and who we know through data do not achieve at the same levels as other students. The project has meant that teachers in SCDSB have received resources and curriculum specifically focused on FNMI people. Additionally, the work of the CYWs has given FNMI students in the urban centre specific and timely support. The CYWs have also engaged the services of other community resources to assist these students in our schools. The work of this project has "infiltrated" other schools. At whatever stage we are at in our understanding of FNMI people, we have all had our eyes opened.

CYWs

The Lodges

Resources

**Professional
Learning
Circles**

**Sub-Steering
Committee**

Research

The Principal of First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education, First Nation herself, leads the project. Her office is located in the SCDSB Board Office which allows easy collaboration with the Superintendent of Education who oversees the project. The Principal is responsible for implementation of the project activities; coordination of the project team; monitoring the progress of the project and reporting to the

relevant bodies; conducting professional development and other related workshops for staff; meeting with school staff, students and parents to ensure their understanding of the project; working with the researchers on design and logistics of data gathering; and generally ensuring that things run as smoothly as possible.

Within the schools, the First Nation Resource Teachers (IRTs)—reduced from two to one in the second year—work closely with teachers in developing Ontario curriculum support materials; providing resources; making connections with community; and giving demonstration lessons. The Child and Youth Workers (CYWs), play a major role in students' lives through their regular presence in the schools. They arrange to have First Nation, Métis and Inuit resource people to work with the students; conduct a variety of related First Nation, Métis and Inuit activities; work one-to-one with individual students; support classroom teachers by providing them with direction on particular issues and with particular students; and generally are available to students and other project staff as needed. In the libraries, new books for all ages exemplify the best in First Nation, Métis and Inuit authors and content both historical and contemporary, both fiction and non-fiction. In three of the original schools, designated spaces, referred to as The Lodges, are available for students at various times for work with Inuit, Métis and First Nation resource people and activities as well as for one-on-one and group sessions. In some of the schools, the White Buffalo Circle led by one of the CYWs has proven to be a popular group session. The work of the UAEPP staff is developed in more detail below. As the central feature of the project, their contributions are myriad.

Staff development is on-going. Professional Learning Communities called “Sharing Success Circles” have given teachers the opportunity to develop curriculum ideas into workable plans and to discuss their questions and thoughts about the project and about infusing First Nation, Métis and Inuit content into their planning for classes. On several occasions there have been community information meetings. The most exciting community events have been year-end cultural celebrations in the schools and at the Board Office.

Finally research has been part of the project since its inception. An outside consulting firm Haig-Brown Research & Consulting (HBR&C) has been contracted by the SCDSB and has prepared several reports on the project. Baseline data from First Nation, Métis and Inuit students, parents and educational leaders within the community inform the first report “*Spontaneous Laughter and Good Marks: Creating Conditions for Success of First Nation, Métis and Inuit Students in the Simcoe County District School Board*.” This report has continued to influence the initiative’s development as well as serve as a benchmark for determining progress. One parent gave us what became the title of the report and something of a focus for the work of the project. She said, “Success looks like happiness in spontaneous laughter at school and good marks resulting from a nurturing, caring atmosphere.” A second report, *The Schools Speak* which focuses on views of teachers and administrators in the target schools as well as those of the UAEPP staff took on double duty serving both as a source of information on the teacher attitudes and

knowledge prior to the project as well as a formative evaluation in that the project had been operating for a few months before the data gathering began. A series of surveys were conducted and analysed in the first year of the project and are presented in a 2009 report ***Student Perspectives: An Executive Summary***. Starting the cycle again, a final visioning day yielded ***From Faint Spark to Glowing Fire: Priorities for First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education in the SCDSB***. This current report serves as the final evaluation of the project from a local perspective.

While the existence of each of the components that were outlined in the original plan in itself provides some evidence of the successful implementation of that plan, the effectiveness of each of them has also been investigated and forms the bulk of this report.

III. METHODOLOGY FOR THIS REPORT

The data which informs this study draws on qualitative, quantitative and documentary sources. The Principal of First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education has been most helpful in contributing necessary specific information regarding the implementation of the program such as numbers of people involved in particular events. Throughout the process of gathering information from study participants, every effort was made to employ respectful approaches based in Indigenous thought. Listening carefully to what the participants had to say was fundamental to constructing and refining the interviews as the process unfolded. Questions were flexible, serving only as a guide. Using a responsive method, researchers followed the direction as the participants demonstrated particular areas of interest. Every interview concluded with an open-ended question, "What should we have asked you that we didn't?" Informal exchanges and subsequent fieldnotes written throughout the time of the study further inform this report.

Circlework Groups

Initial circlework groups held at the Barrie Native Friendship Centre and the final (re)visioning session at the Simcoe County Museum included the guidance and participation of an elder. The younger student groups, held in the lodges, ensured that those familiar to them were present as well as in classrooms as surveys were administered. Snacks for in-school groups and dinner for parent participants were part of the sessions. Circlework focus groups, interviews/research conversations^{viii} were conducted by two First Nation research assistants and the non-Aboriginal principal researcher of HBR&C. For the older students and the teachers, there was no UAEPP staff present in order to give them the freedom to express their sincere thoughts about the project. Each session was taped and complete transcriptions prepared for analysis. Documents, photographs and video provided additional sources of information.

"What should we have asked you that we didn't?"

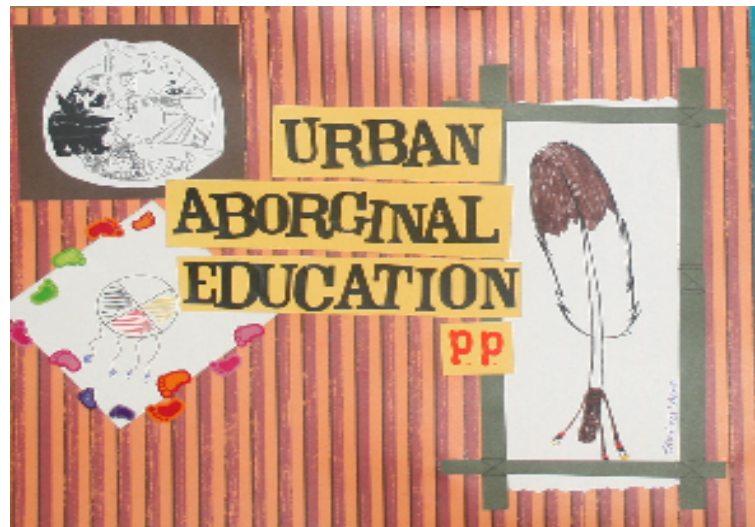
Researcher

Surveys

Pre- and post-surveys were administered to assess certain dimensions of the study and surveys with multiple choice and open-ended questions and, for the younger students, opportunities for artistic expression, were used to examine other outcomes of the project. For students and parents, surveys were most often distributed and/or administered by CYWs as the people most familiar with the study participants and therefore most likely to have them completed and returned. In addition to the new data gathered for this report, documents, interviews and focus group transcripts from the earlier studies mentioned above were re-examined for relevant details and to reveal aspects such as change and/or consistency over time. That being said, the substance of the earlier reports will not be repeated in this one: each stands as a separate component of the research and should be read as an accompanying document in order to have a more complete picture of the pilot project as it unfolded.^{ix}

Results

For the purposes of this report, the results of the research are presented from the perspectives of the people involved with the project. It begins with a detailed description of the work of the UAEPP staff as a way of providing readers with a clearer understanding of the driving force of the project. From there, the report moves into recounting what it is that the people involved have to say about the project. Each of the stakeholder groups, students, parents and community members, teachers and administrators and sub-Steering committee members become part of a circle of input for this report. As the feather is passed, the person has the opportunity to speak from the heart with the other members of the group. Some individuals occupy more than one position such as a sub-Steering Committee member who may be a family member of a student or an administrator with the SCDSB. Each section that follows below incorporates responses to various components of the project as well as specific comments from those most closely involved. In addition, the survey results are presented as complements to the more personal and descriptive views given by specific study participants. In some cases, details of the comments have been altered to protect the identity of the person speaking in order to ensure anonymity. In all cases, only a few examples are presented with summary comments for the other participants. Comments enclosed within quotation marks are taken directly from the transcripts of the participants. While minor editing smooths the flow of the words, every effort has been made to maintain the original intent of participants' contributions.



IV. EVALUATION: WHAT THE PEOPLE SAID

A. The UAEPP Staff

The reporting of results begins with this section on the staff of the project. Any deep understanding of its workings must start here. It draws exclusively on conversations with members of the UAEPP staff during the eighteen months that most were actively working in schools. The Principal of First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education provides leadership for the entire project, skillfully negotiating relationships amongst all involved from Child and Youth Workers to teachers to family and community members to Board and Ministry officials and the researchers attached to the project. Over the existence of the project, one CYW and an IRT completed their terms at the end of the first calendar year. For the second year, two new CYWs were hired, one as a replacement and one later in the year as another moved into a teaching position. At the end of June 2010, there were three CYWs and one IRT working across a number of schools including the four original ones. Respondents to all aspects of the research had nothing but good to say about the staff, their dedication to the students and to the project, and most of all, the results that were clearly demonstrated by their committed work.

What exactly does the staff do? As one commented in an earlier study, “What don’t we do?” Communication with various groups and individuals associated in any way with the project is essential. Community information meetings, Open Houses and various feasts and other celebrations keep the project in people’s minds. Brochures distributed in the schools outline the basic goals and duties of the Child and Youth Workers. Within the framework of supporting First Nation, Métis and Inuit social, emotional, academic and cultural well-being of students, goals include reducing gaps in student achievement by providing additional support in a variety of areas and aspiring to high levels of public confidence through fostering supportive and engaged families and communities. Specific approaches to the work promise support for the students in the classrooms and lodges; one-on-one counseling; bridging parents and families with schools; cultural supports; linking Aboriginal social service agencies with students and families; and collaborating with the Guidance departments to enhance student achievement. In addition to contributing to many of these areas, the Itinerant Resource Teacher works directly on curriculum initiatives including in a partnership with another board. The whole group, ably guided over complex waters by the Principal of First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education, operates as a team: planning for the project; supporting one another in presentations in classes, with teachers and in the broader community; organizing special events; and all other aspects of the everyday work of the project.

*“What
don’t we
do?”*

*UAEPP
staff
member*

The CYWs and the IRT must constantly respond to the complexity and competing demands of their work. In conversations, each person tells of successes and challenges faced in their day-to-day work. There are several equally important reasons for the existence of this initiative and the staff is faced with responding to each of them. First, there is a significant urban Aboriginal population of students and their families who benefit, indeed thrive, with the recognition, respect and information the people involved in the project provide. Second, there are many non-Aboriginal students and their families who know little or nothing about the relationships currently or historically with First Nation, Métis and Inuit peoples and

***We gave
Canada a
place to be
Canada.***

***First
Nation
family
member***

civilizations. In an interview, one family member pondering general ignorance of these relationships repeated what her Mishomis had taught her and commented cryptically, “We gave Canada a place to be Canada.” Finally, too many students are still living with many inequities and other factors require care and attention before schooling can be in anyway meaningful. The UAEPP staff have all been directly and indirectly addressing these gaps and needs.

One of their first tasks with the inception of the pilot project was to win the hearts and minds of those they wanted to serve: 1) First Nation, Métis and Inuit students and their parents—who were sometimes reticent about being involved, lacking trust in people in schools for myriad reasons; 2) teachers—who were reluctant to engage with additional demands on their time and energy for a particular group that was too often seen as “a problem” and about whom most knew little; and 3) non-Aboriginal students, many of whom were living with the societal stereotypes they had learned in the media and elsewhere. It was at times an uphill battle but each day brought the dream a little closer to reality. The CYWs remained committed to the project goals even when progress seemed slow. And the results have begun to show. A frequent comment from teachers within the project schools, “I don’t know what we did when you weren’t here.” After two years, the staff was, if anything, *too* successful: in constant demand and spread very thin as the news of their engaging presentations with students and teachers, of their knowledge of First Nation, Métis and Inuit civilizations and their effectiveness in one-to-one student support travelled amongst the schools. Each one, however, spoke of the unwavering support for their work by many of the principals, SERTs, classroom teachers and community agencies with whom they worked.

One of their major ways of connecting with students is for CYWs to offer group activities during the nutrition breaks. The Lodges, present in three schools in the second year, became central locations for students to gather and meet with the staff. As is evident in what students had to say, they considered them welcoming spaces where it was more than “okay to be Aboriginal.” It is the CYW who creates the atmosphere whether in the lodge or, in some schools, the library or other more temporary gathering space. First Nation, Métis, and Inuit posters and flags decorated the walls. Inukshuks appeared. CYWs commented that more and more

students were coming to the Lodges as they felt more comfortable in acknowledging their First Nation, Métis or Inuit heritage.



Often the IRT was there to support students with some of their academic concerns or to work with them on specific lessons related to assignments in Literacy and Numeracy and to Indigenous knowledge. Students brought interested non-Aboriginal friends. Groups of students met with staff in the lodges for a variety of events: in sharing circles, group work and activities with community resource people and the IRT. Occasionally, there have been special restorative practice circles held with students who were interacting in generally negative ways. The Lodge was also a place for meeting the particular needs of individual students. In the second year, a new CYW formed a culture club in one lodge and brought an emphasis on learning Anishnabemowin, building on the introduction of words from previous years. Students learned to introduce themselves in the language. In considering the health of the student, the UAEPP team was clear that the interrelationships of the four dimensions of a person—physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual/cultural—were integral to their work. The Lodges provided the space for them to build relationships and to work in good ways with the students.

Smudging was a central feature of the lodges and a way that staff have connected with students. Students have been introduced to the medicines used in the circle and are able to talk about the benefits of smudging. Not without controversy, a letter from the IRT outlining the traditional use of sage or sweetgrass in smudging is sent to parents to inform them of the voluntary nature of the practice. The letter includes the following explanation, "Participants will wash themselves in the following manner: over the head to bring about clear decisions; over the eyes to see the situation/issue with clarity; over the mouth to speak kindly and respectfully to each other; over the heart to keep good feelings; over the hands to do good deeds; and over the ears to listen attentively." In some schools, smudging is only to take place out of doors; in others, the lodge is the location. As is noted in the section on students which follows, they have found it a peaceful practice.

CYW's spend a considerable portion of their time in classrooms working directly with the First Nation, Métis and Inuit children in specific curriculum areas or on work habits and skills. They often talked of the importance of working with non-Aboriginal children as well in order not to single out the First Nation, Métis and Inuit students. On the other hand, some students found this time to be one where they felt secure in "coming out" in the words of one of the secondary students. More recently, beading and language classes have become a regular part of the offerings. One CYW posted a sign-up sheet where teachers could sign him out to work with their classes on First Nation, Métis and Inuit topics. CYW's have also contributed to the smooth transition of students from the elementary to the secondary schools. As familiar faces in the larger schools, they are sometimes able to work with their former elementary students as they settle into their new classes.

The staff organized many rich and varied presentations by community-based First Nation, Métis and Inuit scholars.^x Some were held in the Lodges, some were in classrooms and some were school-wide. Presentations on Métis culture and First Nation spirituality, drumming, smudging, the Seven Grandfather Teachings and the four directions were held in the various schools. Presentations on fiddling and jigging brought Métis music to the schools. Claymation projects based in First Nation stories, Métis beadwork and finger weaving added to the activities. Students and staff also interacted with community agencies and organizations in workshops that often informed both. The Barrie Native Friendship Centre (BNFC) has figured prominently with students attending events there such as the popular Gen 7 and individuals presenting drumming workshops. Positive exchanges between the UAEPP and the BNFC have been regular occurrences both for individual students and their families and for reciprocal professional development. In 2009, Toronto's Native Canadian Centre presented on First Nation drumming and singing and dancing with a full explanation of the importance of the regalia.

In the second year of the project, the White Buffalo Circles (WBC) became immensely popular with all students and many teachers. In schools without lodges, the library was often the meeting place. These circles provide a site for the work each of the staff has been doing in bringing knowledge of First Nation, Métis and

Inuit civilizations including history and contemporary issues to the schools in which they work. Approximately 300 students attended one or more of the regularly scheduled weekly WBC's. Each WBC was held during a nutrition break while the topics varied from school to school. Some of the topics addressed included: the Medicine Wheel and the Seven Teachings; Métis history and geography and current issues; traditional and contemporary Inuit lifestyles; the clan system; many aspects of powwows; and of course the story of the White Buffalo which one student commented refers to what its return means to the future of First Nation people. This list is far from complete but it gives the reader a sense of topics presented and discussed. At some point, one-on-one student support had to take precedence and the WBCs could not be offered in all schools or as regularly.

New Lesson Plans:

First Nation, Métis and Inuit symbols;

First Nation place names and stories in Simcoe County;

The Métis Red Sash and Art;

Inuit Sculpture and Carvings

In addition to working as part of the team with students in tutoring and other support, participating in most events and meetings, the IRT also focused specifically on curriculum development and implementation. Using Think Literacy along with other approaches based in the Ontario curriculum, he developed lesson plans for various grade levels with a First Nation, Métis and/or Inuit focus. These included lessons focusing on First Nation, Métis and Inuit symbols; First Nation place names and stories in Simcoe County; Mnjikaning Fish Weirs; First Nation Drum and Dance; the Métis Red Sash and Art; Inuit Sculpture and Carvings; and a unit based in the Seven Teachings interwoven with the SCDSB Commit to Character initiative. Over the two years, modelling these and other lessons focusing on First Nation, Métis and Inuit topics and approaches in 46 classrooms from Kindergarten to Grade 11/12 as well as presenting to about 20 non-grade specific school groups was another demanding and rewarding aspect of his work. In other work with teachers, he made regular contributions to the Professional Learning Community and Board Professional Development days. A resource list, including books and websites, that could be used to enhance various classes from secondary Geography and Science to primary and junior visual art, music and physical education, was prepared. In a partnership with the Thames Valley School Board, a curriculum package focusing on

the three local First Nations as well as Métis is nearly complete and will be available to the SCDSB. Involvement with a range of community groups and learned individuals contributed immeasurably to the success of the project. These included Barrie Native Friendship Centre, Rama First Nation in the project Youth Teaching Youth, Chippewa of the Thames Elders, an Oneida Elder, Wahta First Nation and a symposium in Durham. It is through strong community ties that the IRT sees sustaining the work of the project. Having community resource people in classrooms to support teachers in this work is essential. A cost-sharing model may be the best way to address related budget issues.

As for challenges the team faced, there were many. Time was always an issue: the time to spend in one school, the time to be available when a particular student requested a smudge, the time to build relationships with the more reluctant and needy students. There were disappointments when some students appeared to make significant progress only to move away or drop out. Some students, most often at the secondary schools, known to be First Nation, Métis or Inuit refused to be part of the project perhaps carrying some of the same worries about stereotypes and racism expressed by the parents in the first study or perhaps expressing that ageless teenage desire to be “just like everyone else.” Not all parents were receptive to approaches made by CYWs about concerns related to their children. Attendance and motivation remain serious difficulties for too many students. Setting up and then maintaining dedicated space for circles and lodges was an on-going challenge in some schools. Ultimately, there was just too much work and too little time for the limited number of staff to do all that they felt should be done to respond to the needs of students, teachers and the schools generally.

And in the same breath, one must acknowledge that the team has produced amazing results in the short time they had available. The words of the students, their parents and the teachers confirm this claim. In addition to what is outlined above, special celebrations and displays during and concluding each year have brought rave reviews from all. Seasonal feasts were great successes. Family members who had not previously been to the schools came to these events. Art works including murals were displayed at the MacLaren Art Gallery, Barrie City Hall, the Barrie Public Library, and the School Board Office. The students were asked to paint something that would reflect themselves or represent something about their culture. Each year, one of the schools hosted a First Nation, Métis and Inuit Cultural Celebration. Drummers, dancers, teachers, and Elders from all over Simcoe County came to these events. The daylong celebration in 2009 was held in the gym with the UAEPP staff decorating the walls the day before. Students from grades K-7 gathered for a grand entry and closing, dividing to rotate through the various events during the day. A similar, even better organized event concluded the year in 2010. Also in 2010, one school, independent of the project staff, organized a spring concert which focused on First Nation, Métis and Inuit themes. Each year, there has been a Board-wide celebration of First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education in June. According to all who attend, it is a great success both for displaying work and for gaining knowledge. In 2010, Susan Aglukark’s presentation was particularly impressive.

The CYWs and the IRT have made incredible contributions to the lives of each student and teacher they have touched. Under the sensitive but firm guidance and direction of the Principal of First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education, they are the centerpiece of the pilot project. The ripple effect of their work will continue as their influence spreads though those they have touched. Their centrality to the project’s successes cannot be over-estimated.

B. THE STUDENTS

As students are the main focus of this project and the place where the research for the project began, it seems most appropriate to begin the presentation of the outcomes of the study and the project itself from their perspectives.^{xi} In addition, the first research study focused primarily on the First Nation, Métis and Inuit students and families. Looking for change over time is part of the intent of this current report. Four groups of students at all levels^{xii} engaged in a variety of models of Circlework for this study. Other feedback has been gathered from reports and individual comments and interactions between students and the researchers.

1. Secondary Students

Ten secondary students taking the Native Studies course—five self-identifying as First Nation or Métis and five indicating either non-Aboriginal or unsure of their ancestry—participated in a conventional sharing circle in the Lodge. The group began with introductions around the circle including the principal researcher and two assistants. Questions were posed and each student in turn had the opportunity to respond uninterrupted or to choose to pass if they did not want to contribute. Use of this model ensured that no one person dominated the discussion and that all had a chance to participate without feeling pressured to perform. More free-ranging discussion erupted occasionally as students engaged intensely in addressing some topics.

Every day, I learn things that I had no idea about or was completely ignorant of and it changes my view of First Nations people.

Student

Beginning with the introductions, it was immediately evident that this was a class like no other and that students felt they had gained transforming knowledge. First Nation and Métis students and research assistants introduced themselves as members of their nations and many also mentioned non-Aboriginal heritage. When the non-Aboriginal students introduced themselves, several articulated the understanding that they could have unrecognized Aboriginal ancestry. For example, one said, “I don’t think I have any Aboriginal background.” And another, “No, I’m not First Nations or any Aboriginal background *as far as I know.*”

Active recruitment brought students to the course. First Nation and Métis students came because they were specifically told about the course often by the CYWs, although never pressured to take it. One First Nation student commented, “I want to learn more about my culture from other people’s perspective because I know what mine is and I know what my grandmother’s is. But I don’t know what many other people think.” Hearing from his friends and a teacher that “this is like no other class you’ll ever take: there’s no desks and hardly any textbooks,” a non-Aboriginal student chose to drop the class he was in and come to Native Studies. Another student who had already graduated decided to return just for this course,

It’s pretty cool to be in class learning about my culture.

Secondary student

"It might be something interesting and I'm pretty glad I took it." Another commented, "[The teacher] just said, 'It's going to be a good learning experience and it was.'" One student talked about the first day of class as striking, "because I didn't know anything. But also every day, I learn things that I had no idea about or was completely ignorant of and it changes my view of First Nations people. Maybe before I had a negative view to a point just because it's so popularized in the media...but being in this class absolutely changes that." Another commented, "It was a real eye-opener because there's just so much to know and for me, coming into this class, I knew almost nothing...[For example] yesterday, we learned about sovereignty and self-governing and we researched about Nunavut becoming a province." The combination of First Nation and Métis students with non-Aboriginal ones has led to thoughtful and productive collaborations in acquiring and refining knowledge.

***It's part of
Canada's
history so
that's why
it should
keep
going.***

***Secondary
student on
Native
Studies
class.***

The combination of First Nation and Métis students with non-Aboriginal ones has led to thoughtful and productive collaborations in acquiring and refining knowledge.

Pedagogy within the class was a notable feature for the students, "He asks us what we want to learn," said one. Rather than lecturing, the teacher engages the class in "open discussion all the time...It's a formal lesson in a non-formal way," said another. A student spoke of the importance of the circle to the class structure. Acknowledging, "I'm really bad with school in general," she went on to say, "I'm not going to lie: I just can't handle the traditional style classrooms so I go to the alternative school. But I come here for these periods because I want to." Another student concurred, "When I walk into other classrooms, it's like the teacher is the authoritarian person and you're just small. But when I walk in here, it's like everybody's

equal." In response to her, a classmate said, "The teacher doesn't talk down to us. He makes it much more personable teaching where he's basically working with you. He's a teacher and he's authoritative in that sense, but in a much more personable role." Students appreciated the non-Aboriginal teacher's former experience in a First Nation community as they felt it had given him some insights and knowledge from which to speak. A First Nation student continued,

He learns too right? And he makes us very aware that he doesn't know everything, that he learns as he goes. And if we can teach him things, he really appreciates that too. I thought it was pretty cool he let us know that he doesn't know everything.

The knowledge, experience and passion of guest speakers and "teaching through stories" were fully appreciated by the students. Unlike memorizing something for a test where "you know when it happened but you don't really understand why," with the approaches in this classroom, "You relate to things and I think it's really beneficial in that sense."

Building on the confidence and knowledge they gained from this class, the students are already sharing their knowledge with others. With the assistance of a CYW, they planned and taught specific lessons on the Medicine Wheel, residential schools and First Nation, Métis and Inuit arts and crafts to interested teachers and then to six classes in a number of sessions. "The teachers really appreciated the opportunity to

have some foundational knowledge about First Nations and what actually happens in our class.” The CYW said, “The students were very shy and nervous but as the day went on I could see their courage and confidence growing. We received a lot of positive feed back at the end.” One student acknowledged that her talk on residential schools brought at least one teacher to tears. “We taught teachers: so we’re educating people and educating ourselves” said one student. Others commented on this ripple effect, a stunning feature evident in many aspects of the project.

“The Ripple Effect”

We taught teachers: so we’re educating people and educating ourselves.

Native Studies Student

When I was teaching the teachers, I talked about how, by you being educated and by you telling one person, that person tells another person. And we taught half the school that day. So they’ll tell their friends...the word gets out. It goes to our parents and those parents talk to other parents.

Another student said, “The amount of my friends that are talking about Native Studies now really did skyrocket.” The effect on the teachers is also noticeable, “My anthropology teacher always talks about residential schools now and then people in my class ask about it.” A non-Aboriginal student responds to curious friends, “I give them a little run down [about what we do in Native Studies] and they’re like, ‘Oh, okay. I guess it’s not quite what I thought it was.’ So I spread the word about that.” Even beyond the school, the effects are felt, “My landlord: she’s just starting to get into it and she’s like, “Oh, I need to smudge. Tell me about what you learned about this.” Parents are hearing new perspectives from their children. Finally a student talked of his new found knowledge on the effects of the HST on “Native

people” and how he has shared this information with older co-workers in discussions in the hardware warehouse where he works.

In terms of the curriculum itself, several students talked of how important it was to connect history to the present. “You don’t want to learn just the history: we’re learning about how it affected today.” Pointing to a timeline on the board, one student said, “We have the Indian Act here and we started with residential schools and wars between different nations. [Now] we’re moving closer to the present day.” A guest had talked about the “different [First Nation and Métis] territories in central Ontario...what happened throughout history and why certain groups are where they are now, what led to that.” The student appreciated the connections the speaker made to his own life story and “the ways he tried to stay in touch with his past.” Another student spoke more generally,

[Guest speakers] are really passionate about this kind of stuff. It’s not just facts and ideas....It’s more than that: it’s a culture right. It’s actually beliefs and people actually shape their whole lives around what they’re talking about...When we have the guest speakers who live their lives by it, it shows a lot of the kids that like, wow, you’re actually passionate and it’s real.

Beginning to come to an understanding of First Nation spirituality is another part of students’ learning. One commented, “It’s not necessarily a religion to be First

Nations. It's like a lifestyle and how you can live your life that way. It's a more peaceful thing." And another joined in, "Live with equity." Students also appreciated the opportunity to be creative with their final assignments for the course. Some had chosen to volunteer at the upcoming powwow; one student was working on a mural for the school representing aspects of First Nation, Métis and Inuit civilizations; others were still pondering where such choice could lead them including conventional essays and oral presentations. A number of students had noticed the presence of the UAEPP in their school the previous year and some had taken the Grade nine level Native Studies course offered that year. They commented specifically on a historical bus tour of the area with First Nation commentary; a drumming circle at the Barrie Native Friendship Centre; participation in feasts; and an Aboriginal food day in Foods and Nutrition class.

As a final round in the circle, students had the opportunity to comment on the importance of continuing an initiative such as this class and the UAEPP more generally. From around the circle came the following set of comments:

First Nation Student 1: We should keep this going because if we don't, it's going to all disappear, like it did before with residential schools and massacres. I feel like our culture has definitely disappeared, fallen beneath the cracks. If we don't keep this going, it's just going to vanish. Then to us, it's just going to be a memory. When we have kids, we're going to tell them about it, but it's just going to be a memory and not an experience.

Non-Aboriginal student: If we start talking about it, they'll put problems like those affecting Kashechewan up north....[Rather than] problems across the sea and some war that we can barely relate to, we could see how this affects our own people in our own backyard. I think that's what we should do.

First Nation Student 2: We should keep it running because this generation needs to fight for something. I believe that this generation of Natives needs to fight for their culture. We need to be strong together: we're all kind of falling apart....We need to strengthen up and come together and know what we're fighting for and know what we believe in. That's why I think this project is so important.

2. Elementary Students

In the elementary school lodges, researchers worked with three different groups of students from grades 1 to 8, all of whom were First Nation or Métis. A total of sixteen students volunteered to participate. For these sessions, one of the First Nation research assistants, a qualified and experienced primary teacher, prepared activities which allowed students to focus their thoughts on the UAEPP and what it had meant to them. These activities included creating plasticine sculptures and scrapbook pages after viewing photo collages of the previous year-end celebration and hearing a reading of the book *Shin-Chi's Canoe*. At the end of each session, they gathered in a circle and passed the feather as they talked about the significance of their creations.

For many students the activity gave them a chance to articulate significant understandings that the UAEPP had offered. One younger student shared, "I made a bear paw, because I am in the Bear Clan. And I did a heart in the background 'cause I love being in the Bear Clan." Another said, "I made a turtle because of the oil spill and I feel bad for the turtles and all the animals."



One student made a canoe because "it reminds me of when I was three and I just liked canoes and I used to canoe at Aboriginal camp." An intermediate student said of her scrapbook page, "The feathers show all the ideas: they show what we give each other....All the animals show different teachings. I made the Medicine Wheel into a dream catcher because we learned about the Medicine Wheel and the dream catcher. It also resembles the artwork we shared." Spending a long time labouring over a life-like sculpture of an eagle, a junior student said,

I made this eagle because it's my grandpa's spirit and...the eagle guarded him for his whole life. I think in April, he passed away from brain cancer. He only

had one more birthday left: he died two days before his birthday. I hope his spirit could be mine too.

He concluded, "I'm going to give it to my grandma so she can remember my grandpa."

For most students, the lodge was a central aspect of the project. They liked the learning they did there, coming to chat, and participating in all the activities going on. They found it a comfortable, "I like the bean bag chairs," and safe space. "Some people treat us different but [the CYWs and IRT] treat us good all the time." The support of the CYWs was mentioned frequently, "I like coming here. If I have a problem or something, [the CYWs] help me solve the problem. When I feel bad that other people make me feel ashamed of my culture, I just come here. And then, I always know that being different is better." The White Buffalo Circles figured prominently for some of the students. These are sharing circles conducted by one of the First Nation CYWs and they are immensely popular with many of the children. In the circle, the students learn "... the culture's coming back...They teach us about native teachings and Métis and Inuit." They learn about smudging by following the CYW's direction and actions. He also guides them in relation to traditional teachings including the Seven Grandfathers and the Three Sisters—Corn, Beans and Squash. Two students spoke thoughtfully about the Circle:

I like when we smudge like each week... Sometimes I get in trouble and when I smudge, it just takes all that negative spirit out of me and I feel good after that. And then he teaches us a bit about the Seven Teachings it makes me think. I put the towel under there [gestures to the opening under the door] and then when I come out people are like, "Oh, are they smoking in there?" and I'm like, "No." And I just educate them about sage sometimes...

When we smudge it kind of reminds me that my grandma said that time—because my mum passed away—when me and my brother were babies she used to smudge us with sage and sweet grass so it reminds me of that.

When I smudge I think about my mother and I think she's watching over me, I just can have good thoughts about my mother and it smells like home. I like the smell of it.

Students commented on changes in the schools over the time the project had been there. "The librarian talks to me way more about my culture and she really appreciates it." The library itself has new and valued resources. One student works as a librarian's helper. She worried about students' awareness of the existence of the new resources but was very excited herself about the numbers and variety available. Another student commented, "The librarian suggests books for me from Native authors that reflect First Nation, Métis and Inuit people." Others noticed a change in attitudes from other students,

That section in the library: I like that because when people pick it out, I feel respected. People actually want to learn about the First Nation and Native

cultures. I feel comfortable because there's actually a section about Natives and there's art and everything. It just makes me feel comfortable that there're books like that in our school.

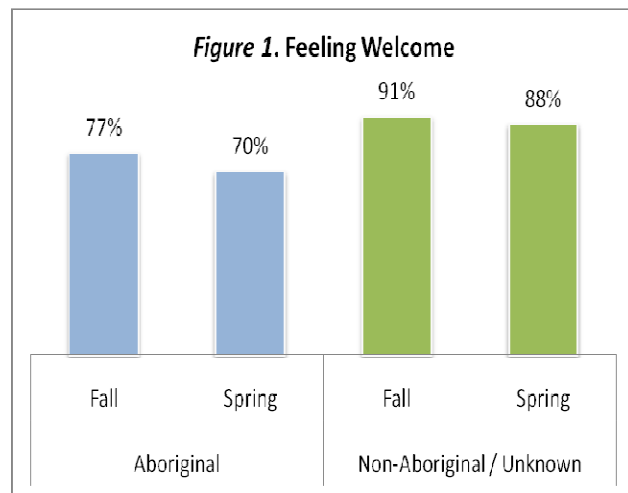
Teachers are asking about pronunciations of Anishinaabe words in relation to specific dialects. The cultural days brought new respect from other students for those who danced. Over all, the students mentioned a change in the atmosphere of the school. "The teachers and staff are enforcing anti-racism and I don't get bugged about being Anishinaabe." A final comment, "I think that this place changed the school a lot because now that the lodge came, everybody respects our culture more. Then there's more books in the library about Inuit, Métis, Ojibwa, and Mohawk. So yeah, I feel this place has just really changed, the whole school."

3. Elementary Surveys

Elementary students completed surveys before and after the 2009-10 year, with some schools experiencing UAEPP for the first time and some for the second year. Results from first-year analysis are available in the document *Student Perspectives 2009*. The following analyses are for the surveys administered in 2009-2010.

Feeling Welcome

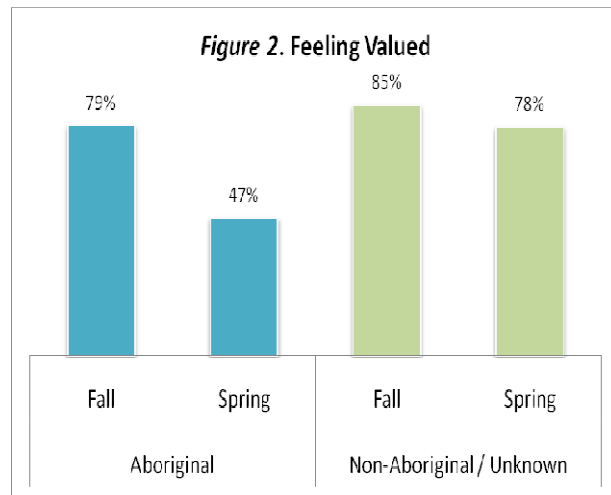
Circlework groups informed the Board that students should be made to feel more welcome at their school. One hundred sixty-eight students in grades three through eight were asked how welcome they felt in the fall of 2009-10. Over 90% of non-Aboriginal (or ancestry unknown) indicated that they felt welcome while 77% of the 16 Aboriginal students felt this way. Of the 333 students who completed the survey in the spring of 2010, 203 responded to the question of feeling welcome.



Again, the majority felt welcome, particularly for non-Aboriginal students. The difference between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in feeling of welcome is significant in the fall ($X^2_{pre} = 6.4, p = .01, \eta^2 = .19$) but not in the spring ($X^2_{post} = 2.3, p = .13, \eta^2 = .12$). **In other words, the number of students who feel welcome is similar post-program, regardless of ancestry (Figure 1).** Students were asked what might help them to feel more welcome at school. Some students hoped that their peers would stop being mean, bullying, treating unfairly or rudely. One First Nation student indicated that he or she would like a 'better life and school'. Other students noted wanting nicer teachers, more friends, more gym time, and someone to welcome them when they arrived at school (a very popular suggestion).

Feeling Valued

Another of the wishes of the community, as told in circles, was for an increased sense of value for students. Students were asked in the fall and spring of 2009-10 about how valued they felt at school. For both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, feeling of value declined over the year. For this measure, there was no difference in proportions in the fall ($X^2_{pre} = .47, p = .49$), but there was a difference in the spring ($X^2_{post} = 7.8, p = .005$). Here, Aboriginal



students felt less valued than their non-Aboriginal peers. However, when asked whether their feelings of value had changed because of the UAEPP, 9 Aboriginal students noted that they felt more valued and only one felt less valued (Non-Aboriginal responses were that 4 felt less valued and 24 felt more valued). Several students indicated that they didn't know or felt the same about value in relation to the UAEPP. When asked what students thought would make them feel more valued, several responded by suggesting that their opinions are listened to, their ideas were used, and, similar to the question about feeling welcome, that students and teachers are nicer.

Peer Treatment

When asked whether (other) students treat each other differently since the UAEPP, most (81%) of non-Aboriginal people indicated that there was no change while 64% of the 11 Aboriginal students who answered this question felt this way. Three (27%) of the Aboriginal students felt that students were treating each other worse since the project while only 8% of non-Aboriginal students felt this way. One Aboriginal student felt that treatment was better among students while 12 (12%) of non-Aboriginal students felt this way. When asked why students were treating each other differently, students offered profound insight. Some quotes are below:

'Being able to learn about other people allows them to put themselves in someone else's shoes'

'Made each person learn respect for Aboriginal people'

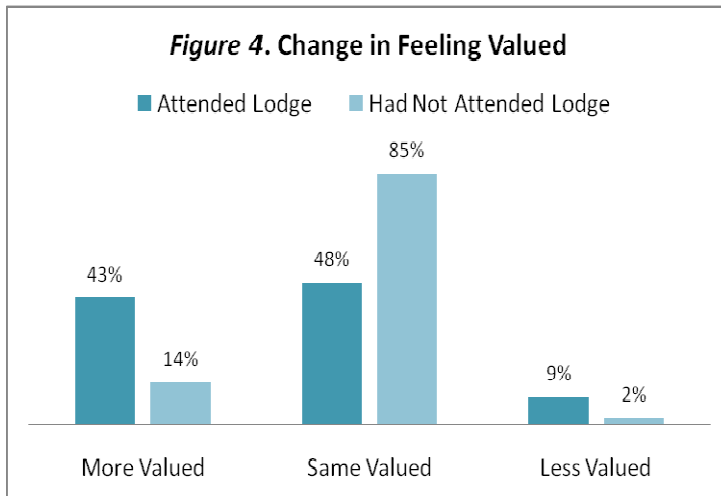
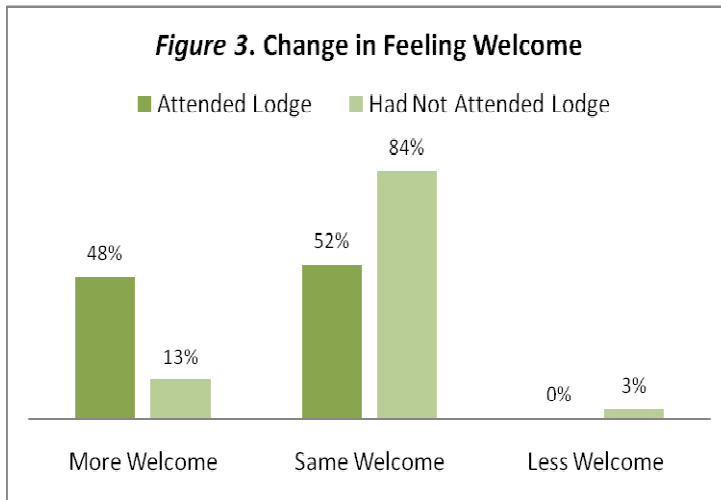
'They would be in trouble if they didn't'

'Made more people nicer and respectful'

No student indicated that he or she treated other students worse than before the project. Six (46%) of thirteen Aboriginal students felt they treated other students better (seven indicated that there was no change) while 21% of non-Aboriginal students felt that the project made them treat other students better.

Space

One hundred fifty-one students answered a question about visiting the lodge at their school. Forty-one percent (N = 63) of those students had attended their lodge. Students also answered a question in the spring as to whether or not they felt more welcome because of the UAEPP. It was interesting to see that there was a significant difference in 'change of feeling welcome', based on whether or not students had been to their lodge ($X^2 = 17.3, p < .001$). Those who had been to their lodge indicated higher feelings of welcome because of the UAEPP, compared to those who had not been to the lodge (Figure 3). Similar results were found when a question about change in feeling valued because of the UAEPP. Those who had attended the lodge were more likely to have experienced a feeling of higher value ($X^2 = 17.3, p < .001$), as seen in Figure 4.



Activities

Several activities were offered to students across the project schools. Each of these is listed below with the number of students attending each on the right (Table 1). Since finger weaving was offered in classes, it was clearly the most often 'attended'.

Table 1. Activity Attendance Frequency

Activity	Number of Students Attending
Working with CYWs	37
Working with Itinerant Resource	44

Teacher	
Finger Weaving	263
Rabbit & Bear Paws	16
Métis Culture Activities	23
Quill to Quill	7
Norval Morriseau / Arthur Shilling	3
Seven Grandfathers Activities	21
Talking Circles	21
Ojibwe Language	22
Beading	19
White Buffalo Circles	47
Drum Circles	43

When asked their favourite activity, 47 students named finger weaving (18%). However, the 20 students who named drumming made up a full 46% of those who attended and eleven students (58%) enjoyed beading. Clearly, hands-on activities were popular with students. Seventy-five percent of students indicated that they gained an understanding of First Nation, Métis, Inuit peoples from doing the activity. Students most frequently indicated that they had learned about culture, history, and art, but some students also learned about spirituality and government. When given the opportunity to offer an open-ended response that told about what they learned, students produced some profound responses. Some indicated that they had learned about stories, cultures, and cultural differences; many that they had learned about symbolism (i.e., sash wearing) or a specific activity (i.e., finger weaving, dream catcher). Selected individual responses are given below (most spelling corrected).

'How to respect everyone'

'Art is feeling'

'..that the Aborigines liked to drum a lot'

'That everyone is the same'

'I've learned a lot from Aboriginal people, I'm one of them'

'Everybody is different but you need to treat everyone the same'

'That people spoke a "toddly" different language'

'Native people used to help pioneers with hunting and surviving'

'How important the seven teachings were'

'I learned how to dance, talk, and play'

'That it is about "be happy" and making people feel better'

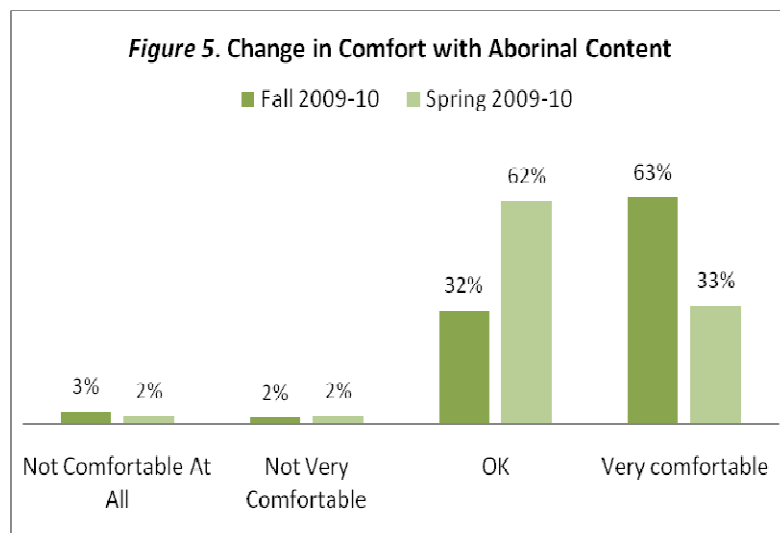
'I learned about all of the history'

'They don't use words, they express their feelings'
'They return to the earth in every way'
'How they use music to connect'
'People may be different but everyone's the same on the inside!'
'That they have many beliefs'
'I learned about Aboriginal art. It is different than our art'
'I think that art for Inuit people is a peak experience'

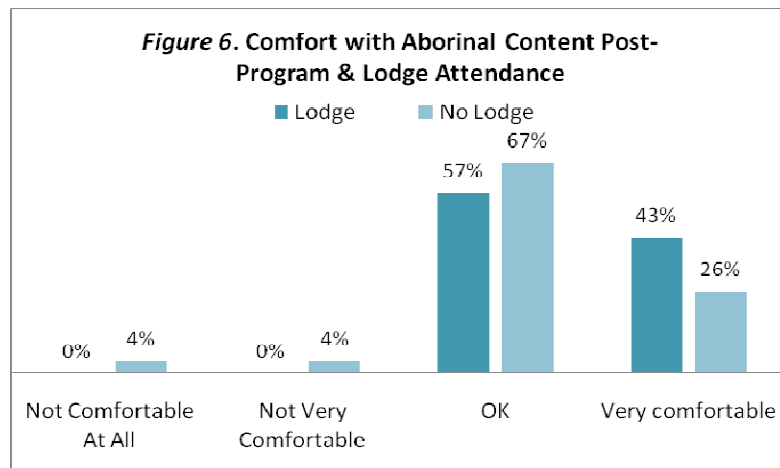
Aboriginal Education

Students were asked whether Aboriginal information was part of regular school subjects. Just under half (45%) indicated that it was somewhat or very much a part of subjects while the remainder indicated that it was not much or not at all a part of regular classes. This was the same for both fall and spring responses.

Students were asked before and after the project about how comfortable they were when Aboriginal information was part of their school subjects. There were more students who were 'very comfortable' in the fall than those who were 'ok with it'



and in the spring, there were more students who were 'OK' than 'very comfortable' ($X^2 = 16.6, p = .001$). This finding is shown in Figure 5. When just spring responses were analyzed and separated by those who attended the lodge and those who did not, there is a trend toward higher 'very comfortable' responses for those attending the lodge, although there is no statistical significance in proportions for this analysis ($X^2 = 5.5, p = .14$).



Twelve (26%) students felt that the Seven Grandfathers should not be talked about during class time while 34 (74%) felt they should (many students did not respond to this question). When asked why, students offered responses that indicated they felt it important to learn about different cultures, that it is interesting, that the seven teachings are important. One student noted that seven teachings should be taught 'only when doing that unit because it shouldn't come up randomly'. Students who felt that the teachings should not be taught in school indicated that it would interrupt other material (one felt that he or she should be learning something that would get them a job), some felt it was boring or not important. One student indicated that he or she 'didn't like that Aboriginal stuff'.

General Comments

Given the opportunity to write something about the project, many students indicated that it was beneficial to have learned from the activities and speakers, some felt that it should be included in school subjects, others gave comments indicating that they felt that the project was 'awesome' and that the facilitators 'rocked'. Some specific quotes are given below:

'I had learned a lot about First Nation because I'm a Cree and I learned a lot about my tribe'

'I loved learning about all the cultures. I love this project'

'I really like the Aboriginals. Thank you'

'It was pretty well done'

'This survey was fun to do, I know some of these things because my dad is native and I'm half. He knows a lot and so do I. When I get older I wanna teach kids about this'

'You changed my life'

4. Student Achievement

To gauge the impact of the Urban Aboriginal Education Pilot Project on student achievement, First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) students' academic achievement was explored. This analysis consisted of a comparison of FNMI students' academic achievement over a three year period. Due to the nature of the comparison, only those students who had been in the respective schools since the project's implementation were included in the analysis.

The following achievement data was included in the analysis: PM Benchmarks, CASI, and report card marks (reading, writing and math) for the elementary students and the Grade 9 EQAO Assessment and OSSLT for the secondary students. Learning skills for both groups of students were also explored.

After analyzing the elementary data and the secondary learning skills, no general trend was revealed in FNMI students' academic achievement over the three year period. As for the Grade 9 EQAO Assessment and the OSSLT, no conclusions can be

drawn at this time due to the small number of students who completed the assessments (ranging from 1 to 11).

In addition to the small number of students completing the assessments, a project as far-reaching in its goals as the UAEPP is takes time to effect the changes in student achievement which are its ultimate goal.

C. PARENTS

The next group to be considered is made up of those parents who responded to the call for contributions to the evaluation of the project. Two evening meetings and a survey based in the Circle: Vision, Relationships, Knowledge, and Action were the opportunities for direct feedback to the researchers. Surveys were sent to all families of identified students. While the response rate was rather low, the substance of those that did participate was overwhelmingly favourable to the project. Four anecdotal surveys, a number of email responses and two intensive interviews provide the major input for the qualitative portion of this section. Some study participants play more than one role in the project so their views are incorporated as well. While generally supportive of the initiative, the latter had some more critical views.

In order to assess change over time in parents' attitudes, again, starting from the initial study conducted in November of 2008, as the project began, seems appropriate. Then they talked of their concerns about the current scene in schools for their children. They recalled their own experiences of not wanting to acknowledge being Aboriginal and of "carrying those seeds of discrimination" within themselves. They sought welcoming, nurturing and supportive classrooms "where it is okay to be Aboriginal." They themselves were often hesitant to go to schools citing both deeply engrained attitudes from their experiences as children as well as feeling a less than welcoming reception as parents. They worried that teachers knowing that their children were First Nation, Métis or Inuit, could actually have a negative effect on their children's experiences when stereotypes prevailed. Some of these same parents participated in the project evaluation. It is important to note that one of the respondents, who was admittedly not in close touch with the school her grandchildren attended, continued to worry about the implications of self-identifying.

In terms of being a parent I could well understand my daughter's concerns about sending her children into a potentially hostile environment. She already has concerns because she isn't well off. She doesn't always have the best clothing for the kids. And she doesn't have the most up-to-date this and that. And they're not very fashionable kids to begin with. There are notions about poverty and culture and then add a layer of racism on top of that and the mix gets pretty ugly. So she wasn't too sure about what it might mean for her kids to have them identified as Aboriginal in that process.

Welcoming atmosphere

The responses to the UAEPP in June 2010 have however demonstrated a dramatic shift in most parents' thoughts. From the first steps into the school, parents noticed posters focusing on First Nation, Métis and Inuit cultures. From there to the Lodges, "it's really good." Not only do most parents feel that their children are "happier in school" and getting "better grades," they themselves feel "always welcome whenever I go in there [the Lodge]. They [CYWs] have drinks and cookies available, 'Yeah, help yourself.'" From not wanting to be involved,..."it's different from home, we don't have many friends here," one parent now feels happy to participate in lodge activities. Another parent said, "The lines of communication [with the school and with her son] are open." Reflecting on her daughter's first year out of a Montessori school, one parent wrote, "Our first year in public school has been a hard, long transition; however to know that we were in a school with extra push for Aboriginal students has helped." She went on to say,

The UAEPP has meant that my child has had increased exposure to her Inuit culture. I have been impressed by all the Aboriginal projects, arts and displays from the library. To our family, this is important because our child is getting cultural influence not just at home, but at school as well. She has come home very excited that there was a display of Inukshuks at school. As an Inuit child, she knows that the Inukshuk is the biggest symbol of Inuit culture next to an igloo...At the final day at the school board office, our six year old was able to connect with another Inuit girl of fourteen. It's so nice to see them together. Because of the UAEPP we are feeling more connected to the school.



Intergenerational Learning

Several parents talked of their own learning either directly from their children or because their interest was piqued. One commented, "It made me more aware of First Nation people and what is important about them....I am also First Nation background and realized how important it is to have this cultural background."

Affirming this ripple effect, another parent commented,

The UAEPP has opened many doors for our family. We've been able to learn about our culture and explore the many teachings of the First Nation culture. Through this program, we've had many questions regarding our heritage answered too. It has given us the initiative to attend outside powwows and cultural events to broaden our education.

She went on to describe an incident at her mother's internment and a comment about "Mother Earth" that triggered a response from her children. "Three years ago, it wouldn't have raised an eyebrow." One parent noted this effect on the family as well, "Certainly knowing that there is Aboriginal studies taking place at school has led us to be less complacent in our cultural education at home. Books from the school library have helped a great deal!" And another said, "Once the kids learn some cultural stuff at school, they come home and talk about it with me. So I talk about our culture more with them than I did before." And finally, "I have boys coming home after learning about the four directions and relating that to the Medicine Wheel. I hear a lot of talk about the Medicine Wheel and colours in everyday experiences—the smell of sweetgrass or cedar in my Mum's yard and the connection with smudging....This has filtered down to younger siblings who are not involved in the UAEPP."

Parents also spoke of noticing changes in their children's behaviours with the support the project has offered. "I would definitely have had more contact with the principal, vice-principal regarding [my child's] disagreements, fights and complications." Another parent said, "Our principal is the best and we feel supported by her in dealing with class issues." The CYWs and the IRT provide "mentoring....They're great people, very sincere and I really like them....They provide that extra attention that my children enjoy and need." They "have dealings with my two kids on a more personal basis." Parents appreciated exposure to traditional knowledge, frequently mentioning drumming, smudging, the Medicine Wheel and the Seven Teachings. "I think it's great they're being exposed to it at this age. I just wish there was something like that for me when I was going to school." They commented on their children's willingness to, indeed pride in, telling others about their First Nation, Métis or Inuit heritage. Students were encouraged to share their culture with other students in class and other events from First Nation and Métis dancing, regalia, fiddling and drumming to Inuit books and clothing. In coming to understand and appreciate their own cultures, one parent indicated it was leading her children to "want to know about the world and different cultures and people."

Language Classes

As with the older students, a recurring concern raised by parents is the need for a focus on language classes. Recognizing that there has been progress—"Now they know more words in our language," and "Every little bit counts: I was very happy when they came home and started using some Ojibway words,"—parents see language classes as most important to "keeping the culture alive" especially for urban children living away from their home communities. One pointed to the need for making use of fluent speakers who may not have teaching credentials,

Hopefully, we can get language classes going. Maybe if the lady at the Friendship Centre, [even if] she is not certified, she could still come in as a volunteer or give her an incentive in some way, to make her feel appreciated....There's a lot of Native people out there, older ones that know their language. And we need those people to come into the school, off-reserve, and teach the language.

Another parent wrote, "Language, language, language. Our culture and language were once disallowed and many people stopped practicing it. Now we are allowed and we should practice everyday not to lose it."



LANGUAGE, LANGUAGE, LANGUAGE

Sustaining the goals of the pilot project

When asked about the importance of continuing the components of the project, parents were overwhelmingly supportive. It's important to "keeping the culture alive." More specifically one said, "We feel we need this assistance from SCDSB in raising an Aboriginal woman. She needs to know she is a valued member of Canadian society." Another parent said, "I think there is a comfort zone when they are with other Aboriginal students." Another parent saw teaching and practicing the Seven Teachings as one way to eliminate bullying. In addition to supporting the First Nation, Métis and Inuit students, parents also commented on the importance of non-Aboriginal children coming to greater understanding of the teachings. With "more

knowledge/more understanding/less problems.” Two respondents talked of specific incidents in the school involving racism and both were pleased with the respectful and immediate way they were dealt with. In one case, the teacher created a “circle” with the First Nation student, non-Aboriginal harasser, the parent and herself in order to talk respectfully through the incident to a good resolution. One parent who appreciated what the project had done to date, wished there were a way to involve more parents. Another commented on the need for “maybe an attitude adjustment for some of the parents.” That being said, for those who are more directly involved, this final comment characterizes the attitudes expressed, “ This journey has made for some very interesting dinner conversations or ‘sharing.’ What I’ve learned and the different perceptions from the boys on the Aboriginal culture leaves me with a smile on my face as the conversation ends. They’re getting it.”

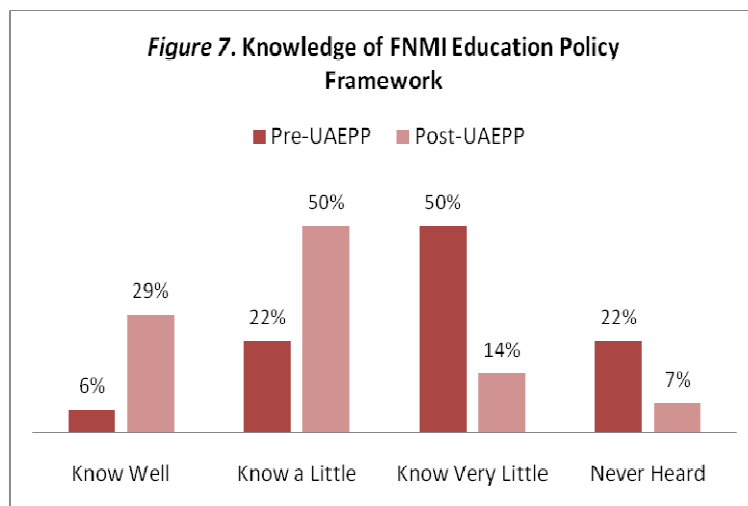
D. TEACHERS

The teachers participated in a survey and two circlework groups. Many resonances are notable within the different approaches. Surveys were conducted with teachers who were part of a PLC. One of the circlework groups included teachers whose schools had experienced the project for only a year and, the other, those in schools in the second year. Most of the teachers who came to the groups had participated to varying degrees in the school-based projects for 2010: some had been part of the Professional Learning Communities. N.B. Many of the points made in what follows echo teachers’ thoughts in the earlier UAEPP report *The Schools Speak*. For additional detail in relation to this teachers’ views of the project, see that report.

1. Survey

During the first Sharing Success Circle PLC, thirty-six teachers completed the survey in the fall and 14 completed surveys in the spring. Respondents spanned elementary and secondary grades and included teachers, principals, librarians and IRTs. They responded to questions about their current knowledge of Aboriginal education infusion, their comfort with the content, and their desired learning. Most teachers (71% in the fall and 86% in the spring) had Aboriginal students in their classrooms.

Knowledge of First Nation, Métis, Inuit Education Policy Framework

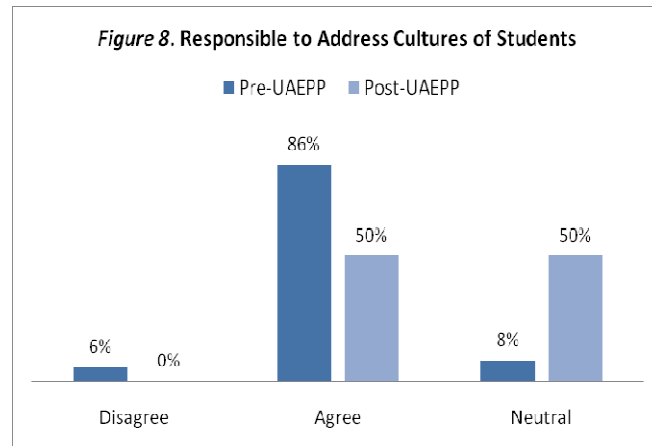


Teachers were asked how familiar they were with the First Nation, Métis, Inuit Education Policy Framework in the fall and again spring of 2009-10 school year. There was a clear change in the amount of knowledge about the framework for these

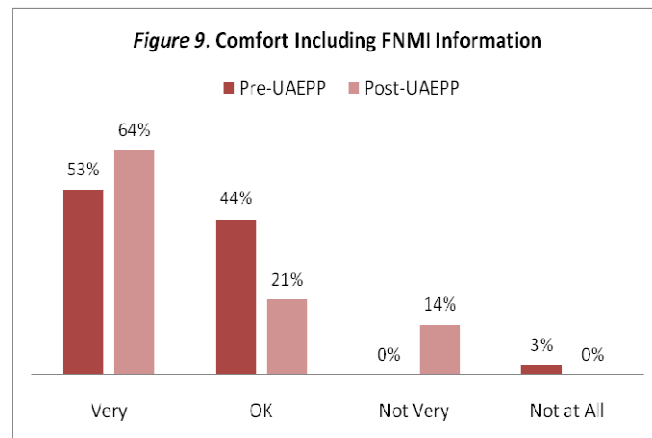
teachers, as seen in Figure 7. Most teachers in the fall knew very little or had never heard of the framework while almost 80% in the spring knew at least a little about it ($X^2 = 11.5, p = .001$)

Expectations & Responsibility

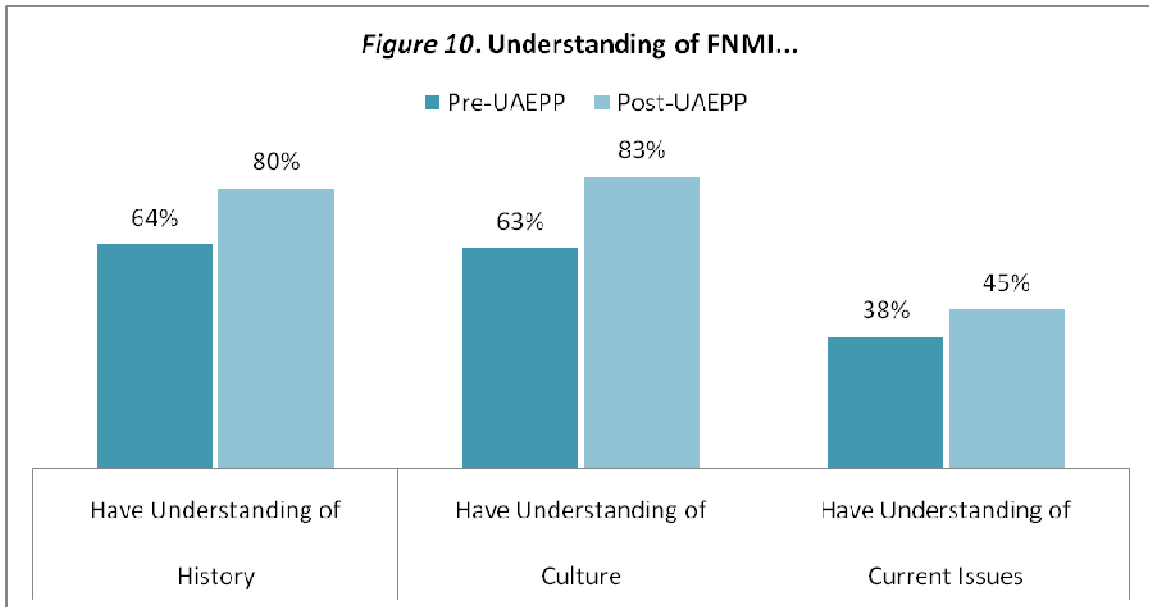
Teachers were asked whether they felt it was their responsibility to address the cultures of the students in their class. There was a difference in the proportions of teachers who agreed, disagreed, or were neutral ($X^2 = 11.2, p = .003$). More teachers agreed with this statement before the project than after (Figure 8).



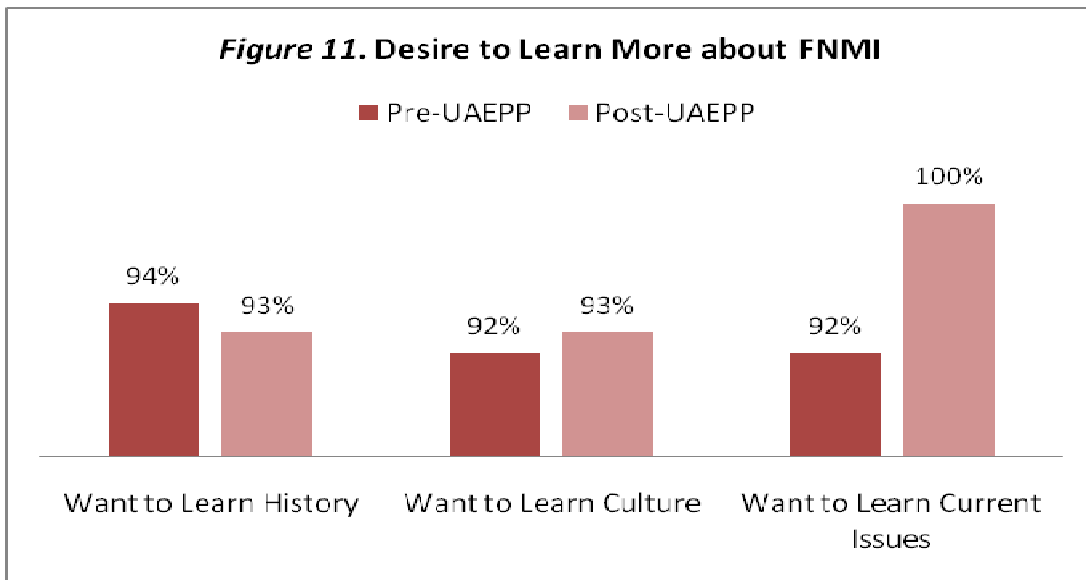
Teachers were asked whether they felt it important that they include First Nation, Métis, and Inuit perspectives across the curriculum. In the fall and spring, most respondents felt that this was important (over 75% for fall and spring). Teachers were also asked how comfortable they were including First Nation, Métis, Inuit information in their classes. It would appear that comfort increased from 'OK with it' to 'Very Comfortable' over the course of the year (Figure 9), but this finding is only marginally significant ($X^2 = 7.2, p = .07$).



The attendants at the PLC were asked whether an understanding of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit peoples is important for all Canadian students. In the fall, 86% of respondents agreed that this was important and in the spring, 94%. Participants were also asked whether they felt they had comprehensive insight, knowledge, or experience beyond that of the everyday person (labeled 'understanding') of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit history, culture(s), and current issues. Their responses are below (Figure 10). In all three cases, more respondents felt that they had an understanding of Aboriginal peoples after the year with UAEPP.

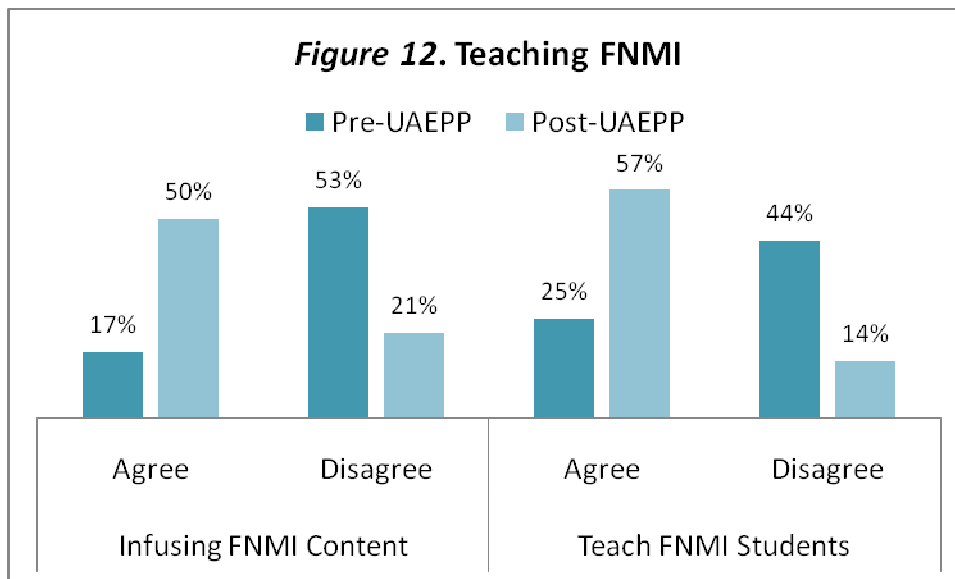


Participants in the PLC were asked whether they would like to learn more about First Nation, Métis, Inuit history, culture, and current issues in the fall and spring. Most respondents were interested in more information both before and after the project, as seen below (Figure 11).



When asked what they would like to learn, participants in the fall were interested in First Nation, Métis, and Inuit *'contributions to Canadian identity and pop culture'*, *'current issues facing FNMI people within and beyond Canada'*, *'helpful issues for law class'*, *'more about how to raise cultural awareness in kindergarten to grade one'*, and *'ways to teach to reflect cultural strengths and learning styles'*.

Before the UAEPP program in their school, participants were asked whether they would like to learn about infusing First Nation, Métis, and Inuit content into their classes. Ninety-seven percent indicated that they were interested in this learning. When asked in the spring (after the program), 64% indicated that they would still like to learn more. Both before and after the program, participants were asked whether they had an understanding of teaching a classroom that includes First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students as well as how to infuse First Nation, Métis, and Inuit content into the curriculum. Before the UAEPP, less than 25% of teachers had an understanding of either of these. After the UAEPP, more (over half) teachers indicated that they had an understanding of Aboriginal education infusion in the spring ($X^2_{\text{infuse}} = 6.6, p = .04$). Although a higher proportion of teachers indicated that they had an understanding of teaching to First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students, the proportions are only marginally different before and after the program ($X^2_{\text{teach}} = 5.6, p = .06$). Please see Figure 12 for these results.



When asked what they would like to learn before the program, respondents were clearly looking for a wealth and variety of information including FNMI perspectives, changing perspectives, history, culture, current issues, ways to infuse content into specific courses (i.e. science and math), ways to incorporate teaching into character education, learning styles and approaches for FNMI students. After the program, teachers were still interested in learning how to infuse FNMI content in collaboration with resources, and FNMI cultures, perspectives.

In the fall, teachers were asked what they would like to learn about teaching a classroom that includes First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students. Teachers offered profound responses, including a desire to learn culture, effective teaching strategies, resources, as well as the selection of quotes below.

'How not to trivialize, ways to empower and not focus on historical victimization'

'How to develop and teach an appreciation for FNMI students'
'How to make it interesting and valuable to non-native students'
'How to address sensitive issues in the class (i.e., racism, bullying)'

When participants were asked whether they had an understanding about the First Nation, Métis, and Inuit community, 31% indicated that they had some understanding of this. When asked in the spring, 57% of the respondents indicated that they had an understanding of the community. In the fall, teachers were asked what they would like to learn about the First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities outside the classroom. They were interested in history (i.e., residential school), celebrations, customs, current issues, community structure, supports and resources, and the impact of the local community on students.

The final question on the survey offered participants the opportunity to share their thoughts about the project. Several indicated that they thought the project was a great idea and were interested in more information and resources (detailed lessons). Some other direct quotes are below:

'Good idea. My observations are that Aboriginal youth continue to struggle to make sense of their culture and heritage in today's society.'

'Need ideas on how best to get teachers on side to implement. Resources for students and for teachers to acquire knowledge are not in the budget.'

'I think it would be beneficial to teach self-identified FNMI students only in a small setting. Then needs could be met on an individual basis.'

'It's a fantastic opportunity for students to explore their culture and share with others. It's also a great chance for teachers to learn more ways to draw life experiences from all cultures'

'Looking forward to integrating authentic experiences within the local community'

In the spring, after the project, this open-ended section was met with comments that indicated that one teacher felt that the budget for UAEPP was excessive in light of other needs, one felt that the project allowed guidance and other staff to have a better understanding of backgrounds in order to better serve students. One teacher reflected on his or her learning about the unique nature of a First Nation learner and how it has helped him or her in the classroom. One participant felt that the UAEPP fell short of expectations as a.) a CYW was working with a student and then left, b.) teachers promoted activities but facilitators did not 'show up' to classes', and c.) the finale was not well communicated. Selected other quotes are below:

'Enhanced the material in my classes... more resources that helped me feel comfortable delivering FNMI material'

'The ministry (grade-delineated) material is really helpful. It is important to celebrate and acknowledge the contributions of the FNMI people'

'I would like to have more presentations on culture and history. I don't feel the activities gave students information'

'I think the project was great and really helped develop an awareness of Aboriginal culture in the school. The students seemed proud of the lodge. I should have accessed resources more'

'Our UAEPP worker was spread 'too thin' across several schools'

2. Circlework Groups with Teachers.

As noted above, one group was made up of teachers who had spent both years with the project and the other of teachers who had joined the project in its second year.

Building Relationships

"The most effective teaching is about a relationship," said one teacher exemplifying the sentiments of the group. Both groups spoke consistently of the importance of the new relationships the project was fostering – within the school, with parents, with community resource people and with the project itself. One teacher said, "Even last year, it really didn't become part of our culture. [At first] the students who were identified were brought to the Lodge but then they were allowed to bring friends. By doing that, they opened the door to everyone. It's not just specifically for the First Nations. Now it really is part of our school." Another teacher said, "Over all, it was a tremendous success. The Aboriginal kids in my class benefitted tremendously. Their attitude and response to themselves and their place in the school, their understanding of their heritage was so helpful." The participants had many stories of individual First Nation, Métis or Inuit students who blossomed with the presence of the UAEPP in their schools. The following exemplifies the way the teachers spoke of the shifts in relationship with the school for a significant number of the students. This student had refused to interact with anyone and refused to do his work when he arrived at the school.

"The most effective teaching is about a relationship."

Project teacher

What's made a difference? I think a big part of it was this project....But that kid for whatever reason feels like he belongs now at our school. He has a sense of self-worth; he has a sense of self-identity, I think largely from this project. Because he saw every other kid in the class immersed in his culture and valuing it and doing their best work towards the outcome and really excited about it and really proud of what they had accomplished.

Relationships with the CYWs and IRT were also mentioned as central to project success. Both were available for "Aboriginal Studies" in the grade 3 classrooms and the CYW was most helpful "with different behaviours and difficulties that I wouldn't have been able to deal with and known about if she hadn't got that point of view across. For at least one student, it's made a huge difference."

The Pedagogy of the Circle

Building on the importance of relationships, the pedagogy of the circle became part of everyday practices for many. As students frequently commented, in the circle they felt equal, that what they had to say mattered to the teacher and to the other students. Inspired by their PLCs and the work of CYWs and IRT in the Lodges, teachers began to make use of what they were learning about the power of the circle. A grade two teacher who had one of the CYWs work with her class frequently transformed her classroom “into a circle keeping an opening in the east, had the four teachings in each corner.”^{xiii} The work shared by the Durham School Board teachers who are using a Medicine Wheel model as a curriculum planner was most appreciated. Others found the circle a wonderful teaching space both for content and for character building. When students in one sharing circle laughed at a fellow student’s comment, it provided a teachable moment on respecting each other. They had “a really good discussion about how, when we’re in the circle, it needs to be a safe space to share whatever you want.” Out of that conversation came a level of trust that allowed for more respectful treatment of one another. The Seven Teachings became a focal point for the teachers’ entry into First Nation thought. One spoke of the significance of the Seven Teachings for his own life. “When the IRT first came in, I thought, ‘Why am I doing this?’ I was really on a downer because things were happening in my life that were not so great.” He used the Seven Teachings as a way to reflect on and move out of that difficulty. He went on to say, “It’s the same for the kids.” After their work with the Seven Teachings in the circle, they were much easier to work with.

The Lodges

Within the lodges, the pedagogy of the circle and focused activities attract students. As one teacher said, “They have the opportunity to teach in a much different way.” Speaking about children having so much fun they don’t realize they are learning—“Oh, we did this and we had so much fun and look, I can count to five in Ojibway,”—one teacher commented on a student’s excitement. “That opens them up to learning more about Aboriginal culture because they have so much fun learning about it in the Lodge.” The Lodges figured prominently in those schools which were able to establish and maintain them. One teacher told of a difficulty with two First Nation students who came back to class after a disagreement and refused to look at each other or participate in class. She “called the Lodge.” From there, the CYW worked with the students to address the problem and “the rest of the day went fine.” Several spoke of the importance of the involvement of non-Aboriginal students in the Lodges and the activities there. Teachers talked about changes in the students’ relationships with the classroom and the school. In speaking of two students in her class, one teacher said,

They came from being very shy to being very proud, because it got to be a big thing. They were allowed at break to bring three friends [to the Lodge]. And suddenly, they were like the stars, because everybody wanted to go, “Oh I want

to go,” and “My turn, my turn.” It was very good for their confidence. It really, really helped them.

“They’ve taken on a whole new respect for the culture and they’ve really learned,” said another. Another teacher commented

It’s not just the Aboriginal students who use the lodge. The self-identified children bring their friends into the lodge. It is a huge group that comes in and out of the room when it’s staffed, and it is a huge group of them that are learning, I’m sure, despite themselves, just by being in the environment, and participating in like the White Buffalo circle, or doing the colouring or talking, or like Quill-to-Quill presentation, or hearing the stories and songs, they are learning a lot about the history, but they are also learning tolerance.

Endorsing the project

Within the focus groups, it became evident that the project is stirring up deep thinking for the participants. While overwhelmingly supportive of its goals, fascinating questions are emerging. Most saw clearly the need for dealing with injustice in terms of success in schools for many First Nation, Métis and Inuit students and in terms of incomplete and inaccurate representations of the history and the contemporary circumstances of First Nation, Métis and Inuit people and civilizations for all students. Some worried about a lack of focus on other groups that could result from this very specific initiative. Those who had been part of the various professional development opportunities saw their skepticism move to endorsement and, for at least one person, even “an epiphany.” One teacher articulated with great clarity his understanding of the need for the specific focus of the project:

The statistics are alarming. [Most] Aboriginal descent kids in urban settings are doing miserably in our schools and that’s what this is about. Regardless of their ability or inability, they have some of the lowest success rates of any segment of society. We have second language kids who do better generally speaking on performance tests and on-going education. We have to find a way to engage these kids and to let the rest of the student population know who they are and what they are about, why they are acting and feeling like this....Because we can’t just look at changing those kids who are failing in the schools. We have to change the system in order to meet their needs.

Group members spoke of their deepening understandings of the historical and current relationships between First Nation, Métis and Inuit people and non-Aboriginal people. A First Nation cultural presentation during the first Sharing Success Circles PLC by a traditional teacher was particularly insightful in relation to residential schools. “He really illustrated for us what it would sound like, what it would like it if you took all the children out of a town say the size of Huntsville,” said one teacher. She elaborated,

Wasn’t that so powerful when he was ripping away at sections of the circle in order to illustrate what had been taken away from their people during the time of residential schools?

SCDSB Teacher

The metaphor that he used was the healing circle or the Medicine Wheel and how that related to the history of the First Nations people since contact and what had been taken away from them and then what needed to happen in order for healing to take place. He used the circle for the metaphor through that whole presentation. Wasn't that so powerful when he was ripping away at sections of the circle in order to illustrate what had been taken away from their people during the time of residential schools? I was, we were all very emotional during that because I was ashamed as a Canadian who went on to pursue a university education with some Aboriginal studies and some anthropology and I didn't have a full understanding of the impact of that time of history on our First peoples....But then I also felt a need to make sure that that informed what I went forward to do in my teaching career.

This teacher's ability to move from feeling ashamed to wanting to be informed and change her practice based in her new understanding of history is remarkable and is typical of those who have taken the time to involve themselves deeply with the project. As others in the group acknowledged, they were particularly affected in that the speaker presented the facts with "no anger" and "no animosity," rather "he was very welcoming."

Others who had attended this session spoke of the power of the Seven Teachings and their relation to Commit to Character, another SCDSB initiative. One commented:

The presentation at Rama was just outstanding, "This is what we do as part of our life: every day we live this." We were starting to think of a project that we could do – an urban Aboriginal project for our school....It was a no brainer, we just said, The Seven Sacred Teachings because in our Board we have the Commit to Character and we're supposed to do that in our programming. The Seven Sacred Teachings, to the small group of people that went to the Rama presentation, was just so obvious. It is there; it is right in front of you. It is just how to be a good human being without all this fancy jargon. This is what you do. And we liked it because if you follow one teaching, you have to follow the other. We also liked the concept of the Medicine Wheel and utilizing it as part of our teaching program too, into our curriculum.

Some wished that the older students could have been exposed to the presentation as well. Those who had not had the opportunity to attend hope to be able to as the work continues. Presentations such as this one brought teachers into the vision that the project set out to address.

Curriculum Infusion

Teachers spoke excitedly about the infusion of First Nation, Métis and Inuit content into their classrooms. "For two years now, we've worked on integrating music and literacy with the project and creating an Earth Day presentation...around the whole concept of loving the Earth." Other mentioned a First Nation graphic novelist who came in to present his book and then worked with the children on developing their talents in the area. Often with the support of the IRT, they found new ways to

address Ontario curriculum requirements that allowed such a focus within their existing goals. Time in the PLCs also aided them in accomplishing this work. In addition to the classroom infusion, one school chose to focus their annual concert on First Nation, Métis and Inuit themes: “ We used an Inuit language, we were singing in Ojibway and we brought in the Métis culture across the board.” They also incorporated a professional drum, the Black River Drumming Group, into the concert.

New library resources contribute to the ease with which teachers incorporate their new knowledge into their classrooms. One teacher talked with great excitement about going to Good Minds Bookstore with the IRT to pick out books for the library. He also talked specifically about the direction from the Principal of the UAEPP to be sure to mix the books into all the areas of the library in order to make clear that this initiative was not about adding on to a course but about thoroughly integrating the knowledge into the everyday work of all classes. Although this mixing seems to have resulted in some teachers not being aware of the new resources, group members suggested circulating a list of the new and recommended resources for each subject area so that all teachers would know of them.

Having started with many non-fiction books, one librarian now plans to purchase more fiction and picture books by First Nation, Métis and Inuit authors to encourage their use in literacy units. Teachers spoke clearly of wanting their new knowledge to permeate all areas of the curriculum. Getting the students to see contrasting world views in science was one person’s goal, “This is the way the Europeans viewed the world, enabled by God to control all the beasts and all the world and here’s the Aboriginal view of the world. It’s a web and we are just one small part of it.” Correcting the inaccuracies from textbooks as discussed in one of the presentations at the PLC caught one person’s attention.

If we are going to meet the need to give our kids a global sort of citizenship perspective, we have to look at our own backyard.

Focus group teacher

I had no idea that it was incorrect because it was what I had grown up in school with. I went to University in Thunder Bay so you would think that the history courses I took there would have the accurate point of view. But when [the presenters] were reading it, I would say to myself, I’ve read this exact passage in the history book I had in university. They would read it and point out how incorrect it was, so from that PLC, it opened my eyes. I didn’t realize that was the truth and that was what actually happened, because that is what I read all through high school and university. And those were the resources that we had, and that are still in our schools and then you look at them and go, “whoa”...

Discussion of history curriculum ranged from one person’s claim “If we are going to meet the need to give our kids a global sort of citizenship perspective, we have to look at our own backyard. We have to look at how our history was shaped before we can pass any judgment or

make any decisions about what's going on in other areas of the world," to the recounting of the reluctance of another teacher to engage with Aboriginal content. "Two things; it's still fresh, it's still going on. There's maybe not a lot of resources out there and the other reaction seems to be they don't feel necessarily competent enough to be teaching an entire unit on this." Again the need for professional development is made clear by the teachers themselves.

Suggestions for the Future

Teachers did express concerns about the project primarily to do with the sense that it had expanded too quickly and the staff was therefore spread too thin. They did however make clear that they saw what has happened so far as successful and that their comments were suggestions for the future. They worried about the logistics of sustaining and expanding the project. The need for a longer term, consistent focus within existing schools came up a number of times in the conversations.

While the presence of the CYWs and the IRT was seen as central to the power of the project, the expansion to too many schools meant that it was difficult for teachers to predict when the Lodges would be open and/or when the staff would be available. Teachers in the second year of the project noticed especially the changes as the CYWs and IRT became involved with other schools, but those in the first year schools also worried about inconsistencies in the availability of staff. No one suggested for a minute that staff members were not fully occupied; rather teachers wished they could be more present in more places. More CYWs and a second itinerant teacher were offered as one solution. Some students were very disappointed when they could not access a CYW. Affirming comments made by both parents and students, "They get attached to them and get a bit upset when they can't see them." The cancellation or reduction in the numbers of White Buffalo Circles was noticed by several: they were missed. The fact that one CYW was hired into a teaching job was good news for her, but did leave the project in the lurch. One teacher worried about the negative effect of that change, "because the kids are left up in the air and they don't know what they can count on. They are just beginning to build trust again and then all of a sudden the person is gone and there is nobody." Obviously such events cannot be readily predicted and hiring a strong replacement must be done according to regulations which take time.

They get attached to them and get a bit upset when they can't see them.

SCDSB Teacher on the students' attitude to CYWs.

Communication was a general concern. Again those involved with the PLCs had a definite advantage in keeping up with developments, but at the same time, teachers new to the project felt unclear about exactly what its significance was and what their role was to be. From knowing what new relevant and sound resources were available in the library to some sense of the

Board's commitment to continuing the initiative, some of the teachers worried about jumping into something which would indeed turn out to be the flavour of the month. While they feel without question that it is worthwhile, they remain somewhat suspicious of new initiatives that are constantly superseded by the next new idea. Many teachers are familiar with the Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework, but some still felt that the Ministry needed to indicate more clearly their investment in ensuring its effects on all aspects of curriculum. "I wish it reached out to more teachers," said one participant. There were concerns also about teachers who were experienced with the project moving to new schools and leaving the project behind while the new teachers coming into the school had to be brought up to speed in order to participate fully.

A very thoughtful discussion on the distinctions between spirituality and religion led one group to conclude that there is a real need to communicate the purpose of the project to those who might see it as a form of proselytizing. In this regard, one teacher spoke of a colleague who had, until recently never talked of her Métis heritage because of the negative connotations that society attaches to "being Aboriginal." These attitudes

...permeate people's view of the culture. One of the main purposes should be to educate and have people develop understanding. Because prejudice and stereotypes are based on misunderstanding and not knowing enough about a group of people. [The project] serves kids not only because they may develop a more sensitive view of our First Peoples. But it just may affect their thinking to be more embracing of other groups as well, any other group....If this is one way to break down barriers and create new ways of thinking about people other than ourselves, then maybe we need to clarify purpose.

Although most felt there was no conflict in bringing in the Seven Teachings and the Medicine Wheel, one person commented, "For you to say it's not religious and for me to say it is, is already an issue." Clearly there is room for further discussion although the majority felt that clarifying the purpose of bringing Indigenous thought into the schools could address this concern.

The Gift of Time

Time was seen as another determining factor in the success of such an initiative. The group members argued that teachers need to be allowed time to engage in professional development and what can be a steep learning curve for many. Even having time to absorb the mandate of the project was an issue, "I do know from talking to some of my professional peers that they weren't really all that clear on the motivation and/or the outcomes [expected]. If it's valuable, we should be bringing it to all the staff who are trying to implement the program." Those who were not able to attend the professional day referred to above found themselves feeling less sure of the significance of the project. They commented on hearing about it and their realization of the importance of that kind of direct contact with community-based scholars but "the train-the-trainer" model just didn't work for them. "We need First Nation, Métis and Inuit resource people to be our mentors," commented one teacher.

To hear a report given at a staff meeting, at the end of a long teaching day, by the teachers who had been there, simply could not have the same impact. “Something gets lost in the translation.” One spoke of the need for “professional development like that for all teachers.”

But not on one of the PD days where there are a hundred people in the room, half of them talking and half of them sleeping, but genuine professional development with a small core group of people, like this target group. Nothing too big: for me something not much bigger than this [group of five] works best. Where you actually have the time and the space to speak and you’re not just one of many people. I think what you talked about having John [Snake] come to the children, I think we need people like John and presentations like you’re speaking to for all of the staff who are going to be implementing this, to ensure that the message gets out and as [our colleague] said, the motivation behind it is clear to people.

The importance of face-to-face contact and interaction with community-based First Nation, Métis and Inuit scholars was emphasized by several. When there was some suggestion that in order to meet budget restrictions, John Snake might agree to be videotaped, immediate reaction followed. “The only problem is, what you are missing is the whole atmosphere.” This teacher went on to say,

Ensuring people of Aboriginal descent come into our school supersedes all of the above. Having them coming in and working with us directly, maybe it isn’t a luxury. If we want to have drama in our school and we don’t bring in professional actors to put on plays—if we don’t go to the symphony for a couple of years, then talking about the symphonic music is really pencil on paper. It’s not the real deal. We are not talking [just] about academic curriculum, we are talking about the lives of kids, making them feel welcome. I don’t think I can do the same job: doing my best job, I am not going to be able to reach those kids in the same way as someone from their culture can.

They also talked of needing time to develop understandings of a new way of seeing the world. Others made the point that there is a need to hire more First Nation, Métis and Inuit teachers and support staff in the Board and that continuing to have First Nation and Métis people involved and in control in ensuring the continuation of the project was essential.

As part of that exposure to the meat of the program, the teachers themselves wished they could have the opportunity to get advice when questions arose about particular students or the infusion of First Nation, Métis and Inuit content into their courses. “I wish our Lodge was more accessible. Really, it’s just one day a week.”

Group members noticed that parents and community members too have found their relationship with the school shifting. Teachers themselves developed an understanding of some parents’ reluctance to come to schools and began to build different relationships with them based in these new understandings. One said,

Possibly their parents did not succeed in the school system and were disillusioned and have a certain difficulty communicating with the school. We

have noticed that a couple of our families, it's very difficult to contact them when we really need to contact them. But one of the positive changes that came out of this, with the celebration days that we had at the school and Board level, those parents came with their kids. A couple of the parents in particular were like, "Hey, I know you from the Friendship Centre. How are you doing?" I see the potential impact of that being, "Hey school's not a scary place. It's actually the hub of the community." We're parenting together; we're teaching together. We're sharing a heritage together. It breaks down those home-school barriers that are also a barrier to student success.

One teacher spoke of reciprocal trust-building:

With the nature of the experiences of a lot of the families with the school system, the trust isn't there. But we've seen more parents come in and support their students because of this program. There seems to be more willingness to talk and a willingness to try to understand. And for us to try to understand what their culture is at home and how it feeds back into the school so they can see the effect of it. There is a door opening.

Another teacher agreed about this reciprocity. She talked of "kids who would disappear for a week" and the teacher not knowing where they had gone. Now the students are more likely to open up, "Well you know, it was a big powwow up at Christian Island" and the teacher encourages them to share their stories. As her colleague responded and she concurred, "It's not hidden anymore." Teachers acknowledged that events such as the seasonal feasts with their bannock and deer stew brought parents and grandparents they had not seen in the school before. One spoke of the importance of the workshops within the community where there was an opportunity to meet family members outside the school context and build relationships from there.

Sustaining the Goals of the Project

As for sustaining the project, the answer for the teachers was clear.

We need training and professional development and not a thousand people sitting in the cafeteria with only half of them listening. Meaningful, small group, real true professional development like you got to experience at Rama. After that with a year or two of sustained support from the Board and commitment from the Ministry with resources, material and a curriculum to back it up, then I think it would be long term self-sustainable in schools. We know that the curriculum will continue if it is properly implemented and it is given enough time and the people are given proper training. We know that.

Heads nodded around the circle. "We still need guidance," said another. They found the erratic funding disturbing and felt it needs to be addressed. "First it was going to be a three year program and then, sorry, it ended up being one year and then, well, we do have another year, but the staff stretched out and watered down because they are going to more schools." If the project goals are to be met, teachers feel there needs to be visible support in the form of on-going professional development, consistent commitment on the part of Board and Ministry to the goals of the project and implementation of the Framework. The pay off will be great the participants

felt, because if students develop cultural sensitivity, if they “are able to understand it for the Aboriginal community, then it goes for all other communities. It becomes difficult to be biased against this community or that community if you start understanding, at least piece by piece, all the different communities within the larger community.” Final words from one teacher on the benefits of the project for all those involved:

There was a lot of learning for those who wished to partake or to find out, there was a lot of learning available. It is part of who we are as Canadian, we started to realize: this is us, this is Canada, this is not something that happened on the other side. [Many voices of agreement from the group.] People came forward and identified. Even when people looked back into their families they say, Oh my goodness there was intermarriage way back, but that is part of me so maybe I need to know about that. It does affect the community.

E. THE SUB-STEERING COMMITTEE OF THE URBAN ABORIGINAL EDUCATION PILOT PROJECT

The sub-Steering Committee is made up of members of community and educational organizations. While membership shifted a little over the time of the project, the core group remained steady. Members included representatives from the senior administration of the SCDSB, Barrie Area Native Advisory Circle, Native Women's Association, Métis Nation of Ontario, Ogemawahj Tribal Council, Friendship Centres, the principals' group, teachers' federations and Georgian College. Two members were also part of the provincial steering committee. The role of the committee was to provide advice on the direction of the pilot project and to monitor the implementation of its various components. UAEPP staff attended most meetings as did a representative from the Ministry of Education. The committee began meeting as soon as the grant was confirmed and continued to meet regularly over the duration of the project. As the initiative is sustained, a question arises about the continuation of this committee in its advisory capacity. One of the hard truths about First Nation, Métis and Inuit participation in such a project is that the individuals available are already members of a large number of related committees. We may be experiencing "death by committee," quipped one member. Finding a way to amalgamate some of their many education-related responsibilities was a constant refrain in the interviews. In addition some funding for smaller organizations which simply cannot absorb the travel and other expenses was mentioned.

In total, eleven members contributed their thoughts to the internal evaluation. All but two members of the committee participated in a face-to-face research conversation with the principal researcher. These interviews ranged in time from about 45 minutes to over an hour and a half. Most were recorded and transcribed verbatim although one person preferred to have a less formal interview without the recorder. One remaining member responded in an electronic interview. Only one member was not available at a mutually workable time.

Topics emerging from the interviews

Analysis of the transcripts and notes from the interviews yield four major areas addressed in one way or another by the participants. Views of the project to date, hiring, culturally sensitive professional development and sustainability are the topics addressed in the following sections.

Views of the project

Without exception, members saw the project as successful. Echoing much of what has been said above, people saw significant change in schools and beyond because of the presence of the program. They noted in particular that it built confidence in many of the First Nation, Métis and Inuit students; that it raised awareness in non-Aboriginal students and teachers; and that it made First Nation, Métis and Inuit civilizations a real presence in schools. "It has been a really great project because we are doing so much work now. We are seeing that commitment to Aboriginal

education from K to right up to the college system.” They spoke highly of the space for the Lodge—“a dedicated cultural area—where one of their meetings was held. One member said of the Lodge, “I was very impressed because I walked in the door and saw that they were smudging already. I am just thinking about how good that is because we are finding at the College that we don’t have to explain things as much. If that starts in the elementary school, that is even better.” The impact on the school over all was seen as highly significant,

The highest priority issue was addressing the needs of Aboriginal students but I think as a consequence of the initiatives that were done, it had a much broader impact on all students. That’s an essential piece. Because if you are going to deal with the educational experience of Aboriginal students, it’s not just about content. It’s also about atmosphere and the school environment itself. I saw that as a really positive benefit of all of this.

A member spoke of the important connections that students and even some teachers were making to their heritage and to community organizations as a result of the acceptance and celebration of being Aboriginal in the schools. One person gave a specific example of a teacher who came to a presentation where it was mentioned that some people had denied their Aboriginal ancestry. When she reported on this session to one of her uncles, she told the committee member, “Lo and behold, guess what? Aboriginal ancestry.” Some members spoke of the wealth of knowledge they themselves had gained from being a part of the committee. “I have learned a lot from FNMI people in a certain spiritual way that is hard to describe. I have learned that it is best to ‘begin from a place of listening,’” said one. That being said, they raised a number of very important issues to be addressed as the project continues. Other specific comments from members included an appreciation that the make-up of the committee was somewhat unique in bringing all major partners in the project to the table together. Opportunity for intense discussion of the critical issues including terminology, such as the term First Nation, which again collapses difference and the label and qualifications for Child and Youth Worker which could send a negative message and did not take into account the contributions made to the cultural teachings in the schools, was one of the very positive aspects of the meetings. Another member commented on the speed with which the project was up and running. She also mentioned the wisdom of starting small and “creating a desire” in other schools to be part of the project.

Hiring

One of the recurring issues raised was the hiring of more permanent First Nation, Métis and Inuit staff as teachers and support workers for the Simcoe County District School Board. While there were also a number of suggestions and comments regarding the continued and expanded, regular use of community-based and culturally-competent resource people, having those teachers in the classrooms as sources of information and potential role models for the students was seen as a gap to be filled. “The labour strategy—trying to do something more about that, “ said one participant. The issue of the person hired knowing the culture also came up regularly, sometimes in the form of a question, “It’s great to have them visibly in the

schools but if they don't know the culture, does it actually benefit the school or the students at all? What's changing?" To address this concern, one participant suggested asking an interview question about the person's traditional teachers and then following up with those people orally in much the same way other references are contacted. Various existing models of union-sanctioned, affirmative action models were proposed as possibilities for the board. Several people spoke to the claim that there are no First Nation, Métis and/or Inuit teachers available. As one member said, "They can't hire Aboriginal people? Yeah, you can. If you really, really want to." They cited examples of local, qualified individuals who could be recruited. One member also spoke of a particular example of the Board's hiring as a possible model, "It's very hard to get qualified teachers who can teach the Native second language course. The Board has had to bring in someone who is qualified in terms of 'can do' the language but not maybe necessarily as a [certified] teacher and has some sort of agreement with the Tribal Council." Another commented, "They talk about the goal to increase the number of Aboriginal teachers but when you ask the question how are you actually doing that, there is no response."

In relation to resource people, there were some similar thoughts. Most important is the securing of the help of at least one elder for the continuation of the project. As one member said,

A lot of questions that you can probably answer during a pilot get much more difficult to answer. And, boy, the role of the elder is so critical. On a pilot project you can often get away with lots of things—you can work on some assumptions—but the more a program becomes entrenched, you start to develop your own policies and your own processes that are going to be there for a long time. When those things get challenged, you need to be thinking about: why did we make those decisions and are they the right decisions?

Another member said,

We really should have a First Nation and a Métis elder and Inuit because those are the ones that are going to bring in new perspectives. Those are the ones that are going to say, "Slow down. We are going too fast. We need to think about what we are doing here. Yeah, they have a project and they have to have certain timelines but that is in conflict with the Aboriginal world and time."

In terms of the committee itself, while it was seen to be compare favourably to other committees in terms of timely reporting and good communication, members wished that meetings could have been conducted less like Robert's Rules of Order, in a "more culturally sensitive way." More community participation was a goal although it is acknowledged that most members are spread thin in their commitments to other committees and their own work. More consistent involvement of and regular communication about the progress of the project with members of the various First Nation, Métis and Inuit peoples and organizations of the area could be enhanced. At the same time, it was acknowledged that the staff was often occupied with the immediate needs of individual students which had to take precedence. Members wished there had been consistent guidance from an elder for their pilot project work. Some suggested opening and closing each meeting with a smudge while at

least one other person questioned levels of comfort with the practice. For another, it's a matter of education and will:

Smudging: you can't do it inside because of smell and I heard that you can't have an open flame because of a health and safety thing. To me those are barriers. If you are in a Catholic school, how does the priest light the incense? Do we have to have a pot of water there in case there is a fire? What would meet that need? It is a spiritual piece: some of the East Indian practices they have had to take to court in order to uphold those rights. You are having First Nation, Métis and Inuit project here, and you are putting up barriers: you can only do it outside. Well, then, educate [those involved].

Members also spoke of the possibility of having a list of elders who could be available to work with particular schools, preferably on a regular and long-term basis so that they develop familiarity with the students, the teachers and other staff. An additional consideration is that, "You need to budget for community people for honorariums and for mileage, because, many times, they are not well off, very seldom make ends meet. Some of them may not drive: they should be picked up."

Professional Development (PD)

Culturally appropriate and sensitive professional development for teachers and others involved in achieving the goals of the project, from Child and Youth Workers to School Board Trustees, is a recurring theme throughout both this report and the duration of the project. Respecting cultural protocol must become an integral part of any professional development that involves traditional teachings. The deep changes demanded by the project, addressing everything from attitudes to curriculum content, is something that requires information and guidance every step of the way if it is to be successful and acceptable to First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities. Teachers have articulated their need for PD in the sections above while the committee members brought many refinements to the discussion.

To begin with, there is a clear understanding from all that education is not simply about grades. While those may be indications of the intellectual well-being of students, their emotional, physical and spiritual well-being can never be separated from it. One member worried about an over-emphasis on academic success to the detriment of those with more immediate needs.

I don't like to be the negative person, but we do have some tough situations in our communities where kids are going to school hungry. It is not unique to the Aboriginal community, but it is a little bit more common. Not having boots to come to school or in the winter-time, a coat, that kind of thing. Even the breakfast program, well, if it is just for the needy kids, who wants to be identified like that? Because it will get out and they will tease. It is tough. And those workers who are there to support those kids have done a very good job in supporting them through some difficult times. But some teachers right now are really caught up in the curriculum and not picking up on that kid looking a bit rough today. That compassion piece that you got into teaching for is missing.

There were many suggestions for ways to continue the valuable professional development that the project, particularly the Professional Learning Communities, has begun. One might characterize the concerns raised as “a little learning is a dangerous thing.”

One member made important distinctions between teaching about Indigenous or traditional knowledge and practicing ceremonies.

Not specifically with the pilot project but with the school board in general, when you are doing those teachings, they have to come from the elders or the traditional teachers to do that kind of work. It's not that the teacher can pick up a teaching and give that teaching because then you're taking away from its original meaning. Resources should be made available to have a visiting elder or a visiting traditional teacher. Because it's so needed and it will benefit both sides.

Concerned about “the difficulty of mixing the culture into the system in a superficial way,” she went on to give a specific example of the importance of learning from a traditional teacher so that the teaching can be used respectfully. A grandmother had been called into the school to discuss her grandchild's situation.

She was talking to the teacher and the teacher noticed that she was from a First Nation community. She said, ‘Oh yeah, we're doing a lot of that kind of stuff here and we have 25 tobaccos ties that we all made.... Do you think you can come and bring your drum next week? And do some drumming for the kids?’ And [the elder responded], “You know when it comes to those tobacco ties and the teachings behind the tobacco ties and the purpose of that tobacco tie, you're asking me for something. You're asking for my spirit to do this work. That's when that tobacco tie comes in handy. It's not just a matter of making the tie and saying, ‘Oo, you know I made tobacco ties.’ It's the purpose behind it. Because when you pass that tobacco to your elder, your teacher, you're asking for something and it's that spirit of that individual that's accepting that and that work gets done.”

The best of intentions gone awry. It is precisely this kind of situation that worries many of the committee members. Another person spoke of the ease with which the Seven Teachings is being taken up by so many teachers. “I get concerned when the Seven Grandfather Teachings is like a favourite story, but the story is never really told. And it's only a small part of the Creation story that had a great impact on the people, kept us alive again, saved our little lives.” Similarly a non-Aboriginal member said, “Empowering non-Aboriginal people to do the Aboriginal piece could create a lot of challenges. That would speak to why you would want an elder or some kind of cultural advisor to OK that. Otherwise you are going to get a lot of backlash from the community.”

In this regard, members mentioned specifically the importance of teachers knowing their limits. “It's okay *not* to know everything,” said one. Another member said,

If I was working with a Chinese student, I would say I can't help you if they wanted me to help with their teachings or to learn more about their background. My role would be to make sure they get connected to that, not to

actually do that work. Even though I might want to be helpful, I'm not the best person to do it. Recognizing that at a personal level is step number one....It's a simple thing: my cultural competency goes as far as that: to know that's not my role. My role is to hook her up to the people that can do that....It's not your job to know it all. You should know all about your people and your history and your culture. You should know all of that.

While never for a moment wanting to withdraw from the activities and goals of the project or demean all that teachers have been able to learn and do in such a short space of time, members did want to consider ways to do better what had started in such a forceful and positive way. Intensive and sustained professional development was seen as much the best way to proceed. Members also had some specific suggestions which included dedicating some of the PD days each year to the goals of the Framework—"every year making it more challenging"; work-shopping the new library resources so that teachers actually know how to use them in good ways; drawing on First Nation, Métis and Inuit community resource people for cultural sensitivity education; using Lunch and Learn sessions to have knowledgeable students teach the teachers culturally appropriate knowledge; and creating opportunities for teachers to observe in classrooms where teachers are doing an exemplary job of infusing First Nation, Métis and Inuit content and process into their curriculum (e.g. existing collaboration sites). In all of this lies the assumption that the goal is not to add a course or a unit to a program but to infuse First Nation, Métis and Inuit resources throughout the curriculum. "It can't be an add-on. It has to be part of delivering the curriculum. It can be part of your language program; it can be part of your science program and part of your social studies program. It's not an add-on where you have to do a separate lesson. It's just part of what you do on a daily basis." One member also spoke of the importance of intensive cultural sensitivity and awareness training for all administrators and trustees, "We are committed enough that we put all of our senior management through twelve days of Native training."

Sustaining the goals of the pilot project

As the project was reaching the end of its second year, sustainability of the goals was on everyone's mind. Many were willing to remain involved in this advisory capacity despite their concerns about too many meetings. For some it was clear that something had started, started well and "the momentum will carry it forward." There was no question of the importance and desirability of continuing the important work. Indeed there were those who always saw the limited time of the project, either as a year or two, as only a beginning. Commenting, "I think the School Board had not anticipated how much time it was going to take," a member went on to say, "All along I had been saying a year is not enough. You are going to be lucky if you even develop some trust in a year. Being new to the project, there was not an understanding that you cannot move things quickly." When faced with the prospect of a year long project, another member had commented, "You really need to look at a longer term....[Otherwise] you spend all your time getting the money, hiring and then it's gone. You create a need or some good relationships within the community and then 'fsh' it's gone." Many people worried that its effects would disappear

without commitment from schools, the Board and the Trustees to make it an integral part of planning and to fund its continuation.

And that commitment is already beginning to come to light. As one committee member said, "Our board has made the commitment, has seen the results, have seen them as being promising and has chipped into make it sustainable." Committee member and Superintendent of SCDSB Education, Janis Medysky, writes in her electronic interview, "The major success is that the project has 'infiltrated' our schools. It is not over. Our positions are continuing, including the principal position. The project and our other work in this have been solidly supported by our trustees. Work in FNMI education is embedded in our Board Improvement Plan and is 'cross department.'" Another member points out "taking the lead from the Board Improvement Plan," it can also become a part of many School Improvement Plans for the coming years. Others had some specific suggestions such as designating at least 10% of the library budget for resources for First Nation, Métis and Inuit content; creative use of smaller grants available from a range of sources to enhance the work; complex management of course offerings that would allow more focus on First Nation, Métis and Inuit material as agreements between individual students and their subject teachers.

With all the good will in the world, no one is naive about the challenges that will continue to require thought and energy as the project moves into becoming established policy and practice. Again Janis Medysky states lucidly what she sees as two major challenges:

There is and always will be the lack of support for this work from those who do not come from a place of understanding. Racism has not gone away because of this project. There continues to be a comparison drawn between immigrant groups and FNMI people - all of whom should be respected.

Sustaining support from FNMI groups will continue to be a challenge. There is a great deal of mistrust—which is warranted. We have a long way to travel out of the woods. The reverse of this is somewhat true. "Mainstream" people have a hard time doing good work in this area when we are not FNMI people. We have to work very hard to be genuine.

As the project comes to an end, and the commitment to continue is evident, along with the challenges that such on-going work entails, perhaps it is best to conclude this section with these words of wisdom from one of the committee members:

What the board really needs is that elder, that elder that someone can call or someone can ask questions to that has that connection to the teachings and to the culture. Because if you do all of this nice stuff, if you want to connect it to the teachings, the elder has such an important role especially in a project like this if it's going to continue. And then having those visiting ones in the different schools and doing that work would just top off a great program.

V. THE MODEL

The purpose of this section is to lay out in simple terms the components of the model which are essential to its successful implementation. This is only one model of course, but its immediate successes in one School Board in less than two years suggest it has the strength to influence real transformation in beliefs and attitudes and most important, actions to promote success of First Nation, Métis and Inuit students in schools and deepen understanding of all participants about their relations with one another in this country we call Canada. This pilot project has had both statistically significant, deeply personal and social results which can only be truly measured as time passes and one determines the sustainability and the permanence of the effects it has created in the short term. The commitment of the Board to maintaining and expanding the original intent of the project is integral to its continuing effectiveness. Some refinements to the original model have been added as suggested by the preceding evaluation.

For those who would emulate this approach, the components are as follows:

An Elder to guide the process. Recruitment of a group of Elders and other resource people to be available for work directly in the schools as needed.

The creation of a critically supportive advisory committee made up primarily of First Nation, Métis and/or Inuit community members as well as representatives of teachers' federations, local colleges and senior administration of the Board. This committee guides and monitors the project, creating and refining its vision, receiving and responding to regular reports and communicating to constituents on the project/process.

Culturally-sensitive and appropriate professional development opportunities for teachers—small group, hands-on, led whenever possible by First Nation, Métis and/or Inuit educators, community-based or school-based. These opportunities must include time for open discussion circlework.

Child and Youth Workers, preferably with knowledge of First Nation, Métis and/or Inuit traditional teachings, who are consistently available and who operate with an articulated mandate that recognizes the interrelatedness of the intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual dimensions of children's school lives.

First Nation, Métis and/or Inuit Resource Teachers who can work with teachers in using culturally-appropriate protocol to infuse First Nation, Métis and Inuit content into their plans and actions. Most important, these IRTs should be available to give demonstration lessons in classrooms and to develop useful curriculum materials consistent with the Ministry of Education's goals.

Resources for all areas and categories within libraries including books, DVDs, music and graphics as well as the identification of relevant websites in a central Board site which teachers and students can access. Communication to all staff of the existence of accurate and respectful resources related to First Nation, Métis and Inuit curriculum possibilities.

Designated space within the school for activities and gatherings and for student interactions with CYWs and IRTs as well as community resource people. Other welcoming aspects in various locations throughout the school.

A “champion” at the level of senior board administration is integral to success. Intensive education in cultural awareness and sensitivity for all involved in the administration and governance of the Board.

Accompanying assessment of the effects of the work is desirable. Existing surveys could serve as models for other Boards. In addition, a qualitative research component can provide richer detailed feedback on the effects of the project for individual participants. Collectively, the two approaches give a big picture view of the effects.

Commitment on the part of the Trustees, Boards, Administrators at all levels, and teachers to build a focus on addressing First Nation, Métis and Inuit student success consistently into their immediate *and* long range planning. Representation of this commitment in Board and School Improvement Plans is one way to institutionalize such a commitment. N.B. This must be seen to be a long-term, organic process – its goal is fundamental change in schooling for First Nation, Métis and Inuit students and non-Aboriginal students.

It is most important to note that each jurisdiction considering implementing this model is best advised to make appropriate adjustments to suit local context and conditions. What is written here can never be a blueprint; it can only serve as a guide.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations are suggestions for improvement for the Urban Aboriginal Education Pilot Project as it moves from being a limited time project to becoming a fully-fledged commitment on the part of the Simcoe County District School Board. They are drawn directly from the words of the study participants: the students, parents, community members, teachers and sub-Steering Committee members. Each is an addition or enhancement to what has already been taking place. They should be read jointly with the Model presented on the previous page.

As with all recommendations, these ones are only a few of many possible. Each person involved has the responsibility to read and think about the implications of all that the participants have contributed to this study.

1. The involvement of an Elder as a guide for the initiatives related to First Nation, Métis and Inuit students
2. A strategy for hiring more FNMI^{xiv} teachers and staff in SCDSB
3. The presence of FNMI resource people in schools and for teacher professional development
4. Budgetting for FNMI resource people to be part of school plans
5. Focus on a limited number of schools so that adequate staffing can be maintained
6. Articulated expanded mandate and perhaps name change for CYWs who are bringing traditional teachings to the schools
7. Consistent presence of CYWs in elementary schools
8. Clear communication to students of CYW availability for support and activities for students
9. Dedicated cultural space within each school
10. On-going culturally-sensitive professional development for teachers given by culturally-informed FNMI people
11. PD in small groups with opportunities to explore complex issues
12. Community resource people in classrooms to support teachers
13. Language classes
14. Time: for all involved to build trust; to learn; and to keep learning.
15. Time: for thorough discussions of the intricacies and relationships between Indigenous thought and Euro-Canadian thought.
16. Communications about new resources available to teachers in their libraries
17. Some ways to address the movement of teachers to and from project schools in bringing them up to date on the initiative and allowing their involvement to continue beyond the project school
18. Continued outreach to family members through culturally-sensitive events and other forms of interaction
19. Enhanced interactive communication with FNMI communities about the process of the initiative and for critical input
20. Culture awareness and sensitivity education for all Trustees and School Board Administration and Staff.

VII. APPENDICES

- A. Questions for Native Studies Class**
- B. Questions for Parents and Caregivers**
- C. Questions for Teachers**
- D. Questions for Sub-steering Committee Members**

N.B. These questions served only as a guide to engaging the various participants in the internal evaluation of the Urban Aboriginal Education Pilot Project. In most cases, after introductions, the research conversations or circlework group began with some form of the very broad question “What has the UAEPP meant to you?” From there, researchers followed the directions set by the participants while occasionally checking the interview schedules/sets of questions to ensure that the ground was covered in terms of the important dimensions of the evaluation. A final question, “What should we have asked you that we didn’t?” passed the final focus of the interview back to the participant once more. These two open-ended questions allowed study participants considerable control over the directions of the research conversations.

APPENDIX A

Internal Evaluation for the Urban Aboriginal Pilot Project Native Studies Class

What, if anything, does the Urban Aboriginal Education Pilot Project mean to you?

What do you like about the Native Studies course?

- What are/were your reasons for taking this course?
- What are/were you hoping to get out of taking this course?
- How is this course similar to or different from your other courses?
- How is the atmosphere in this classroom similar to or different from other classrooms?
- Is it important to you to have Native Studies as a course option?
- What do you think about making part or all of this course compulsory for all students (& teachers)?
- Prior to taking this course, can you recall other times in school when you learned about or focused on First Nation, Métis and/or Inuit cultures, histories, perspectives, etc. (i.e., lectures, assignments, field trips, artwork, children's stories/novels, guest speakers, events, etc.)?

Over the past year, what FNMI events happened at your school?

- Who was involved in these events and where did they take place?
- How did you participate in these events?
- How were these events special/important/meaningful to you?

Have you noticed any differences in the school over the last year? Can you remember any FNMI events happening at your school prior to last year?

- FNMI course offerings?
- what type of pictures/displays around school?
- FNMI presence in school?
- books in library?
- FNMI focus for school work?

Do you talk about these events/activities with your friends, classmates, teachers, family, community, etc.?

- How have you shared your learning with friends, classmates, teachers, family, community, etc.?
- In your opinion, how have other people (classmates, teachers, community members, family, friends, etc.) responded to these activities (i.e., Native Studies course, etc.)?

Was your school/Native Studies class involved in any local First Nation and/or Métis community events?

- First Nation, Métis, and/or Inuit community members in school?
- students involved in community – class field trips in community?

The UAEPP includes the presence of CYWs, Resource teachers, the offering of this course, resources for the library and space for FNMI resources, students and activities.

Are you aware of these things in your school?

Have you made use of them?

Are they important to you and/or other students? In what ways?

What else needs to be done with regards to the project? Recommendations? Is there anything you did not like about UAEPP?

- Can you think of an example of something connected to the project that has made you feel uneasy/uncomfortable?

Are there any questions we should have asked you that we didn't?

APPENDIX B

Internal Evaluation for the Urban Aboriginal Pilot Project Parents and Caregivers

Main Questions

What has the Urban Aboriginal Education Pilot Project (UAEPP) meant for you and your child or children?

Can you give me a specific example or story about something that your child has said or done that makes you think this?

Vision: Has the UAEPP made a difference in your child's feelings about school?

Relationships: Has your child developed new relationships with people in the school? (e.g. teachers; other First Nation, Metis and Inuit students; other non-Aboriginal students; CYWs; etc.) Is your own relationship with the school better or worse? Has it changed in anyway?

Knowledge: Has your child increased his or her interest in and/or knowledge of First Nation, Metis and Inuit cultures, languages, histories and ways of thinking? Has this made any difference to your own knowledge and/or sharing of knowledge that you have?

Action: Do you feel your child is more or less successful in school this year than in previous years (before the UAEPP)? What does that success look like? Better grades? Happier to be in school? Or?

Reflections:

Is it important for the project to continue?

Are there specific aspects that stand out as important?

Any other stories you would like to share about the program?

Do you have any messages for teachers, principals, School Board about the project?

Final Question: Is there anything I should have asked you that I didn't.

APPENDIX C

Internal Evaluation for the Urban Aboriginal Pilot Project Questions for teachers

What has this project meant to you over the past year?

In one of the early pieces of research with the UAEPP, FNMI parents, students and community leaders talked of the need for changes in the school environment, the curriculum, and relations with family and community as desirable goals to support FNMI success.

Do you think there have been changes in these aspects of your work since the UAEPP was introduced? If so, what do they look like? Please give specific examples.

In what ways, if any, has your practice changed over the past year?

Can you share a story about how your involvement with the project has changed the way you think/feel about teaching over the past year?

How has this project influenced the relationships you have with students, staff, Child and Youth Worker(s), and administration? FNMI students? Non-Aboriginal students?

In what ways has your knowledge and understanding of FNMI cultures changed this year?

Do you feel that you have been able to be more or less successful in your teaching of FNMI and all students this year? What do you think it means to be successful in school? What does it look like to you?

What do you think it will take for your schools to continue this work? What if there is no additional funding? Can it become a priority or shift in everyday life within the school?

What should I have asked you that I didn't? Any final comments?

APPENDIX D

Internal Evaluation for the Urban Aboriginal Pilot Project Questions for sub-steering committee members.

1. What has the UAEPP meant to you?
2. What are the major features of the project that stand out for you as important?
3. What is the role of the sub-Steering Committee?
4. How is this initiative different from others that have been undertaken by this board or other bodies in the Barrie region?
5. How important is it?
6. Does this initiative matter for all students or is it really about the success of FNMI students? If the former, what are the dimensions that matter?

Sustainability

1. In *The Schools Speak* report, sustainability is one of the major concerns. What is your sense of the sustainability of the initiatives of the UAEPP? What will it take to sustain what has begun? What are the implications of failing to sustain it?
2. How important is each of the dimensions of the UAEPP: CYWs; Resource teachers; resources; FNMI principal; Lodge; other?
3. Professional development is one of the ideas that teachers cited as important for their continuing and deepening involvement in the curriculum changes they have been making. Is that a possibility?
4. What are the implications for teacher education?
5. Have relationships with parents of FNMI students changed as a result of the UAEPP? In what ways? Any specific stories about these changes?
6. 5. How significant has this been for building better community relations? Can you give me examples of changes in relations?

What should I have asked you that I didn't?

ENDNOTES

ⁱ N.B. While the Ministry documents and most current Board communications use the terms First Nation, Métis and Inuit, the word Aboriginal continues to be used in some documents. In this report, the use of the terms will be consistent with the references they draw on. No disrespect is intended. While Aboriginal is considered to be inclusive in many contexts, there is also concern that it masks difference and that naming First Nation, Métis and Inuit as distinct groups prevents any such reductionism.

ⁱⁱ For a developed discussion of Circlework, see Fyre Jean Graveline's book of the same name.

¹ Framework, p. 7

^{iv} *ibid*

^v Urban Aboriginal Task Force, p. 99

^{vi} Because there was a provincial Steering Committee overseeing the three funded projects, the local committee chose the name sub-Steering Committee. Indeed there were three members of this committee who also attended meetings of the provincial Steering Committee.

^{vii} Project Plan, September 2008, p.2

^{viii} The details of these approaches are outlined more thoroughly in the two earlier reports.

^{ix} Reading all associated reports would be especially important for any other School Boards attempting to implement a similar model.

^x "Community-based First Nation, Métis and Inuit scholars" refers to those people who have expertise in traditional and Indigenous knowledges. They may not have degrees and/or other mainstream credentials – although some do—but they are knowledgeable in local traditions and contemporary Indigenous culture and/or language.

^{xi} The third and most recent report "*From Faint Spark to Glowing Fire: Priorities for First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education in the Simcoe County District School Board*" includes many comments from students and others on the UAEPP as the major initiative of the Board.

^{xii} Informed parental consent was obtained for all those under the age of sixteen.

^{xiii} With new ideas comes the need for new language. This simple statement exemplifies the way that Euro-Canadian view of the world takes precedence even as people are taking baby steps into Aboriginal ways. While Euro-Canadian thought tends to be linear and therefore the idea of corners is integral to a concrete formation, of course the circle may have directions but never corners.

^{xiv} The author apologizes for stooping to use this acronym. While it is efficient, it is unrepresentative of the complexities and differences between and amongst the groups and the individuals who identify with them.