

The Lakehead Public School Board's Urban Aboriginal Education Project

Review & Research Study

Final Report

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JULY 15, 2010

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After three years of funding from the Ministry of Education's Aboriginal Education Office, the Lakehead Public School Board (LPS) has made meaningful progress, established within all schools and is well on track with Urban Aboriginal Education including programs, professional development, community partnerships and Aboriginal student success.

The research study reviewed and gauged the UAEP work by the LPS over a period of 18 months (November 2008—July 2010). During this period, the LPS and the university-based research team collaborated on the research approach, design, stakeholders, and other data sources while the research team completed the data collection, analysis and results, including two phases of research. In Phase I, the LU research team undertook a quantitative scan of all LPS stakeholders in Aboriginal education through an online survey with a return of 283 respondents. From this survey, the researchers were able to determine the rate of familiarity and readiness by LPS members for specific UAEP program components and approaches. Comments collected through the survey helped with the design of a qualitative set of questions to elicit more perspectives and stories of Aboriginal education. During Phase II of the study, a series of 43 in-depth focus groups, each averaging between one to two hours of discussion, were conducted over a 6-month period with a total of 235 participants. These participants represented the following stakeholder groups: elementary teachers, secondary teachers, principals, non-Aboriginal students, Aboriginal students, Aboriginal parents, Elders and community members.

Each focus group was encouraged to share experiences and stories of Aboriginal education in the LPS and to comment on how engaged they were in school-based Aboriginal education. The majority of participants were clear that they perceive the LPS engaged in many new initiatives and implementing important programs in Aboriginal education. All research participants were also clear that the UAEP funding needs to continue to deepen the gains and improve returns on the capacity-building that the LPS has already invested in and established. Aboriginal education is a deep systemic set of issues and complexities that requires a systemic response. A systemic approach by a school board requires years and funds for it to take hold and make a serious impact. The LPS has taken a wide systemic approach with the UAEP, Aboriginal organizations and partners working together with all levels of the school board, to shift the district-wide organizational culture of the Board towards culturally responsive, respectful relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members.

From a review of all the focus group transcript data, it was evident that all stakeholders are aware and are starting to experience the impacts of the UAEP programs in the LPS. In the Phase II focus groups, there were no participants who were either unaware of or did not recognize the need for more engagement in Aboriginal education by the LPS. Since the purpose of Phase II of the research study was to consult with all stakeholders review the impacts or gains of the UAEP from their experiences and perspectives, success stories and recommendations are presented here as outcomes of Phase II.

The three top success stories of the UAEP in the Lakehead Public Board that were voiced the most frequently from a wide array of participants across the stakeholder focus groups

include the following: 1) the board-wide approach to teacher professional development, resource and curriculum development in Indigenous knowledge integration or Aboriginal perspectives; 2) the involvement of community through AEAC, Elders, curriculum writers, special events, and community connections; and finally, 3) the role-modeling and direct involvement of Aboriginal educators in classrooms with Aboriginal students such as certified Aboriginal teachers, Elders, Native counselors, the LTTA Aboriginal artists, and the UAS outreach workers.

The three key recommendations for future UAEP development voiced with the greatest frequency from stakeholder participants across the focus groups include UAEP programs or initiatives that stakeholders want to see continue or want the emphasis to shift towards particular issues. The three recommendations include the following: 1) hire more teachers and staff members of Aboriginal ancestry who can provide the role modeling, cultural understandings, language revitalization and Aboriginal worldview to all students as well as assist or work directly with Aboriginal students; 2) hire more Aboriginal facilitators or PD developers to work at the elbow or provide direct coaching to non-Aboriginal teachers for more effective Indigenous knowledge integration and Aboriginal content across all subjects and grade levels; and, 3) continuous communication, consultation and negotiation with Aboriginal parents, organizations and community to build cross-cultural understandings and implement plans for the growth and improvement of Aboriginal education in the LPS.

Introduction

Purpose of the Review and Research Study

In this final report of the UAEP research in the Lakehead Public Board, stakeholder group experiences, voices and stories have been recorded, analyzed and organized to review the gains and successes of Aboriginal education achieved through the UAEP funding. The objectives of the research in Phase II was to gain an understanding of the following perspectives of different key stakeholders: the motivations of non-Aboriginal educators to engage in Aboriginal education; educators' personal and systemic challenges of integrating Aboriginal content, perspectives and Indigenous knowledge into curriculum and pedagogy, insights into the partnerships and relationships with Aboriginal parents, families and communities; the welcome and invitation of Aboriginal community into school and classroom instruction; how the Board is supporting northern Aboriginal, urban Aboriginal and at-risk students in the development of specific programs and strategies; how Aboriginal parents and families want to enhance cross-cultural understandings between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students; and, how non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal students want to interact and learn together. For all the stakeholder groups, they were asked what would assist them in further engaging Aboriginal education in their schools and classrooms.

The purpose of the Phase II research is to report to the Lakehead School Board and the Ministry on the effectiveness of the UAEP programs as well as inform decision-making for future phases of UAEP implementation and Aboriginal education development in the LPS and across the province in Ontario school boards. In this research study, "effectiveness" was determined by levels of engagement by all the stakeholders in LPS Aboriginal education. The success stories and recommendations found in this report have been substantiated by the results and evidence of the focus group and several sharing circles data.

The Urban Aboriginal Education Project Mandate

The Urban Aboriginal Education Project (UAEP) is a Ministry of Education funded project that consists of three school board sites, including Lakehead Public Schools. The UAEP is intended to provide Lakehead Public Schools the opportunity to develop innovative models and strategies to support Aboriginal students' needs and achievement. Lakehead Public Schools' Urban Aboriginal Pilot Project is aligned with the Ontario Ministry's First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework. The research of the UAEP strategies and programs in Lakehead Public Schools have accomplished the following goals of the UAEP: (a) build cultural awareness of all staff and capacity for culturally inclusive teaching and assessment practices in classrooms, (b) ensure schools are welcoming environments and incorporate Aboriginal content, resources and materials, (c) provide Aboriginal student supports including transition assistance, mentorship and Elder supports, and (d) focus on a "connecting for success" approach in developing community relations and promoting Aboriginal Parent/Guardian advocacy.

The Urban Aboriginal Education Project Research Study

Research Model

This research draws upon models of narrative and Aboriginal research. This qualitative study comprised a mixed method of narrative focus groups informed by goal of culturally responsive Aboriginal education. This mixed method was the approach to explore and document different stakeholder groups' stories, perspectives and critical experiences of Aboriginal education in an urban centre, an Ontario public school board, in Thunder Bay, in the Lakehead Public Schools. While a decolonizing awareness provides the analytic framework to identify differences and power positions of the stakeholder groups, an Aboriginal approach that supports a relational, reconciliatory framework undergirds the purpose of improving Aboriginal education in the Lakehead Public Board.

Research Questions

To review the efforts of the Lakehead Public School Board in Aboriginal education and to study the impacts of the UAEP funded programs, the research study focused on questions of engagement by all stakeholders associated with schools and departments in the LPS. The three central research questions for the study were:

1. How are all the members of the LPS—teachers, principals, students, staff, etc. — working to engage in Aboriginal Education and improve conditions for Aboriginal student success?
2. How well are teachers, principals, students, etc. engaging in the issues and implementation of Aboriginal Education (the issues, content, Indigenous knowledge, worldview, culture, truth & reconciliation, ...)?
3. What can be learned from the LPS examples of UAEP that are important and will inform other Ontario school boards' implementation?

Research Design

The focus group interview was the primary method of data collection in this Phase II of the research study. Focus groups are interviews structured to foster talk among the participants about particular issues and perspectives and are usually comprised of four to eight people (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). They are "...particularly useful when the topic to explore is general, and the purpose is either to stimulate talk from multiple perspectives from the group participants so that the researcher can learn what the range of views are, or to promote talk on a topic that informants might not be able to talk so thoughtfully about in individual interviews" (p. 109). This method is also informed by an Indigenous methodology centred on a conversational method of sharing stories and experiences. Conversation is a way of gathering "embodied" knowledge by referencing the stories, story-telling, re-remembering, and relating touchstone experiences, rather than simply gathering "data". This conversational method is dialogic because the gathering of knowledge is built upon an Indigenous relational tradition as well as to create culturally

responsive conditions of welcome and respect for all participants, but in particular for Aboriginal participants.

The research team facilitating, recording, witnessing, transcribing, and analyzing the focus groups included both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal graduate research assistants. At all focus group session with Aboriginal participants, there were Aboriginal researchers present to ensure respectful protocols, to make the research more welcoming, friendly and relational, and to verify that the research outcomes and results would be meaningful to Aboriginal community.

The in-depth conversational focus group sessions were between one and two hours per group, with a couple of notable exceptions with Aboriginal participants who wanted to talk and converse for longer periods. The conversations were audio and video-recorded in order to ensure a back-up data source (in case of technical break-down) as well as another source to verify speakers and visual group responses for the focus group transcription.

Focus Group Questions

The conversational method was used to gather data of stakeholder perspectives and to encourage a sharing of experiences through stories and examples. To prepare for each stakeholder focus group, the research team studied the issues, contexts and situation of that group in the LPS UAEP. Each focus group had a distinct set of open-ended questions that were used as a guide by the focus group facilitator. Participants in the shorter focus groups (e.g., the secondary teachers during lunch hour sessions) were provided with a semi-structured conversational guide to make the session as effective and efficient inside the time constraints. Examples of the open-ended question batteries for different stakeholder groups are provided in the appendices of this report.

Study Terminology and Acronyms

The term Aboriginal is used to identify those individuals who identify as have First Nations, Inuit or Metis ancestry. Non-Aboriginal is used purposefully to identify those individual who are not of First Nations, Inuit or Metis ancestry. Often, the term Euro-Canadian and Eurocentrism are used to refer to Canadians of European ancestry (or White) while the term “eurocentrism” refers to a European worldview that dominates and often negates or erases other worldviews or ways of knowing. The term Indigenous Knowledge (IK) is used to acknowledge the different sets of traditional knowledges that exist within broad communities of Aboriginal peoples. In the case of the LPS and Thunder Bay, the local First Nation is Anishinaabe (Ojibwe) and will be the default IK reference in this report. An IK-positive pedagogy or curriculum is an approach to instruction and classroom engagement that respects and creates space for Indigenous knowledge, recognition of the harmful impacts of colonialism and residential schools on Aboriginal peoples, and, advancing an active agenda of reconciliation or “good relations” between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples through education.

Acronyms in this report include the following: Lakehead Public Schools (LPS); Aboriginal education (AE) or Urban Aboriginal education (UAE); Indigenous Knowledge (IK).

Analysis and Findings

For the analysis of the more than 800+ pages (single spaced) of transcripts from the 43 focus groups, a grounded theory method was chosen to assist with thematic groups and identifying patterns in the research and how those patterns fit together to create new meanings. Atlas.Ti (a qualitative software program) was used to assist in coding and organizing the qualitative data and for the creation and organization of the analytical outputs. The coding process was inductive and involved a number of levels of data analysis and group debates within the research team on the constructions of meanings. Employing Atlas.Ti required that we pre-design the codes into themes and sub-themes. These codes have been included in this report as Appendix 1. Atlas.Ti was a particularly useful tool for finding themes that crossed the different stakeholder groups as well as the distinct differences of stories and experiences. The other particularly useful method of Atlas.Ti was its ability to keep track of how much data or how many references were made in a particular category, theme or issue. This form of quantification of data allowed the researchers to figure out the “top” or most reported issues, experiences and successes that the participants voiced. While a specific number or measure is not included in this report, the study reveals those lessons, stories or experiences that will most likely impact other Ontario school boards as they implement their own contextualized version of the UAEP.

In analyzing, interpreting, deciding how voice is represented and writing-up the research, a decolonizing, Indigenous-responsive approach was used. In seeking an understanding of the LPS board’s approach, implementation and successes with the UAEP, the research study has as a primary focus the school board’s overall engagement in Aboriginal education. Given this system-wide focus of the research and the Board’s UAEP, it is not surprising that the findings convey insights into the different stakeholder members’ roles, viewpoints, and perspectives. What became clear is that different stakeholders have different ideas of how much effort, responsibility or action they need to take to address the issue of Aboriginal education or improve Aboriginal student success in the LPS.

The findings that follow for the majority of the report have been organized in such a manner that the reader can 1) quickly view the diversity of perspectives across success stories and recommendations for future UAEP in two tables, and/or, 2) read in greater depth the voices and stories of each stakeholder group represented in stakeholder reports.

UAEP—Success Stories of the LPS

Stakeholder Group	Success Topic 1	Success Topic 2	Success Topic 3
Elementary Teachers	<p>Change Mechanisms -Professional Development raised deep awareness -teaching conditions improved (resources, experts on staff, community partnerships at the school level, coaching by PD facilitators)</p>	<p>Pedagogy -LPS teachers want to learn how to teach Culturally Responsive and IK-positive practices. -Teachers understand the need and conditions for CR-IK pedagogy and its implications for student success.</p>	<p>Responsibility -Teachers want to fulfill their responsibility for improving UAE for Aboriginal students. -They want to feel confident discussing cultures and addressing UAE at a deeper level than token Aboriginal days or events. -Teachers understand that their pedagogy is the gateway for Aboriginal student success.</p>
Secondary Teachers	<p>Responsibility - Secondary teachers want to be responsible for AE and learn how to incorporate IK-positive content in their curriculum, especially in literacy and socials. -S. Teachers want to engage with Aboriginal students and parents or families. They desperately want more success for their students (graduation, credits)</p>	<p>Pedagogy -Secondary teachers want to engage ALL students in IK and cultural discussions. -S. Teachers appreciated all the PD opportunities they received through UAEP and want more subject and school specific PD.</p>	<p>Change Mechanisms -The SATs proved very competent, capable, approachable and effective to each staff. -Teachers appreciated any direct mentorship or coaching they could receive for IK integration and interaction or communication with Aboriginal students. -Teachers want more opportunities for communication and liaisons with parents/community</p>
Administrators	<p>Responsibility -Ready to continue positive planning and agenda setting for student success with Aboriginal advisory councils and communities. - Greater understanding of the needs and challenges</p>	<p>Change mechanisms -Desire to problem-solve for greater access to Native courses for ALL students (academic credits). -Greater accountability, advocacy and</p>	<p>Cultural Awareness -Large learning curve by school administrators of cultural values and IK through UAEP PD and LPS facilitators. - Regular communication and developing relationships with families and communities are critical for student success.</p>

	for remote, Northern students. Recognition for the need of IK integration in classrooms and schools.	communication with families through principal's office.	-Growing recognition of Aboriginal students and families as resources for cultural integration
Non-Aboriginal Students	Relationships -NA students want to improve social cohesion and relationships with their Aboriginal classmates. -Anti-racism strategies are important in classrooms and school yards (common spaces). -NA students want more regular opportunities offered by the schools for cross-cultural socialization (clubs, teams, extra-curricular)	Cultural and IK Awareness -NA students desperately want more cultural knowledge and awareness of both themselves (their own cultures) and Aboriginal (urban, local, regional, Northern).	Pedagogy -NA students want more culturally responsive and IK-positive curriculum. -They want to be taught by schools and teachers how to transition into classes and spaces that are cross/bi-cultural and more representative of Aboriginal culture/IK.
Aboriginal Students	Relationships -Aboriginal students value inclusionary efforts and behaviours by non-Aboriginal teachers and students. -Aboriginal students highly value the SATs, Native counselors and UAS workers for meaningful relationships that go beyond the in-classroom interactions. This is what makes them want to come to school. -Aboriginal students value school opportunities for self-determination (curriculum, courses, extra services)	Change Mechanisms -Aboriginal teachers, role models, community presence are highly valued and effective for students. -Supports for transitioning to urban from community or reserve schools are highly effective and needed. - Native language classes are very important to Aboriginal students (cultural connections, IK positive curriculum, and Aboriginal presence/space as majority)	Pedagogy -Teaching that is IK positive and promotes pride in Aboriginal cultures (cultural identity) is highly valued by Aboriginal students. -Aborig students were very quick and clear in identifying who is a culturally responsive teacher in their schools. -CR non-Aboriginal teachers make meaningful relationships with Aboriginal students/families and are able to discuss Aboriginal history, issues and IK. While resources help, CR pedagogy was the most recognized factor.

<p>Aboriginal Parents and Community</p>	<p>Change Mechanisms -Teacher attitudes and culturally responsive training. -Anti-racism strategies. -Classrooms that represent Aboriginal culture, welcoming to parents/families and a focus on relationships. -Elders, community and parents invited as co-educators in the school.</p>	<p>Positive Relationships between schools and community (institutional level) -Every effort to establish trust, comfort, ownership ... (after the trauma and ongoing legacies of Residential Schools) were highly desired by parents and families.</p>	<p>Supports -Aboriginal teachers and Aboriginal presence in the school (UAS workers, Native counselors) were highly valued by Aboriginal parents/community -Regular communication, inclusion and invitation to community/parents as educational supports -CR and IK-positive curriculum for ALL students (non-Aboriginal students/community are part of the solution)</p>
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UAEP RECOMMENDATIONS from STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

Stakeholder Group	Recommendations
Elementary Teachers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. More integration of IK and Aboriginal content in all subjects, JK-Gr.8 2. More IK-positive authentic learning opportunities (experiential, with community) 3. Institutional support for greater flexibility—less rigidity in covering curriculum, content, EQAOs 4. More Aboriginal teachers, EAs, role models, mentorship, community presence in schools 5. More resources and ongoing PD
Secondary Teachers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. More SATs for specialized liaisons, 1-to-1 support for students, expertise in IK and AE 2. Ongoing PD and more AE/CR experts in each dept 3. School Staff forums to discuss UAE issues and Aboriginal students 4. Improved communication with parents/community 5. Flexibility of content and expand AE course offerings –make accessible/enticing for ALL students
Administrators	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. More money and funds for UAEP programs and staff. 2. Culturally responsive and IK-positive PD for principals and administrators. 3. More community and parental involvement in schools (cultural teaching, IK expertise, volunteers at registration, etc.). 4. More dialogue and planning with parents/community regarding the integration of AE, CR, IK in teaching and their educational values for their children.
Non-Aboriginal Students	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase AE, CR, IK in the curriculum and make specific Aboriginal courses more academically viable and accessible for non-Aboriginal. 2. Increase discussion of cultures, cross-cultural issues, diversity, etc. in all courses/classes. 3. Encourage cross-cultural dialogues and social interactions in social events/clubs/sports/extra-curricular. 4. Rethink transitioning issues and approaches for both

	Aboriginal (remote) students and non-Aboriginal students (into Aboriginal issues).
Aboriginal Students	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase Aboriginal role models and teachers in schools. 2. Increase Aboriginal content and IK-positive approaches in curriculum. 3. Integration of IK and CR teaching in all subjects and grades. 4. Mandatory Aboriginal courses for ALL students. 5. Increase Native Language courses in secondary, and include NL in elementary schools. 6. More targeted supports for Aboriginal students—especially those transitioning from remote communities. 7. Continuing need for lots of teacher PD and improved culturally responsive teaching (and cross-cultural dialogue).
Aboriginal Parents & Community	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Language revitalization is IK-positive and culturally responsive. Increase Native language classes, teachers and community presence in schools. 2. More Aboriginal teachers and staff in schools will increase welcoming environments, IK integration or expertise and be immediate role models. 3. More parental, Elder and community involvement in schools. They are expert educators of IK and culture. 4. More IK in the curriculum, IK-positive pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching for ALL students.

Elementary Teacher Stakeholder Group

How are LPS elementary teachers working to engage in Aboriginal education and Aboriginal issues/knowledge? Where are they currently in terms of their active engagement in teaching Aboriginal students (and connecting with Aboriginal community)?

Description of Stakeholder Group

The elementary teacher stakeholder group in this qualitative phase of the UAEP study was comprised of Grade 5 teachers, Grade 7 teachers and assorted grade-level elementary teachers (Kindergarten to Grade 8). Overall, eighteen elementary teachers participated in the Urban Aboriginal Education Project (UAEP) focus groups. Six focus group sessions were held in total: two focus groups for Grade 5 teachers; two focus groups for Grade 7 teachers; and, two focus groups of mixed levels. Four of the six elementary teacher focus groups, the two Grade 5 teacher sessions and the two Grade 7 teacher sessions, were directly organized to coincide with the mandatory district wide, grade-based professional development (PD) workshops facilitated by the Lakehead Public Schools' UAEP facilitators. The other two focus groups included an assortment of elementary teachers, who had participated in UAEP programs and PD the previous school year (2008-2009) and were invited by email to attend a special evening session, conducted as a dinner and sharing circle. All focus group teachers self-selected themselves as volunteers for the UAEP research.

The findings from these six elementary teacher focus groups are presented below and organized into five sections: 1. The UAEP programs, 2. General overview of elementary teacher experiences and perceptions of Aboriginal education in the LPS, 3. Key UAEP issues or topics for elementary teachers, 4. Recommendations, and 5. Limitations.

1. UAEP Programs

Elementary teachers were aware of the Urban Aboriginal Education Project as they provided many comments about particular programs and program components that stem directly from the UAEP initiative. Some of the teachers understood the general purpose of the UAEP was to create strategies province-wide to foster school board engagement in Aboriginal education. Most of the elementary teachers provided information about specific aspects of the UAEP program including funding. Various specific strategies mentioned included: Professional Development: Aboriginal Cultural Awareness; Welcoming Environments: Connecting for Success in the schools; Aboriginal Transition: Aboriginal Student Supports; Aboriginal Role Models/Cultural Programming; Aboriginal Mentorship: Aboriginal Student Supports, and the First Peoples Resource Collection. Many teachers discussed the success of the First Nations Resource Kit¹ which was created and distributed to teachers in 2008.

¹ Elementary teachers referred to the UAEP purchased Resource Baskets as First Nations Kits. The UAEP research team understands the correct term for these kits to be resource baskets. Teachers described the

2. General Landscape of the Elementary Teachers Stakeholder Group

A review of the focus group transcript data collected suggests that overall, elementary teachers were positive about the ability of UAEP-delivered grade-based professional development to enhance their engagement in Aboriginal education. Teachers cited knowledge about Aboriginal history, culture, and current issues, as well as resources aimed at making their teaching more culturally responsive, as the most important aspects of professional development workshops. Similarly, teachers reported that interacting with members of the Aboriginal community was extremely important in adapting their teaching practices to be more culturally responsive in order to promote the engagement of Aboriginal students in their classrooms.

Generally, elementary teachers were concerned that their own lack of Indigenous knowledge (IK) prevented them from incorporating Aboriginal content, worldviews, and issues into their teaching practices. Furthermore, teachers reported that their engagement in Aboriginal education was limited by their lack of access to teaching tools and individualized mentorship (coaching) related to Aboriginal education. Teachers stated that resources were often unavailable or available in quantities that were not sufficient for use in classes with large numbers of students. They also stated that frequently they felt as though they were not yet adequately trained or coached to utilize Aboriginal education resources to their fullest potential in their own teaching.

3. Key Issues

The key issues/themes that received the most comments from elementary teachers, in descending order, were: a. Change mechanisms, b. Pedagogy, involving teachers' knowledge, awareness and relationships, c. Responsibility, and d. Supports. Elementary teachers also provided many recommendations for the improvement of Aboriginal education and Aboriginal student success, such as teacher professional development (PD), continued communication with Aboriginal community members and Aboriginal agencies (partners), as well as the provision of classroom supports, among others.

3a. Change Mechanisms

Most of the teachers' comments that pertained to change mechanisms highlighted how current teaching conditions, personal understandings, and non-Aboriginal student readiness could both improve or limit their capacity to engage in culturally responsive pedagogy.

Teachers' comments about teaching conditions that were barriers to change included a variety of issues that were systemic, such as the following: (a) an insufficient number of culturally appropriate classroom resources, (e.g., textbooks that exemplify Aboriginal Canadian history, and fiction books that illustrate Aboriginal culture and include Aboriginal characters, (b) a lack of technology in the classroom (e.g., computers

collections as resources that provided them a variety of materials and Aboriginal cultural artefacts for use in the classroom.

and Smart boards), as a means of accessing culturally inclusive materials through the internet, (c) a lack of classroom personnel (staffing) for Aboriginal student support such as English Language Learners specialists or Educational Assistants (EAs), (d) the current curriculum was perceived as too rigid or prescribed and a lack of extra or flexible time in the timetable for authentic learning tasks, (e) large class sizes were perceived as limiting teachers' ability to provide the one-on-one attention to individual students, as were teaching split grade classes.

Besides barriers within classroom or school conditions, teachers' also provided comments that exhibited various personal or intrapersonal challenges they were struggling to overcome. Teachers discussed their own personal issues as well as those of colleagues which acted as barriers for culturally inclusive teaching practices. Select teachers made comments which suggested that they were still coming to terms with their own inter-generational racist upbringings or legacies. For example:

... the first time you're confronted with "you're a racist" or "you were raised a racist", "your family's racist and you are a racist" – it is very difficult to come to terms with that.

The following comments illustrate one teacher's personal struggle to overcome those barriers:

If my grandfather knew that I was sitting in on this thing [PD], he'd probably would be laughing because from my dad and my grandpa, this is the biggest waste of tax payers' dollars kind of thing. So I have to remember saying they're not//what is their culture? I gotta be careful too as a teacher cause it's not the same as what my dad or I tell my dad what happened at school. And it's, "You just grab that kid and haul him down to the office." "Dad, you can't do that." "What do you mean you can't do that?" "It doesn't happen." "I would have hauled you down there." [inaudible]. But I've gotta be careful too cause I say, "What's with this kid?" I can't, "Why is he not?" and voices of my dad and grandpa in the back of my mind saying "You've gotta haul this kid off." I was raised that way too, so anyways....

The same teacher stated the following in a later focus group session, when asked if they believed the first step to improving Aboriginal education in the LPS board was by adding Aboriginal content to the curriculum:

I teach from a White perspective, that's all I know. Um, so yes, but then sometimes, ... yeah, there's my grandpa coming out and the same with my father-in-law. [He/They] will say, "Do you have white kids in your class too?" "Why is this such a focus?" "There's non-Aboriginal kids in your class, what about them?" And ten years from now, they're going to say "Oh, we've been teaching too much Aboriginal. What about the white kids, what about the Polish kids, what about the Scottish kids, what about the Cuban kids, what do you do?"

The above comments suggest that although teachers may have grown up in families that exhibited ethno- or Euro-centric attitudes and racism towards Aboriginal

peoples, some teachers are clearly reflecting on those past experiences and are questioning those beliefs. It appears clear that the UAEP inservices are causing teachers to pause and reflect on who they are and what impacts they have on their Aboriginal students. The UAEP professional development programs have heightened teachers' awareness to the point that many do not want to bring these biases, assumptions or racist attitudes into their teaching practices and are actively questioning what they have been doing or practising.

Teachers also reported colleagues' entrenched positions as a social barrier of culturally responsive teaching practices. The FG teachers stated that they have observed other teachers on their staffs exhibiting defensive postures, rigidity or exclusivity in their teaching styles due to their frustrations and perceptions about Aboriginal students' lack of engagement in the classroom. The following comment from one teacher suggests that some teachers may be unknowingly taking the position of "the perfect stranger"² – a stance that seeks to do no harm or absolve any responsibility in the matter by avoiding interactions or relationships with Aboriginal students:

I'm constantly taken aback at how there are many Canadians, non-Aboriginals, who want to say, "Uh-uh, not my responsibility. I am not going to take any part in sort of addressing this. I prefer to remain what I call, or what Susan Dion refers to as, the Perfect Stranger - "Don't know any Aboriginal peoples, don't know anything about Aboriginal culture and knowledge, not going to learn any or anything because it's not my culture...I don't want to make any mistakes, so I'm going to remain the perfect, polite, neutral stranger...and just wash my hands of it." The problem is, if you avoid this, you do just as much damage.

The Perfect Stranger that you referred to, that's certainly quite common and the other attitude of, "I'm here to teach, pick your subject, and if you come to class and you try, then I can work with those students. But, if they come and they won't engage, then you know what? There's only so much I can do. I can't do anything about that." Heaven forbid you would change your teaching style to maybe draw them in, you know. [murmurs of agreement from multiple other participants] And it's a defensive posture, I get it. And it's a frustrated posture of, "I'm trying everything here and this kid won't engage, or these kids won't engage and what else can I do?" And it's a posture that comes from... they [teachers] really don't know what to do next.

The following teacher's comment suggests that non-Aboriginal teachers perceive other teachers' racist attitudes impacting the valuing of every student's potential to learn, which also contributes to other teachers' demoralization. This teacher understood the

² This is a reference to Dion's term for individuals who assume the position of "Perfect Stranger" in relation to Aboriginal peoples. "It is informed simultaneously by what teachers know, what they do not know, and what they refuse to know. It is, for many, a response to recognising that what they know is premised on a range of experiences with stereotypical representations." (Dion, 2007, p.331)

damage of these unresponsive or racist teachers as a disservice to children and teaching as a calling or important service.

There shouldn't be any racists... and that the children... or ethnocentrics, if that's the word...and that children should be the great hope for all of us. And it's been very, very disappointing to understand that not everyone thinks that way who is in teaching. It's been demoralizing.

The above comments convey some of the internal struggles of elementary teachers as they work through their own personal issues, such as those stemming from inter-generational racism and family or community Whiteness. The UAEP professional development has been effective and successful in raising deep issues for many non-Aboriginal elementary teachers. The complex issues presented in these teachers' comments signifies both the contribution of the UAEP PD as well as the ongoing need for additional support for teachers (e.g., professional development, mentorship, coaching, PLCs or teacher forums), as they work towards cultural awareness in the classroom.

Teachers also made many comments depicting barriers, such as school culture and lack of accountability, which they felt prevented Aboriginal student learning and engagement in classroom activities. For example, one teacher reported that the school culture in another school was not successful at integrating Aboriginal students, or creating an atmosphere conducive to ensuring Aboriginal student success because the teachers did not share in the responsibility for their student's learning:

The school culture was not successful at integrating Aboriginal students and there were many more of them. The Aboriginal students in that school were the ones that were having the most difficulty. They were the ones that were having behavioural issues and when people would sit down and talk about it, that would come up again and again. "It's all these Aboriginal kids - it's their issue - it's their problem..."

A few teachers brought up the issue of accountability and the lack of ministerial supports available for ensuring Aboriginal student success on EQAO provincial assessments. Fellow teachers' also pointed out several barriers that they were dealing with which prevented their success, such as the following: their Aboriginal students not having the opportunity for authentic cultural learning, and a lack of time, money, and teacher training. The following four teachers illustrate such concerns:

- Teacher #1: *Right, cause if the kid's not getting authentic learning, we are not giving them what they need...our mandate as teaching should be taking a kid from where they are and moving them no matter where they are. We are unable to do that...our hands are tied [with EQAOs]...*
- Teachers #6: *It's interesting because indeed we have seen progress in some schools. Some schools who have the time and the money to focus on that, their [EQAO] scores have gone up. So that's what we hear about is their scores have gone up...where are yours...well our scores are still there.*

- Teacher #4: *But they've got the time and the money....and the training...*
- Teacher #1: *This still doesn't speak to all the kids, the Aboriginal kids throughout Canada who are still unsuccessful. They have the highest rate of not being successful...are we addressing that? Is EQAO doing anything about that? Absolutely not.*

Some teachers reported their perceptions that social and academic engagement was difficult for urban Aboriginal students whose families tended to frequently relocate, as well as for students in transition from remote communities. Others perceived barriers that were connected to Aboriginal students' absenteeism. For example:

...from what I've seen in our school, a big challenge is just getting students in the doors - attendance of the Aboriginal students is a big thing.

Many of the FG teachers perceived that some Aboriginal students were dealing with larger systemic and social barriers such as poverty, which was understood as hindrance or barrier for having the necessary learning tools (e.g., computers at home) to succeed academically.

XXX [teacher colleague, name removed] was talking about how to get people involved, the absenteeism - yeah it's hard. It's very difficult to separate out the Aboriginal culture and the culture of poverty, because so many Aboriginal people are living in poverty in Northwestern Ontario.

Teachers also discussed the statistics presented in the UAEP professional development (PD) workshops as eye-openers to the gap or schism of social resources between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students:

And the results present a lot of information, and one of the things it said was 80% of our [Aboriginal] students don't have home computers. So, right from the get-go, they get one period a week [in school] and they are not on the same playing field anymore - They are not there so ... I don't know [what we are supposed to do].

The above comment may suggest that some teachers are frustrated with the social disadvantages that some Aboriginal students may experience at home as well as in their learning at school. It may also imply that there is a need for more intensive in-service and teacher development on issues of poverty and social barriers.

Some FG teachers presented negative perceptions about the possibility for change in Aboriginal education, which may be due to their first comprehension of the real social challenges and residential school legacies that are impacting their Aboriginal students. Some teachers were also very vocal in their uncertainty of how to address or resolve these challenges. There were comments that depicted teacher feelings of helplessness or of being "stuck", which may further separate teachers from their clear desire of working towards cultural awareness and improved culturally responsive teaching. The LPS-UAEP programs have accomplished an important stage of raising teachers' awareness and making them attuned to the wider range of Aboriginal student needs. The ongoing

realization by elementary teachers of barriers in Aboriginal education warrants acknowledgement and further problem-solving in future UAEP.

3b. Pedagogy: Teacher Knowledge, Awareness, & Relationships

The theme that received the second most comments from elementary teachers was pedagogy, which involved: positive Indigenous knowledge (IK), cultural awareness, positive pedagogy and relationships.

Positive cultural and Indigenous knowledge

According to elementary teacher focus groups, most teachers had become more knowledgeable about Aboriginal history, culture, and current issues through the UAEP professional development workshops and training. Moreover, most elementary focus group teachers were aware of specific areas within the curriculum as well as particular Ontario Ministry of Education initiatives (e.g. Character Development) where Indigenous knowledge or culture could be incorporated into their lesson plans. The LPS professional development series through the UAEP funding were highly successful in this topic.

Cultural awareness

Similarly, the findings from the focus groups reveal that many elementary teachers were working towards increasing their awareness of Aboriginal culture and Indigenous knowledge (IK) as well as recognizing their own personal cultural positions in an attempt to converge multiple worldviews, perspectives, and values within their classrooms. Teachers reported that the majority of ways they are learning about Aboriginal culture and knowledge are from the UAEP professional development, by forming or experiencing partnerships with Aboriginal community members and organizations, from their Aboriginal students, and through experiential outdoor learning in and around Thunder Bay. In a discussion about learning Indigenous knowledge (IK), one elementary teacher stated,

I too feel I'm definitely a learner. I don't really know what my role is. All I know is that I want to learn, not only from Elders and [Aboriginal] people who have more knowledge than I do, but also from my students. I think they're a huge resource for us to learn from ... just more about where they come from and who they are as people, as very little people in my case. I also need to learn more about myself and my family.

Through the UAEP professional development sessions, many teachers began exploring their own family histories and cultural positions, while recognizing the unique role Aboriginal peoples have played in shaping the history of Canada. In some cases, this understanding resulted in teachers modifying Eurocentric classroom structures and practices to include sharing/talking circles, restorative circles, and authentic community projects. On this issue, one elementary teacher responded,

What we identify as Canadian and so much of who we are, what we do and even where our cities and towns are in this country and what resources we use and for

what [agreement by other teachers]... and where they go and everything, has so much to do with the ties that the first Europeans formed with the Aboriginal people here. I think there is a special indebtedness to that culture and perhaps that culture does deserve treatment different from more recent immigrant cultures that have come into Canada.

Positive pedagogy and relationships.

Most of the UAEP elementary teachers reported that they were adapting their teaching practices to become more culturally responsive in order to positively engage Aboriginal students in their classrooms. The most common strategies currently employed by elementary teachers and directly related to the UAEP funding were the following: inviting Aboriginal community members (e.g. Elders, artists) into their classrooms, weaving Aboriginal content into a variety of curricular subjects and areas (e.g. “cultural projects” that encourage students to trace their ancestry), participating in field trips and celebrations that enhance students’ awareness of Aboriginal knowledge, and forming partnerships with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal colleagues to develop teaching resources. Elementary teachers who were employing more culturally responsive pedagogies reported that positive relationships were being formed with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students as a result. The following quotation demonstrates how a partnership formed between an elementary teacher and an Aboriginal student teacher enhanced Aboriginal student learning and resulted in positive student-teacher relationships:

- *Teacher #1: She [Aboriginal student teacher] just has naturally incorporated the aspects of her culture into a lot of her lessons. And it’s been really fun for me to watch and to actually see that coming from somebody whose culture it is and to see how my Aboriginal students are responding to her.*
- *Interviewer: Wow, so they are responding to her?*
- *Teacher #1: Absolutely. Yep!*

Negative knowledge.

Despite the many positive steps being taken by many elementary teachers, some of the focus group elementary teachers reported hearing racist comments about Aboriginal peoples made by their colleagues and in their staff rooms or school environments. Some teachers also reported being uninterested in one component of the UAEP-delivered professional development (i.e. a presentation on statistics reported in the Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy and Framework). A couple of the FG teachers stated that the statistical data presented were common knowledge and acquiring this information did not contribute to their professional growth. It was almost as though these teachers felt lectured and burdened with a large responsibility that they were not yet equipped to fight against. Yet, these same teachers did acknowledge that an absence of knowledge about Aboriginal culture, history, and issues would result in cultural non-awareness and poor teaching.

Cultural non-awareness.

Some teachers did not understand why a greater emphasis was being placed on Aboriginal education rather than on incorporating aspects of all regionally represented cultures. On this topic, an elementary teacher responded,

I understand that we need to integrate, but don't we need to integrate all cultures? We have many cultures, especially in this area, we have tons.

Further, some teachers who taught in elementary schools with low Aboriginal student populations felt less responsible for engaging in Aboriginal education than if they taught in an elementary school that had a high population of Aboriginal students. In the following quotation, one elementary teacher who worked at an elementary school with a low Aboriginal student population, shared a comment made by a teaching colleague,

Because I don't teach any Native students, I don't have to worry about Native culture or cultural practices in my classroom. I don't need to worry about differentiation or anything else.

The attitude displayed in the above quote reflected the way that some non-Aboriginal teachers in low Aboriginal demographic schools may approach Aboriginal content in their pedagogical practices. It also demonstrates how a non-Aboriginal teacher perception remains that urban Aboriginal education is contentious and hard work whereas a regular Euro-centric approach is easier and worry free. While the UAEP programs in the LPS have had a significant impact on elementary teacher training, there remains a significant amount of teacher education that needs to continue.

Negative pedagogy and relationships.

According to the elementary teacher focus groups, two major obstacles still exist in making pedagogical shifts towards culturally responsive teaching practices, and as a result, some teachers were reluctant to teach about Aboriginal cultures in their classrooms or discuss contemporary Aboriginal issues. Firstly, some teachers did not feel entitled to teach about Aboriginal history, culture or issues due to a (professed) lack of knowledge about these topics. The research team also noted that a couple of the FG teachers who made statements about a lack of knowledge were also absolving themselves of responsibility for seeking out learning opportunities, by identifying and locating themselves with another culture. In an FG discussion about engaging in Aboriginal education, one elementary teacher stated,

I have a different cultural background. I'm not opposed to learning different cultures. I love all cultures. However, I don't think we are doing them [Aboriginal students] a service, by myself, with a Polish-French background to be teaching something that I just barely understand, because I'm not immersed within that culture.

Secondly, some elementary teachers had difficulty engaging in Aboriginal education because they were afraid of presenting Aboriginal knowledge incorrectly.

Some teachers were also fearful of introducing topics (e.g. racism, taxation, treaty rights) that had the potential to make both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students feel uncomfortable. One elementary teacher shared their fear about using “proper” terminology when teaching about the history of Aboriginal peoples or discussing Aboriginal issues. They did not know what was the “correct” term, Native, Aboriginal, First Nations, etc.

I feel like I'm walking on eggshells sometimes. I don't want to upset a culture and I worry that I might and I won't even know that I've done it.

It is also interesting to note how this teacher then discussed in their FG the fear of judgemental Aboriginal students and legal retaliation by irate Aboriginal parents. In this case, it was evident that a couple of teachers were almost paralyzed by fear of making a cultural mistake.

3c. Responsibility

Responsibility was the theme that received the third most comments from elementary teachers. In most cases, elementary teachers provided comments illustrating how non-Aboriginal peoples is the group most responsible for addressing the issue of poor academic performance and lack of school success by Aboriginal students. Some teachers also commented that a lack of responsibility on the part of various LPS stakeholders (administrators, EAs, Ministry curriculum) was perceived as barriers for change and improvement. There were also a few other comments by the teachers depicting Aboriginal peoples and families as sharing in that responsibility to change and improve Aboriginal education. It is clear that the UAEP professional development and in-service has had a significant impact on non-Aboriginal elementary teachers' perceptions that they have a clear responsibility in urban Aboriginal education.

Elementary teachers made a multitude of statements which conveyed their efforts to take responsibility for ensuring Aboriginal student success and building of cultural awareness within the classroom. Teachers reported that they were working to accomplish the following: 1. ensuring that Aboriginal culture was included in their curriculum and integrated with other subjects (e.g., science and social studies); 2. making certain that Aboriginal literacy resources were incorporated into classroom learning and activities; 3. attempting to make partnerships with community agencies in order to engage with the Aboriginal community through the inclusion of Aboriginal guest speakers, Aboriginal artists, and other role models; 4. trying to spend more time with Aboriginal students, who were sometimes in transition, in order to reduce any grade-gaps or challenges with oral languages or literacy.

Of the comments illustrating non-Aboriginal peoples as responsible, many teachers stated that the bigger responsibility for systemic change in the school or across the board was for administration and the school board to work towards. In general, teachers' comments depicted the school board as having the authority and means of creating change within Ministry mandated curriculum, assessment, professional development, budget allocation, and administrative development. Teachers questioned why there had not been any professional development opportunities on the topic of

cultural awareness and Aboriginal culture prior to 2008 (or prior to the UAEP funding). Teachers emphasized that consistent professional development (PD) opportunities for all teachers (e.g., specifically K through 8) were necessary to ensure board-wide change with teachers. Other teachers reported that those in administration should receive more professional development (PD) on Aboriginal culture and cultural awareness in order to become leaders in Aboriginal education.

Before we can have success, we first have to educate the teachers because the teachers are in fact working there [in Aboriginal contexts]. But, even before that, we have to educate the administration and they have to learn that okay, it's funds. But okay, even though it's funds, there's a whole bunch of culture that they have to learn in order to pass it down [to teachers and students].

Some FG teachers also stated that Aboriginal peoples share the responsibility for building cultural awareness. Some elementary teachers perceived the problem of student absenteeism and completion of classroom work as the primary responsibility of Aboriginal students and their families. For example, one teacher's perception about the responsibility for student attendance is illustrated by the following comment:

It's unrealistic, it's a disservice [to put pressure to succeed academically] to Aboriginal kids whose attendance is poor. But, I can't fight years of the fact that these kids parents maybe didn't put a lot of stock in education. Or, you know, don't seem to be too concerned that their child gets to school each day.

There were a few comments in the focus groups which depicted Aboriginal people as generously taking responsibility for educating non-Aboriginals by sharing their knowledge of Aboriginal culture. Teachers reported that they greatly appreciated when Aboriginal students and community members took part in classroom activities to help non-Aboriginal teachers and students to understand and learn about Aboriginal cultures. The following comment suggests that although teachers have learned to be more appreciative of the Indigenous knowledge (IK) shared by community members through the UAEP, teachers would still like to learn more. There is still more teacher education that needs to be done to ensure IK positive integration and culturally responsive teaching in the majority of LPS classrooms:

We have the same after-school program [UAS youth outreach partnership] and little bits of it come in mostly in terms of Powwows, Jingle Dancers and Sash Dancers and so on and some boys who are in drumming... but not a lot of in-depth knowledge it seems.

Teachers realized that there were knowledge holders of positive Indigenous knowledge in their schools, an important resource, but they want to learn and integrate deeper stronger IK in their classrooms and their own understandings.

3d. Supports

The elementary teachers provided various comments about supports which had helped change either their own or their school's engagement in Aboriginal education. Teachers named the UAEP funded professional development facilitators and various community members through partnerships as the best supports for improving their engagement. Community members included Aboriginal artists teaching sash dancing or jigging, cultural instructors who taught the creation of cultural artefacts (e.g., dream catchers, Inukshuks), and role models such as Elders and other Aboriginal specialists involved in drumming or Powwows. For example, one teacher stated that Aboriginal artists were the key facilitators for raising their awareness about teaching Aboriginal culture:

I was a grade 7 teacher last year so I could participate with Learning through the Arts [LTTA], working with a Métis woman.... bringing dance into the classroom, so we all had a little bit of Aboriginal teaching that way.

Teachers reported that community agencies also facilitated positive learning opportunities for students. Partnerships with community agencies that were brought up in the focus groups by teachers included those with: Old Fort William for experiential education, Red Cross for Breakfast programs, and the Children's Centre of Thunder Bay (CCTB) for counselling and mental health.

... one of our smart goals is to engage our community and so anytime we are doing any of this, it broadens what we are doing. And, over the last couple of years, we had just the connections that we can make and the connection with CCTB. So all of the partnerships that we are making[in Aboriginal education] really helps with our engagement with the community.

Teachers mentioned a variety of types of professional development (PD) as contributing to significant teachers' change in engagement, such as the following: UAEP workshops that had been offered since 2008, the receipt of classroom print-based resources related to Aboriginal education, and reading various books and articles authored by Aboriginal writers were also viewed as supports for change. Teachers stated that receiving in-service and implementation information about the First Nations Resource Baskets was also very supportive.

Aboriginal community support workers such as the Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS) outreachworkers were also commented upon by the elementary teachers as very important facilitators of cultural awareness within the school and of building relationships with Aboriginal students and families. One teacher stated the following about the UAS outreach worker at their school, who was able to provide much knowledge about Aboriginal culture to their student teacher and their class:

...[the student teacher—name removed] and her partner were doing structures before Christmas and they had the kids build teepees but they didn't have any knowledge about them...and wigwams. So we asked XXX [name removed], who is the Urban Aboriginal person on our staff [UAS outreach worker], to come in and

he was able to fill that need... And he came in and talked to the kids about, you know, this is what Wigwams are and this is what a teepee is. This is what they traditionally would use here...so that was really helpful too. But, again, we have the benefit of having that expertise knowledge there [in the school's UAS outreach worker].

Lastly, a few teachers stated that research grants were also helpful for “getting things going” or engaging in the issues of Aboriginal education. For example:

A big part of it [successful Aboriginal education] is having a huge chunk of grant money tied with it like all or you and the research. So we can actually get some money and get some things happening [in urban Aboriginal education].

4. Recommendations

4a. Recommendations from Teachers

The elementary teachers made many recommendations that they perceived were a continuation of building more cultural awareness amongst non-Aboriginal students and educators, and that this awareness would support more Aboriginal student success. Most teachers recommended integrating Aboriginal curriculum and Indigenous knowledge throughout the elementary grades (e.g., JK to 8) on a regular basis to promote acceptance by the non-Aboriginal students and community. Teachers also recommended the opportunity for more authentic learning activities (e.g., trips into the community, experiential learning outdoors, hands-on) by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Teachers stated that these type of learning activities would require more time and flexibility in school schedules and the mandated curriculum. Finally, teachers stated that they would prefer constancy in their own teaching positions (e.g., grade levels and schools) in order to build positive relationships over time with Aboriginal students and families in the school community.

Most of the elementary teachers also recommended more professional development (PD), similar to the inservice they had received through UAEP, for all teachers, regardless of grade level or subject specialization. Teachers stated that they thought PD should be consistently offered and that teachers of JK through grade 8 should be invited (and even required) to attend, in order to make a larger impact within schools. Some of the suggested topics for further PD included a thorough presentation of teaching strategies, more information on Indigenous knowledge (e.g., the Seven Grandfather Teachings and the Medicine Wheel's four Rs –respect, relationships, reciprocity and responsibility), more integration of IK in other ministry mandated curriculum such as character development, more training on how to use Aboriginal artefacts and tools for teaching, and more training on anti-racism and cultural sensitivity. Teachers also stated that they wanted to be able to communicate openly with administration about teacher and student needs and that student success should be reconsidered in order to move towards a more culturally responsive pedagogy. While teachers understood that academic success and measures on EQAOs were required, they wanted greater flexibility to address

cultural identity and community transition before placing pressure on Aboriginal students for performance.

Teachers made recommendations to include more Aboriginal educators and role models in their schools to support Aboriginal student cultural identity and student academic achievement. Some teachers reported the critical need to have more Aboriginal teachers, educational assistants, and other staff with Indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage. Other teachers stated that hiring teachers with experience in working with First Nations people or knowledge of Aboriginal cultures would also contribute to building cultural awareness within the school community and integrating IK in pedagogy. Teachers recommended starting a community volunteer program where community members can visit classrooms and schools on a regular basis. Teachers reported that their experiences with community members through UAEP programs helped significantly to enrich student learning on a variety of topics related to Indigenous knowledge and Aboriginal cultures.

Finally, teachers made recommendations for the provision of more resources and print-based materials such as multiple classroom copies of picture books with Aboriginal characters and fiction books including Aboriginal culture, all authored by Aboriginal writers or illustrators. Teachers also recommended having greater access to technology in the classroom, in the form of smart boards and computers, in order to integrate other culturally relevant resources for student learning.

4b. Recommendations by the UAEP Research Team

Based on a review of the data, the following recommendations regarding program development of future UAEP for elementary teachers are suggested by the UAEP Research Team:

- 1) Continue ongoing support, financing, facilitators, and professional development opportunities for elementary teachers to engage/explore/discuss and learn about culturally responsive teaching practices that address cultural awareness, decolonizing processes, Indigenous knowledge integration and Aboriginal education.
- 2) Increase the number of Aboriginal peoples in schools by (1) hiring more Aboriginal teachers, administrators and staff and (2) inviting Aboriginal role models from the community into the schools on a regular basis (i.e., for regular classroom curriculum, rather than simply for special events).
- 3) Continue ongoing support/finance for educational research on the topic of culturally responsive pedagogy by teachers, schools and in collaboration with experts in the field.

Limitations to the research:

5. Elementary Teacher Data Limitations

Limitations of the collected information about the elementary teacher stakeholder group include:

- (1) The majority of elementary teachers interviewed were Grade 5 and Grade 7 teachers respectively, with the inclusion of a few teachers from other grades. As a result, the data is most reflective of the views of 25 self-selected junior and intermediate teachers in the LPS.
- (2) There may be a chance that some teachers' opinions and views were more strongly represented than other teachers' because some teachers participated in more than one focus group session.
- (3) Social desirability, the desire to respond in a manner that will be viewed favourably by others (e.g. teachers, researchers, other administrators), may have influenced teachers' responses to the interview questions or may have influenced their silence.

Secondary Teachers Stakeholder Group

**How are LPS secondary teachers working to engage in Aboriginal education?
Where are secondary teachers currently (after 2 years of UAEP programs) in their perceptions and active engagement in teaching Aboriginal students?**

Description of Stakeholder Group

The findings presented in this section of the report are based on 10 focus group meetings conducted with approximately 60 secondary school teachers. Most focus group meetings were conducted during participants' lunch hour and lasted an average of 40 minutes. Focus group facilitators provided participants with verbal explanation of the UAEP project and the purpose of conducting the focus group meetings which lasted 10 minutes. Six (6/10) focus group meetings coincided or were directly tied with district-wide, professional development workshops of the UAEP. These six workshops were conducted at the Lakehead Public School Board offices. The other four focus group sessions were conducted at the teachers' own secondary schools, surrounded by colleagues such as SATs and other departmental teachers.

The findings presented below are divided into four sections: 1) UAEP programs and resources identified by the secondary school teachers; 2) general overview of comments of this stakeholder group; 3) key issues; 4) recommendations to improve the UAEP by the secondary teachers.

1. UAEP Programs

Overall, secondary teachers feel very positive about the implementation of different programs and resources developed as a result of the UAEP funding. According to participants, the main reason for their positive reception is that they have attended professional development sessions organized by the UAEP where they have become more knowledgeable about Aboriginal cultures, content, IK, and current issues. Secondary teachers appreciated learning more about this critical topic of Aboriginal education and growing demographic of Aboriginal students entering their classrooms:

*I think that the UAEP sessions have done a lot, especially... XXX [teacher colleague – *name removed] and I were at the same school last year and we collaborated a lot on those lesson plans – not just the two of us but we had our*

school request if we could send extra teachers to the [PD] session, I guess because our school has such a high Aboriginal population. And it's just not new teachers, it was a lot of teachers. So I think that's really good. It's showing that people are open and it's giving us access to resources that we otherwise wouldn't know how to find, including people in the community – guest speakers and things like that.

The two main successful components of the UAEP cited by the majority of secondary teachers participants were a) the positive impact of having Special Assignment Teachers (SATs) in their schools; and b) the UAEP professional development workshops. According to the secondary teachers (especially the school located focus groups), SATs are their liaison to Aboriginal families, community, experts in Aboriginal cultures, local events and LPS Aboriginal education initiatives, including the UAEP. Many secondary teachers participants stated that it was the SATs who have helped them begin to understand Aboriginal cultures and current issues in greater depth. Two FG participants' comments illustrate the important role that the SATs have had in their high schools:

- *I've had experience with just, you know, part of the curriculum being on Aboriginal issues and asking the SAT if there is anything that's coming up and, you know what? Of course she had [already] a speaker coming [into the school] and our class attended.*
- *I think the role of the SAT here in the school is to raise awareness of everybody here in the school and I think that makes Aboriginal students feel more proud of who they are. You have guest speakers in and that was great for everybody.*

One secondary school teacher placed an emphasis on the importance of bringing secondary teachers together to discuss Aboriginal education issues regularly, including discussing Aboriginal students. For example, this teacher considered that the focus group sessions conducted in the research study provided a type of discussion forum to make teachers aware of the ways Aboriginal students' cultures and identities impacted their stances towards schooling and educational values. Further, this participant considered that although the process towards improving Aboriginal education in the LPS still had a significant way to go, every step forward made was important and worth noting:

*It's things like these [UAEP sessions] that totally make a difference. In this whole process [of Aboriginal education in Canada], there has been so much damage done that it can't be fixed overnight. So, it's baby steps. Everything we do is baby steps. When I worked at XXX [*school name removed], some people would laugh and say: Oh, you had 13 graduates this year. Well, you know what? That's 13*

*more than graduated last year and all it takes is a little more [effort, attention].
Thank you for inviting us to be involved in this [research focus group].*

As demonstrated by the previous statements, most secondary teachers demonstrated awareness and understandings of the UAEP's purpose in the LPS secondary schools. The following section provides a general overview of this stakeholder's group position in the implementation of UAEP programs based on a review and analysis of the secondary teacher focus group data.

2. General overview of perceptions and positions of secondary teachers in the LPS

An analysis and review of the focus group transcript data shows that many of the secondary teacher participants are positively engaged in Aboriginal education in the LPS through the efforts and programs of the UAEP.

3. Key Issues

Based on a review of the secondary teachers' focus groups data and transcripts, the following key issues emerged: a) cultural awareness and positive perceptions of Indigenous knowledge (IK); b) negative relationships and deficit perceptions (racism and anti-racism); c) responsibility for Aboriginal education.

3a. Cultural Awareness and Positive Indigenous Knowledge

The transcript data suggests that these teachers have been actively reflecting on their own assumptions and cultural positions while striving towards a greater understanding of Aboriginal perspectives. For example, one secondary teacher stated:

I had the opportunity...to bring an Elder in, to work with this group of students...At the first meeting with the Elder, it was a little bit like having the tables turned on you...I realized quickly that I needed to shut up and listen because I really didn't know...there was something going on there – something about the way people were communicating or getting ready to communicate that I didn't know.

This teacher indicates an acknowledgement of the shift in power of knowledge holders when it comes to Aboriginal culture and education. The secondary teacher also realized that the Elder had Indigenous knowledge that was distinct, important and communicated in a manner that they were not accustomed to or outside a Eurocentric set of practices.

Many secondary teacher participants stated that they have attended the UAEP Aboriginal-focused PD workshops; sought appropriate and relevant educational resources for Aboriginal students; benefited from Aboriginal artists, musicians, Elders, or guest

speakers who have presented in their schools or classrooms; put greater attention towards the idea of creating welcoming environments; and, want to enhance Aboriginal students' sense of belonging in their classrooms. All of these efforts and awareness demonstrate the gains by the UAEP with this stakeholder group. For example, one secondary teacher stated how they have changed their teaching and taken responsibility for Aboriginal education (AE) in response to the UAEP workshops and the LPS focus on AE:

Where I find I am supporting the Aboriginal students in my classroom is being there for them, listening to them. It's not what we teach, it's how we treat each other, and I think they see the difference. I think that the best thing we can do for our students is build those relationships with them as well as incorporate culture.

3b. Negative Relationships and Deficit Perceptions (Racism and Anti-racism)

Some of the secondary teacher participants have gained enough confidence to engage their students in discussions of Aboriginal history and issues in attempts to increase all students' awareness (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) of the resulting social impacts. Some secondary teachers commented on the racist remarks that surfaced from non-Aboriginal students in their classrooms during these discussions.

When we were discussing Aboriginal issues, there was a lot of racism that came out. And they don't know they're being racist. Like these kids didn't understand that thinking things could mean that you're racist and these are bright kids. And they honestly didn't understand what they were doing and saying and...it's still racism, you know.

A few secondary teachers were able to respond to this racism by spending more time on the issue in attempts to teach anti-racism and educate their non-Aboriginal students. Some of the secondary teacher participants; however, discussed concerns over the increasing racism in Thunder Bay as the Aboriginal population grows and social and economic gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups widens and misunderstandings increase. These secondary teachers do believe that they are part of the solution by addressing greater education for both groups as a critical step in minimizing the gaps and developing a language for discussing these issues. This anti-racism awareness by certain secondary teachers demonstrates another significant gain of the UAEP programs in the LPS.

Other secondary teachers participants were concerned about the presence of condescending and deficit attitudes towards Aboriginal peoples by some non-Aboriginal

people they know either in their schools or in the community. In the focus groups, some secondary teachers relayed second-hand knowledge of stereotypical complaints and ongoing misunderstandings about Aboriginal peoples such as “free” higher education, tax exemptions, and other ‘breaks’ or special treatment. Some teachers recalled hearing other teachers talk about having no time to deal with Aboriginal issues and no willingness to discuss these issues because they do not consider them to be their problem or responsibility. One teacher participant summarized their impressions of other teachers’ attitudes:

...but teachers say, “Aboriginal?” ... and it’s, “Oh, I don’t need to deal with that, it’s somebody else’s school that will be doing that, somebody else’s problem.”

Some of the secondary teachers discussed the disengagement of other teachers and the ensuing difficulties perpetuated when secondary teachers assume Aboriginal education is not their problem and pass on their Aboriginal students to Student Services staff or special assignment teachers (SAT) to “solve the Aboriginal problem”. As more non-Aboriginal secondary teachers become educated by the UAEP and more engaged in Aboriginal education, they become more aware of other colleagues on staff who are disengaged or unresponsive to Aboriginal students and community. This would appear to be an unfortunate but necessary step of awareness in the shift towards improving Aboriginal education by the LPS. Explicit efforts at addressing racism in classrooms and anti-racism strategies should be continued and extended by future UAEP programs.

3.c Responsibility

It was clear in the focus group sessions that majority of secondary teachers perceive Aboriginal education as an important and collaborative effort by themselves with the Aboriginal community at large, the school board, and the school administration, especially when it comes to educating Aboriginal students for success. Some secondary teachers noted that frequently they observe Aboriginal students in their schools as being “tossed around” as if they were someone else’s responsibility, when it should be the opposite, clearly every teacher’s responsibility in the school. As one participant in a focus group observed:

*In our school, my principal directs everyone to either myself or [*name removed], who is one of our guidance counselors [if they have an Aboriginal student with problems]... so usually teachers make one or two attempts to phone a parent and*

then they come to us and say, “Her, this kid’s not showing up to my class. Can you do something about it?”

While another teacher who teaches in the social sciences commented that Aboriginal perspectives integrated into the curriculum helps teachers to enrich students’ thinking and understanding:

There is no right view or wrong view of the world. There’s multiple different ways of looking at it and I think in a school, you know, in our board, [and] society, we need to be actively embracing other people’s viewpoints because, you know, we teach in History so many different perspectives and in Civics you’re telling people: “Hey, you’re not the only person around. There’s other people looking at the same issue. It’s a matter of perspective” ...So what is our [teachers’] next step? I think we always have to be thinking ahead. And, by moving along, we’ve got to start somewhere. Let’s start there and let’s keep progressing...I think it’s a great idea, the idea of perspectives of other people. They should always be considered.

Other secondary teachers wanted to place more responsibility on the school board and school administration. They stated that they were already overwhelmed with responsibilities within the school other than fulfilling their main mandate, educating the students. According to them, these responsibilities keep them from committing seriously to helping remote northern Aboriginal students in making a healthy transition to the city and their new school context. For example, during one of the focus group meetings conducted in one of the local high schools, one teacher appeared to be frustrated with the school situation of having to participate in numerous committees and having to choose whether to attend these meetings or prepare for classes:

We have at least 6 new committees that have been formed since October. And so, we’re being drawn on to come to these committees, PLCs, organize for that. When do we organize for our classrooms? The kids in our classrooms, the new curriculum for our kids in the classroom. We’ve got so many different fingers being pointed in so many different ways that, “Well, I’ve got to get through my day and yeah, I should help.” I missed the LL meeting the last time. I’ve missed a few. I joined this committee months ago and have only managed to attend one session. I’ve got a class, that’s got to come first. The literacy test is the second priority. I don’t know? It seems like it is. And how many other committees do you want me to join? And how many other things do you want me to do on top of it? I do have a regular life. I think that there seems to be an endless stream of things that we should get on board.

Other teachers considered that the Eurocentric mindset in which urban schools operate, including the school curriculum, makes it difficult for Aboriginal students to feel comfortable at schools. According to one teacher-participant:

But the school... there is so much bureaucracy around it and the administration are so...maybe they have so many guidelines and expectations that they have to fulfill that our kids are just a number... When 15% of my high school is Aboriginal and you have 50 to 100% of those hanging out at the front foyer [during class], there's a problem. And how are we going to address it? It seems that people who are working directly with First Nations students really seem to resent that responsibility a lot of times, as though they have these extraordinary needs they have to provide for, plus teach the curriculum... what point is the curriculum if the kid's not enjoying being there?

The majority of the secondary teachers who participated in the focus groups agreed that first and foremost, Aboriginal education was the responsibility of the Aboriginal community itself, more specifically, the students' and the parents' or guardians' responsibility:

- *I don't think that it's that the responsibilities aren't being met [by schools], it's just that it's difficult for the student to accept those responsibilities and then difficult for the teachers who are working with them to make that connection.*
- *You need parents or guardians to support teachers that are willing to support and understand and show empathy to these students because they have so many outside influences and if they trust you, then they'll share that information with you. So that's important.*

4. Recommendations

The findings described in this section are based on the concerns and perceptions expressed by secondary school teachers. These findings provide insights into what this particular stakeholder group recommends for the next stage of UAEP implementation. The majority of LPS secondary teachers contend that in order for Aboriginal education to succeed at the secondary school level, it needs to become part of a board-wide plan that includes individual school councils, augments teacher personnel and specialists in AE, and includes curriculum documents that respond specifically to the needs of Aboriginal

students, whether they are from Thunder Bay or from remote communities. These findings or recommendations are also a reflection of the significant challenges that these teachers believe they face when trying to meet Aboriginal students' needs:

1. More ongoing continuous localized professional development and training of both secondary teachers and administrators. An analysis of the focus group meetings revealed this recommendation to be the most repeated and highest priority by the majority of secondary teachers. As one teacher stated:

We need to be trained in terms of how to relate to the kids, how to implement Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum, we need to have subject-specific training. And also, there needs to be a Board consciousness, like these students are here basically unsupervised from the North. How can we facilitate their ability to make effective choices because a lot of them are there as 13/14 [years old], away from mom and dad, and they're lost. So be proactive, help the kids instead of react when bad things happen.

Connected to the professional development of secondary teachers in culturally responsive pedagogy and positive integration of Indigenous ways of knowing is the development of **more critical culturally relevant curricula** that teachers can refer to and upon which they can design their teaching. For example, this recommendation was revealed when teachers discussed the implementation of more Native languages programs and giving Aboriginal students the choice of taking such languages in place of the mandatory French credit.

2. **Training more SATs:** Most of the secondary teachers placed a particular emphasis in having more SATs in their schools because they consider these teachers a valuable resource and critical liaison with Aboriginal families or communities. SATs were also described as mediating cultural information or validating the Indigenous knowledge in the curriculum that teacher were communicating to their Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Many teachers discussed the fear of making mistakes that could jeopardize their authority with students, particularly Aboriginal students. Teachers stated that the resource capacity of the SAT position, their non-Aboriginal teacher support work should be recognized and factored into SAT job profiles or descriptions.
3. **Having more Aboriginal "experts" in each department at school.** According to the secondary teachers, an Aboriginal teacher or cultural advisor would act as an

Indigenous knowledge resource or IK integration support for teachers in a specific department or curriculum specialization, including science and math. As one secondary teacher stated:

We should also have Aboriginal teams from each department, a representative, so that we can all [in different departments] get it [Aboriginal education] because often it falls on the shoulders of social sciences and English.

4. **Improve communication among teachers, departments, parents and other community members such as Elders and artists.**
5. **Make course options “visible” and available to ALL students.** Most teachers complained that many times students, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, are not aware that there are AE courses they can take. Sometimes, this non-awareness forces students to take courses they are not interested in taking. In addition, teachers stated that very often non-Aboriginal students would like to take Native Studies courses but because they are not Aboriginal, they are given the impression that they are not allowed to take these courses or they do not see these courses as open or accessible to them. The same frustration and cultural pigeon-holing happens with Aboriginal students when they want to take other (academic) courses but are placed instead in Native studies classes, only by virtue of their race or heritage.
6. **Flexibility and scheduling of special support or transition Aboriginal courses.** Teachers commented that many AE support or transition courses were designed or funded to last only one semester. Teachers saw this scheduling as working against Aboriginal students’ progress and transitions at school because students did not have enough time to experience success in one course or develop strong competencies in the subject matter. Moreover, this short course duration jeopardized the relationship-building process between student and teacher by stopping it just when a relationship across cultures was being developed and the remote-northern into urban transition was strengthening.
7. **Determine priorities before allocating funds.** Most of the secondary teachers recommended that before the next set of funds from the Ministry of Education are allocated, school boards need to establish a planning council that includes input from classroom teachers from each secondary school to determine what new programs to fund, courses to design, pedagogical supports for teaching, and which programs to sustain so that there is real success and gains in UAEP at the secondary level. To paraphrase, teachers wanted the funding allocation to become more school-centred and determined. But, teachers also stated that there is a need for both centralized decision-making for a board-wide consistency and funding for teacher-teams (PLCs)

or school committees to decide an AE project/approach that they want to inquire into. For example, one of the teachers stated:

I guess the first support always comes from money, Ministry money, money coming down the pipe and before it spreads out onto each individual school, it has to be decided what we're doing with it. The money has to continue so that we can have teachers and the same teachers every year and resources so we can have environment sources, our teachers go out in the bush and have co-op where maybe our students would go up north during [goose, animal] migration time for three weeks and do some hunting. And not only for the students to do that but also we need the teachers to go to a Native reserve, Indian reserve, and see life for a little while and then come back and switch teachers, teachers on a reserve and maybe urban teachers and we need to have a back-and-forth. And so, there's lots we can do but we need the money and we need the time to do it.

5. Limitations of the data

The findings presented here present a couple of limitations which should be considered by the reader to better read and interpret the findings in the previous sections:

1. As noted above, four focus group meetings (4/10) were conducted during secondary teachers' lunch hours at their own schools. Such a context might have posed a conflict of interest for these teachers as they might have felt either rushed by the short period or silenced by the presence and views of teacher colleagues or the SATs.
2. The questions used during the focus group meetings were intentionally designed as broad as possible so that teachers could provide a wide spectrum of comments and would not be constrained by more closed-ended questions. While this is a significant strength of the study, closed pre-designed questions might have been more efficient during the lunch hours or could have been directed in such a way that more participants would have spoken.
3. Most participants in the four lunch hour focus groups did not select themselves to participate in the study. Many were asked by their school administration or encouraged by their SAT to attend these sessions.

Principals—Elementary and Secondary

How are the LPS principals working to engage in Aboriginal education?

Stakeholder group description

The findings presented in this section of the report are based on 2 focus group meetings conducted with approximately a total of 30 LPS principals, one FG for elementary principals and another for the secondary principals. One focus group meeting was conducted at the end of a day-long business meeting while the other focus group was conducted during an extended long lunch hour, after a morning's district business meeting. Both focus group sessions took place in Lakehead Public School Board offices. In both focus group sessions, the principals were organized around tables of four-to-six administrators.

The findings presented below are divided into five sections: 1. UAEP programs and resources identified by the principals, 2. General overview of this stakeholder group's data and "landscape" of engagement in Aboriginal education; 3. Key issues, 4. Recommendations by the principals to improve future UAEP programs, and 5. Limitations associated with the data collection process.

1. *UAEP programs and resources*

All principals at both the elementary and secondary levels were very familiar with and were able to explain the purpose of the UAEP programs and resources. Their greatest concern was that these programs and resources continue.

2. *General overview or landscape of Principals' engagement in the UAEP*

Overall, both administrator focus groups were clear that the main positive impact on Aboriginal education currently in their schools is the UAEP funding for additional personnel, such as the Special Assignment Teachers (SATs) positions or Aboriginal counselors, as well as the professional development facilitators who deliver the culturally responsive training for teachers. The LPS principals were also clear that they need funding for additional resource and support services positions. They count on the specialized training and competencies of these LPS staff members to continue and improve communication, relations and liaisons between Aboriginal community and schools.

It[referring to the UAEP study]. is going to reiterate many of the same challenges that are complex and that are not founded in education, but founded in culture. These issues that as educators we are only educators, that's all we are, that's all we can do.

They[referring to the Aboriginal community] never stepped onto the train [analogy for the education system] to say, "Where are we going to?", or "This is where I want to go." They're still standing at the station saying, "Oh look, trains." And they are exactly in the same spot. If they can be there, for us, it's outside the principals office, the bell rings, the principal shoos the kids away, walks a bunch of them to class, everything's fine, goes back to the office, a couple of minutes later, you hear voices outside. I could do it every 10 minutes, all day long. Same kids, same place.

These comments summarize some principals' attitudes about the cultural schism or divide between Aboriginal students, their communities and their own approach to educational leadership or school culture. Such comments illustrate that principals are working to reflect on their own assumptions and positions as school administrators, while they work towards a greater understanding of Aboriginal perspectives. For example, most of the principals have a firm belief in the implementation of culturally responsive initiatives in their schools. Some principals consider the celebration of cultural events such as powwows and guest appearances of Aboriginal community into their schools as sufficient steps to make Aboriginal students and their families feel welcome in the school setting whereas other principals are working at a deeper cultural level in their own school organizations to shift relations between Aboriginal families and non-Aboriginal educators. A few principals expressed a need for their own training and professional development in Aboriginal-non-Aboriginal relations and communication because they are beginning to feel stuck and uncertain of what are effective strategies to help Aboriginal students to succeed at their schools:

After two years I have no strategies left. I'm not the solution. And my expectations or my authority are not the solution. Because, to be honest, what are they doing wrong? It's not that they are doing anything wrong, it's just that they aren't doing the right things right.

3. Key Issues

The key issues or themes that arose in the principal focus groups include the following: Responsibility, Relationships and Change Mechanisms. These are the issues that are best describe principals' engagement in Aboriginal education in the LPS.

3a. Responsibility

The majority of the administrators who participated in the focus groups stated that they believe that Aboriginal education is primarily the responsibility of the Aboriginal community. Their comments were based on the assumption that Aboriginal parents need to first figure out what to expect from provincial school boards and advocate for what their children should receive, beyond regular academic expectations. Many principals focused on northern students from remote communities as they compared the cultural understandings by urban Aboriginal students (students who are “used to” both the urban life style and urban school system) to new northern students who are not yet accustomed to the urban education system. One principal stated that cultural misunderstandings between northern Aboriginal and urban non-Aboriginal educators are rooted in Aboriginal (mis)perceptions of urban education, long-term goals, and overall aspirations. Many principals agreed that there is a cultural gap between northern Aboriginal students/families and the non-Aboriginal approach to education. As one principal described the responsibility for Aboriginal students’ success in LPS schools, the other principals at the table seemed to be in agreement:

I think the problem is very [much more] simple than that. I don't think the Aboriginal community knows why their kids are at our high schools. They don't know why they are there. Are they there because it's a warm place? [Is it] because they get to be with other Aboriginal kids? Or are they there because they see value in education and see how education can move them in the right direction. I don't think they have, I don't think they [communities and parents] understand their place in that, I don't think they understand where they want to go as a group, as a culture ...I don't think they understand. I don't think they have a focus. And I don't [think] they pass [it] on. They don't pass on dreams to their kids. Other than... I think they are all about day-to-day survival. They are not looking down the road. They don't have big dreams. They don't have discussions [with their children].

3b. Relationships

The principals stakeholder group were also clear that good relationships and communication between Aboriginal families or community with the school or school board is a critically important step in Aboriginal student success. According to the principals, continuity of communication would be helpful for their administrative work in helping Aboriginal students stay in school. This seemed a particularly critical element when coping with the successful integration of northern (remote) students who board with billets and has a band administrator in charge of their educational liaisons. Principals discussed the needs for relationships and communication between Aboriginal families and the schools. As one principal stated:

It's the lack of communication between the school and the parent and the

boarding parent, I find, has been very ineffective towards redirecting kids to reengage themselves into the school. It's been very ineffective. Some bands have sent counselors down, and, depending on the band and the counselors, some have been more effective than others. Some are just, you know, to find boarding homes some are actually doing some counseling and helping kids stay engaged in schools. I mean there's a big variety as to how effective they are.

Many principals want to rely more on specific staff, specially trained or recognized, for their abilities to communicate or develop relationships with Aboriginal students and/or families. A couple of the principals referred to these staff members as capable of providing assistance with these communication or relationship-building challenges. Principals also mentioned a need for community volunteers or navigators who would help with registration or advocacy during parent conferences or conflict resolution meetings:

*As a vice-principal, we have a lot of these students enter our buildings in late August or September for registrations. I think the parents and the students lack an understanding of the programming, what is available, what to sign and not sign. Some of the kids are left with boarding parents and then that is a whole issue for us as well. So they [the parents] would be saying goodbye to their son or daughter and going back north ... And it's the communication that we needed a big assistance with, making sure that those parents know what is going on with those kids back in the school and the lack of success that whole [cycle of communication] is big, as far as I'm concerned. And when XXX [*name removed] joined the team, our team with us, and she stepped in and started putting lots of things in place for the families. I think that was a big factor ... these families needed to know what was going on - what were they signing, what kind of program was their son or daughter doing, when were they being successful, what could they do to help their son or daughter be successful from way up north? I thought that was wonderful to see. Even the children who live here in the city, they need some support as well ... with a lack of understanding of the system, I think ... So now we have a new registration ... done a different job. There was list of people that was given to us ... they could be called on and have them come in and help these parents understand what was the program, what was their son or daughter going to be involved with, stuff like that.*

3c. Change Mechanisms

The majority of principals were clear in identifying three change mechanisms that they believe would greatly improve conditions of Aboriginal education in their schools : a) More transition courses or programming for northern students from remote communities; b) More funding to hire personnel/staff to assist in more one-to-one supports for Aboriginal student success; and c) More forums, councils or communication

opportunities for better and consistent communication with Aboriginal stakeholder groups. These change mechanisms are described below in greater detail.

More transition courses and programming for northern students from remote communities

The majority of the principals in the focus groups considered the educational and academic disparity between northern remote communities and LPS schools in Thunder Bay the issue that needed the greatest improvement and change. Most principals considered that there is an imperative need to implement more special courses and continuous programs to help northern Aboriginal students in their transition to the LPS urban school setting. Furthermore, principals noted that these programs would not only aid students in finding out what their academic gaps are and work on them, but, just as importantly, assist these students cope with the culture shock they might suffer. To illustrate, one principal commented:

A lot of the kids we get here, that are new to the city and are from remote communities, are not yet able to handle the curriculum that we offer them in Grade 9. They have huge gaps, a lot of these kids, and I'm generalizing, have gaps in their learning, They, um, some of them haven't attended Grade 8. Some of them come here with half Grade 7 and we don't have the programming where they can feel successful. So they've got lots of things working against them. They've moved here, they're without their parents, and then we put them in a class where they cannot succeed because they don't have the background, they just don't have the skills to be ready for Grade 9. Also, what I find, specifically in Special Education, is some students have significant, significant learning needs and have not always received the kind of extra support that they needed to be successful in their elementary schools, in their home schools, in their home communities. Some kids will have been tested, but have received none. There is no indication in the OSR at least, if any kind of special education support. Some kids obviously need to be tested and there's nothing to show that has happened. So, it's really difficult because by the time we see them, if they do have a learning disability or mild intellectual disability, they've lost a lot of years to learn and it's really hard when they come into Grade 9 to make that up. So that's really difficult to see that they do have these huge gaps and they do have these needs that haven't been addressed.

It was clear that the LPS principals are aware of the complexities and difficulties of their northern students from remote communities and that they want to improve the academic success of their Aboriginal students. Another principal spoke more directly to the culture shock that Northern Aboriginal students regularly face and then the way they and their school is impacted by this transition shock. Principals also felt that Aboriginal students would need to steer the course and direction of how to bridge the cultural divide between urban and northern education systems:

I think all these factors go together for the development of a sub-culture of Aboriginal kids in this city and in our schools. So it's one thing to say you're from a reserve or an urban Aboriginal kid, but inside the school, there's a sub-culture of Aboriginal kids and they have a different set of norms and values that sometimes do and sometimes don't cross over with what our schools norms and values are. So they are in school but they are not attending classes. Or they are attending classes but they are not coming prepared to do the work. So the perception is that they don't value the educational piece but they like the caring environment and they like the safe environment. So one of the pressing issues is several things. One is they are coming from far away so there is a culture of the city that they have to get used to. Or a lack of support and the mismatches that happen there. Then there is a subculture that's welcoming them among the lowest common denominator but that takes them away from why they're down here and what they're trying to achieve. And the other factor is that when they are in a classroom that there's often the gaps in their learning, fundamental numeracy and literacy and learning skills, then to sit in a classroom 75 minutes, 4 times a day... it [school approach] seems to be not strength-based and not success-oriented. So that ends up being an insurmountable task for them to come in and as of day one, do 4 classes in a day, sitting in a chair. So missing in all of this is the student's voice. The actual Aboriginal student's voice and I think that's the next natural step we need to move toward ... is how do we tap into what they think and feel and want and they're willing to do?

More funding to hire support services and staff to implement programs for one-to-one Aboriginal student support

Many principals considered that the best way to help Aboriginal students make the transition to urban LPS school would have to be more funding from the Ministry of Education for additional hirings and support services. The majority of principals stated that the capacity of individual schools as well as the school board would be weakened considerably if the full responsibility for Aboriginal education was placed on principal shoulders with funding cuts. As one principal stated, a cut of funding would leave them struggling to band-aid a hemorrhaging "Aboriginal problem":

As far as I'm concerned, September 1st, 2010, there's no money available, so what about the smaller classes?, What about the extra support teacher? What about all the extra cultural things? What about the culture sensitive and targeted resources? There's no money for that anymore. So what can we actually sustain and whose shoulders does it fall on? It falls on us to try to keep the good work moving forward without support - financial or centralized. And so, whatever

momentum has been gained now, how do you maintain that? And that's where we'll have to make very difficult decisions, because we then, in budgets that are already existing, we have to make those decisions as to where we cut back on what's been there. So, if that school's had even \$5,000 extra, that's a significant amount to do cultural things and to do field trips and to do feasts and whatever else they've done. If we have to say that now we can't afford that anymore. Now the students that we've invested in have to fall back into exactly the same situation as everybody else and whatever learning we have here, we can't sustain the programs if we can't afford the programs. That's going to be a tough one next year.

Communication between stakeholder groups

As noted in the *Relationships* section of this report, principals felt that another change mechanism that needed more attention is the communication among schools, Aboriginal parents, boarding parents, and band counselors. They consider that this communication would best help schools and principals know students are located and know what the community or family is expecting of the school. The following anecdote from one principal illustrates the communication challenges of principals/schools and how regular contact with communities and band counselors are critical parts of a student's success:

*It just happened last year. The student was not successful at accumulating credits at [*school name removed] and was absent most of the time. So the student became 18 years old and left our school. I wasn't sure what happened to that student. I was trying to reach his reserve on behalf of some other students who are much younger than him, to find out what happened to those students because they hadn't been attending for some time. So I tried and tried to get a hold of the band office and was unsuccessful on numerous occasions and then one day, somebody answered. I identified myself and he said, "oh, XXX [principal's name removed], it's me!" And it was the student who had left the previous year and I said, "What are you doing there?" And he said, "I'm running the band office now." So when I asked him about these younger students, he knew who they were, he was related to them. But he had no idea where they were living, who they were living with, or how I might be able to find out where I could contact them. So there's the person who was unsuccessful in our school, but maybe it depends on your standard of success, I guess. He's back now, running the band office.*

4. Recommendations

The findings described in this section are based on transcript data of the two principals focus groups and they provide insight into what principals believe should be implemented

in order for Aboriginal education to succeed at their schools or to be documented as part of a curriculum document that helps school boards respond to the needs of Aboriginal students from northern and reserve communities. These findings are also strategies that these principals believe they need to try to meet Aboriginal students' needs:

- a) **Develop more culturally responsive and positive Indigenous knowledge integrated curricula.** This recommendation was stated the most often by all the principals.. As one principal articulated:

... it might be helpful to have some sessions on, for guidance counsellors, maybe there's something on how to//what kind of questions to ask students of a First Nations background, how to get them to respond more fully.

- b) **Having more access to Aboriginal "experts" at each school.** According to the principals, this staff member would act as a resource, communication or cultural advisor for them. As one administrator stated:

I think it might be helpful in our school here, if maybe we had more of these Aboriginal Counsellors working in our schools. So if the office next to me had a Counsellor that these kids know and their families know and they have worked with in the past, I think that would be, I think that would probably be very helpful. I think because of their gaps in learning, one of the programs in our building that tends to be very successful for a lot of Aboriginal kids is our Student Success program, and that works ... a program where a student will go in, any student in the building will go in and will work on a booklet like this [shows booklet] so, they will do course work on their own, individually, at their own pace.

- c) **Improve communication between schools and Aboriginal community.** Principals considered that better models of communication between school and family and/or the Aboriginal community will result in greater exchange of understandings focused on student success. As one principal commented:

Doing a better job of meeting with communities where these kids come from to help with the transition. A lot of our kids come late in the semester so//well not late in the semester, late in September, so they may come the third week of September when most of the other kids have started the first week of September ... so all those getting-to-know-you activities, those, "Here's our rules, here's our structure, here's what to expect, here's how you do this, here's how you do that."

Non-Aboriginal Students

How are the LPS non-Aboriginal students engaged in Aboriginal education?

Description of Stakeholder Group

The non-Aboriginal student stakeholder group is comprised of four grade 8 groups and four high school groups. Overall, 43 students (18 in grade 8 and 25 in high schools) participated in the Urban Aboriginal Education Project (UAEP) focus groups. Each non-Aboriginal student focus group was interviewed once over the course of a lunch hour at his or her respective school. Students participating in these focus groups either self-selected to take part or were invited by a teacher or administrator within their school. With the exception of a few “visible minority” students, the non-Aboriginal student group is comprised mainly of white Euro-Canadians³. Participation in the research was remunerated with a pizza lunch.

The findings presented below are divided into five sections: 1. UAEP Programs; 2. General Landscape of non-Aboriginal Student Experiences and Perceptions of Aboriginal Education; 3. Key Issues, including Relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, Aboriginal and Self Cultural Awareness/Knowledge, and Pedagogy; 4. a) Recommendations by Non-Aboriginal Students; b) Recommendations by the UAEP team; and, 5. Limitations.

1. UAEP Programs

Non-Aboriginal students, while unable to directly name the specific UAEP programs that were implemented in their schools, have taken note of initiatives that may have been related to the UAEP. For example, students report having received visits to their schools and classrooms by Aboriginal authors, dancers, and drummers who may have been invited through the ‘Learning Through the Arts’ (LTTA) initiative. Student participants also report that Aboriginal speakers had been invited to their schools to give lessons on language, trapping, and respect, among other culturally relevant activities. These in-school events were complimented by out-of-school events such as Powwows and Fall Harvest. Also, some non-Aboriginal students are aware of initiatives such as After School programs and Breakfast programs that were frequented by Aboriginal students.

2. General Landscape of Non-Aboriginal Student Experiences and Perceptions of Aboriginal Education

³ For this reason, when speaking of the culture of the non-Aboriginal student stakeholder group, the Western culture is the one being referred to.

A review of the focus group data collected suggests that overall, the majority of non-Aboriginal students are generally positive about participating in urban Aboriginal education *within* their schools (curriculum, content); yet, there are also indication that they are increasingly concerned about an ongoing lack of curricular content that addresses Aboriginal culture in all their subjects, and that racism and divisiveness still persists between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peer groups in their schools.

The non-Aboriginal student stakeholder group is positive about the following successful UAEP interventions: the inclusion of Aboriginal guest speakers and cultural events, such as Powwows, drumming, and dancing; effective, appropriate, and integrated cross-cultural curriculum; and, a number of exemplary well trained teachers who make their classrooms welcoming environments and facilitate culturally sensitive discussions with all their students.

On the other hand, non-Aboriginal students are aware and concerned with the following systemic issues that continue to pervade urban Aboriginal education: the inattention to contemporary Aboriginal culture; the prevalence of racism and divisiveness between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peers, particularly in social spheres outside of the classroom; schools continuing to operate, either by design or in practice, as segregated spaces; and a perceived large number of teachers who fail to address racism in school.

Overall, the UAEP programs and initiatives appear to have had success in shifting non-Aboriginal students towards engagement with Aboriginal education and making them more aware and curious to learn about their Aboriginal peers, their communities, history, cultures and Indigenous knowledge or worldview.

3. Key Issues

Based on a review of the non-Aboriginal student focus groups and transcripts, the following key success topics and issues emerged: 1. relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people; 2. Aboriginal and Self cultural awareness and knowledge; and 3. pedagogy. These issues are discussed in the three sections that follow.

3a. Relationships between Aboriginal Peoples and non-Aboriginal Peoples

The theme that non-Aboriginal students reported most frequently was “relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples”. Many grade eight focus group participants stated that they had mutually respectful relationships with Aboriginal peers. Furthermore, they noted the school board’s efforts to make schools welcoming environments for all students and to increase Aboriginal cultural content. However, participants were also aware that within the wider student population, there still exists a notable social division between groups of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students that remains in spite of the above efforts. They report that racism is still present within schools, and that teacher responses to racism are inconsistent and oftentimes ignored or ineffective. While the majority of the non-Aboriginal students demonstrated concern about this social divide and racism towards Aboriginal students in their schools, others actually made racist comments during the focus groups but seemed uneducated or unable to perceive the racism in the comments they made. Lastly, non-Aboriginal students who seem to care about respectful intercultural relationships also spoke about feeling fearful and anxious at the possibility of unknowingly making offensive statements or asking inappropriate questions. The paralysis of fear appeared located in ignorance but with an accompanying desire to learn and change.

Most non-Aboriginal student focus group participants described positive relationships with Aboriginal peers.

I’ve got a couple of Aboriginal friends that are really good friends.

•

Actually my best friend is an Aboriginal person. She wants to take me to some of the pow wows so I can learn more about her and her culture.

I have more Aboriginal friends [than non-Aboriginal friends] ...I just get along with them better.

Many students have taken note of efforts to include more Aboriginal cultural content within their respective schools in order to make schools welcoming environments. As indicated by the following quotes, non-Aboriginal students, overall, reported positively on these initiatives.

- *It’s [Aboriginal education] doing really well actually. Like, cause, they try their best to put ...an afternoon for anyone who wants to learn or wants to know more about Aboriginal culture...*
- *It’s working good because ... we have lots of activities too, and like pretty much everything in the school... Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal are both welcome to it.*

More specifically, two non-Aboriginal students perceived and articulated feelings of cohesion amongst all classmates, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, following presentations by a respected Aboriginal staff member in their school:

- *Everyone feels the same basically because everyone's accepted. Everyone accepts everyone.*
- *Yeah, cause like ...their group [Aboriginal] accepts you, which makes the non-Aboriginals accept them too.*

Nonetheless, despite positive mention and successful UAEP initiatives, non-Aboriginal students did report ongoing racism within their schools and a general social divisiveness between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peer groups.

- *It definitely feels segregated. Different. Like there's still a lot of racism around about Native people and stuff like that and they don't appear in many academic classes ...they just seem separated, like there's no real interaction.*
- *I've known a lot of people who have made a lot of off-colour comments about Aboriginal people.*
- *We've had some fights, we've had racial slurs painted on walls, we've had the usual [stuff], name throwing, mud-slinging, you name it, it's probably been done*
- *There's a lot of people who joke around and say racial slurs and things like that, but even if they're just slurs there's always something that made that happen, you know, like it's just disappointing that people can joke around like that. I also find there's a lot of racism between Caucasian people and Aboriginal people.*
- *They'll [non-Aboriginal students] just like start pushing them [Aboriginal students] - they'll start like tackling and, hitting and punching people.*
- *Yeah, some people think that, not to be in a rude way, that the Aboriginal people are like dirty.*

One student response suggested that the racism demonstrated within LPS schools is a reflection of what happens in the greater Thunder Bay community.

- *My friends make a lot of racist remarks and stuff and have a lot of... negative feelings or attitudes about Aboriginal people because of the fact that they're separated... I see a lot of like racism and prejudice... in the city and in this school.*

While teachers, administrators and other school staff do not necessarily bear witness to all acts of racism, non-Aboriginal students perceived that teachers and administration are the most responsible for improving the situation (or they are the most able, due to power to influence). They also noted that students themselves, along with their parents, were also responsible. What this responsibility might entail was unclear to some non-Aboriginal students.

- *I don't know what an educational system such as a school can do to stop racism.*
- *Interviewer: Who is responsibility is it to help make the class feel more like a community?*
 - *Student #1: ... the teachers ...we're too shy.....*
 - *Student #2: ...the parents and the children...*
 - *Student #3: and our responsibility...to try and respect them... instead of judging...*

Nonetheless, non-Aboriginal students reported that while some teachers, administrators, and other school staff, do respond actively to racism, some still ignore and fail to directly confront racist attitudes and behaviours.

- *Our teacher this year...she's very high on respect and if you break her respect line she kind of like... gets real mad...*
 - *I think the teachers crack down when you hear racial stuff like that and you can get suspended if you're racist and things like that. They just pretty much try to crack that down when they see it*
 - *Teachers do not do anything when they witness this.*
 - *It depends on the supervisor - some of them just don't want to deal with it.*
 - *...the teacher looks and then turns around and doesn't do anything.*

A few non-Aboriginal students from the focus groups made racist statements and seemed to be unaware or uneducated that their attitudes were racist.

- *... you see some Aboriginal people on the streets drinking... and haven't done anything with their lives...*
- *I've only seen one Aboriginal person in my entire life anywhere that's actually employed... from my experience they're usually just... I don't know...on the street all the time...they don't really have anything going on.*
- *One of the things especially is that they hijacked the senior kindergarten room and made it into this big sort of Aboriginal thing with all these posters on the wall and stuff...and they sit there all day with all the worse behaved kids in the school... and drunk...*

Non-Aboriginal students indicated that in many instances, they and their non-Aboriginal peers who act racist, act unintentionally biased and racist because they lack knowledge of cultures and cultural differences, either Aboriginal or their own.

- *I think the big thing with racism is sometimes people aren't realizing that they're being racist.*

Some non-Aboriginal students described feelings of anxiety about interacting with Aboriginal students or fears that they might make a cultural mistake, and as a result, either reluctantly voice, or choose not to voice, their real opinions.

- *Sometimes the people who are more 'gung ho' about [their Aboriginal culture] are a little bit frightening and aggressive, and it almost feels like they feel like their culture is better somehow. I feel scared sometimes when they're like, 'Native pride!'*
- *I felt 'Oh, this is uncomfortable' 'cause [the Aboriginal girls] just stopped talking just as soon as I walked in ... and they were just like not looking at me*
- *...but sometimes what's happened is this feeling about being nervous about talking about things.*
- *Well, it took me a long time to actually voice my opinion ...you don't want people thinking, 'Oh, you're the racist White, typical you.' It's more based around fear.*

3b. Aboriginal and Self Cultural Awareness/Knowledge

The theme or topic that received the second most comments from non-Aboriginal students was “cultural awareness and knowledge”. Many non-Aboriginal students’ comments either clearly stated or pointed towards a lack of cultural awareness or knowledge, about Aboriginal cultures and their own. The students identified limited opportunities to develop these understandings in school and through curriculum. Yet, many students are keenly aware that this lack of cultural awareness and knowledge contributes to the ways in which non-Aboriginal students perceive and interact with Aboriginal peoples in schools and communities.

First, when asked to share knowledge or demonstrate understanding of Aboriginal peoples, most non-Aboriginal students displayed limited understandings in the focus groups. Non-Aboriginal students claimed that there is a paucity of Aboriginal focused curriculum and a lack of opportunities to learn about and engage with Aboriginal cultures, histories, art, languages, etc.

- *The [grades] 7 and 8 history program is supposed to focus on interactions between Aboriginal peoples and the other founding peoples of Canada. Now the best word to try and describe that experience was “patchy”. It’s really not a lot about Aboriginal people. It was more about conflict that was happening around those times between French, English and then the Aboriginals kind of third. And so, I think that’s also a problem is that it’s kind of like thrown in as an extra in history curriculum. You look at the grade 10 history program, it’s got a little bit about residential schools but pretty much nothing about the more modern [situation].*
- *School does a very poor job of having Native culture or having classes [on culture]. There’s nothing there really.*

Some non-Aboriginal high school students, who are keen to learn about Aboriginal culture, expressed concern that classes that focus on Aboriginal culture (namely art and language) are typically offered or perceived as “segregated” classes and they believe these classes are often reserved for Aboriginal students only.

Secondly, many White non-Aboriginal students know very little about their own cultural identity and the dominance of Euro-Canadian culture. During the grade eight focus groups in particular, very many students expressed limited knowledge and sincere

curiosity about their own cultural identity, stating that they wished they also had cultural traditions to celebrate and distinct knowledge to learn.

- *Student #1: I don't know my culture.*
- *Student #2: What do you think White culture is?*
- *Student #3: I don't know what my culture is like.*
- *Student #4: I don't even know what my culture is. It usually is just about the Aboriginal culture.*
- *Student #5: We know more about their [Aboriginal] culture than we do ours.*

While there is no doubt that these same students are immersed daily in their own dominant Euro-Canadian culture, their lack of cultural self-awareness is a common phenomenon amongst people who are part of the dominant culture. While much of what White non-Aboriginal students learn as curriculum content *is* their culture, there seems to be a lack of education about the significance of cultural identity and discussions about *whose* culture is represented within the curriculum and *why*.

- *Like I don't even see ...when you're in a class, you're not even really learning about culture [when] you're like reading a book - you don't think about it, you just want to get it done. When you're doing math, you're not thinking of the Europeans.*
- *I think maybe that we don't think about it because it's our culture maybe.*

For some White non-Aboriginal students, the inability to recognize the dominance of their own culture within the curriculum leaves them with the misconception that there is an overemphasis on Aboriginal education to the exclusion of their own culture.

We only learn about one culture...and that's not our culture, so we're kind of left out a bit.

Due to a lack of awareness of Aboriginal cultures, their own cultures, or both, many non-Aboriginal students are unable to recognize the distinctiveness of Aboriginal peoples within the grand scope of Canada as a multicultural nation and Aboriginal peoples as the first and original peoples on this land.

Well, this is just in general, but I'd like to learn about all cultures in Thunder Bay because we're very multicultural, but I find that um, I just don't understand a lot of the Aboriginal culture and why they're so um...I guess like isolated?

As non-Aboriginal students become increasingly aware of Aboriginal cultures and their own cultures, as well as historic intercultural relations, they are better situated to move towards intercultural understanding and respect. One non-Aboriginal student, for

example, recalls the shift that occurred when they knew more about colonial legacies perpetrated against Aboriginal people.

I never knew that [residential schools] ... no wonder there's so much hostility and if somebody did that to my ancestors, I probably wouldn't feel too hot towards them. So I never knew that before and I was like: "Sure we invaded their space, we moved them into reserves" but it was a long time ago." I didn't really realize that stuff was still kind of going on at a more recent time. No wonder there's so much hostility. No wonder it's not meshing properly...but I didn't know that.

3c. Pedagogy

The theme that received the third most comments from non-Aboriginal students was "pedagogy". While many non-Aboriginal student participants speak about the dearth of Aboriginal-focused curriculum, as well as lack of curriculum that explains and directly names the dominant Eurocentric culture, they also highlight some positive practices that indicate a shift towards increased cultural responsiveness. These positive pedagogical practices include cross-cultural content, Aboriginal-focused curriculum, and, Aboriginal guest speakers who deliver cultural programming. Participants also speak strongly about the positive impact that one committed teacher can have. Below are two exemplary practices enacted within LPS schools.

- *It's also cool too because we read a few stories, well, a lot of stories in that class and also in our English class we did this. Instead of doing Shakespeare, we actually did a Native [version], which I actually think it was an interesting twist. It added some culture. I liked it and they talked about it and... it was actually describing a typical Aboriginal life coming from a reserve and everything like that and they would have words in there you wouldn't understand the language and underneath it, they'd have the English. So, you got to learn a little bit about their language...and their religious beliefs, too, which was good.*
- *Instead of just taking about, well, this is what happened - 'cause everyone knows the Native land was taken over- , instead we talk about their culture, you know. Why the stereotypes, you know, and then we talk about their beliefs, their views, instead of just talking about it, we actually get to explore it. It's really cool.*

As the last quote suggests, there is a need for classrooms to become spaces in which culturally sensitive discussions can occur and in a manner that students feel supported to

ask difficult questions about stereotypes, biases, beliefs, perspectives, values, etc.

- *I think that it's more like not having the chance to ask than being scared to ask.*
- *You have to be able to communicate. If there's no communication, nothing is going to happen or get done. But you have to know respect first before you can talk civilly about things.*

Some non-Aboriginal students, however, caution that including Aboriginal-focused curriculum is a complex endeavor that is not entirely embraced or embraced positively by all teachers or all students.

- *... putting little pieces of Aboriginal stuff into each [course] ... sounds like in theory, it would be a really, really awesome idea and to get more knowledge and stuff within the school community, but I almost feel like it would be like at the beginning of the course you know when [the teachers] are like "Oh, we just have to get over this boring stuff so we can get to the content."*
- *When you're forced to do something, you get mad and then you sort of start not liking that culture because you're forced to do it.*

Many non-Aboriginal students indicated that they believe some, but not the majority of teachers in their respective schools, would be capable of facilitating the inter-cultural dialogue necessary to integrate Aboriginal culture in meaningful and respectful ways.

It's probably a mix. I feel like some teachers are really, really enthusiastic about their job, and some are like "This is more work for me, I'm going to have to do more research... I already have my entire lesson book planned, now I have to add more stuff".

4a. Recommendations from Non-Aboriginal Students

Non-Aboriginal students suggest many different ideas about how the LPS school board could improve the current state of urban Aboriginal education. The most prevalent recommendations (in descending order) are to: i. increase the quantity of Aboriginal focused curricular content, ii. make extra-curricular activities inter- or cross-cultural, and, iii. re-think and re-design transition programs.

i) Increasing the quantity of Aboriginal focused curricular content

In order to increase the quantity of Aboriginal focused content within schools, non-Aboriginal students suggested (in descending order) the following specific strategies: increasing community and Elder involvement, offering more Aboriginal language courses, including more knowledge of contemporary Aboriginal culture and contexts, beginning an Aboriginal education focus earlier in elementary schools, and, including Aboriginal content in every course. Non-Aboriginal students also argued that Aboriginal language courses should be accredited as academic level courses so that students striving to enter university would be more enticed to enroll in them.

- *I think that if we overcome language as a barrier between people we ... can begin to work together to create a better society and that's one of the reasons that I think that, you know, people should do more to educate themselves in languages.*
- *The problem is, it's not an academic course, it's an open course... if it was academic I would be in it in a second. Because we ... need academic courses for college and university, but if it's an open course... I can't.*

ii. Encourage cross-cultural student organizations and social events

When it came to the issue of familiarity or prior experiences in Aboriginal culture or their own cultural heritage, some non-Aboriginal students suggested that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures should be explicitly represented in school social activities and extra-curricular programming.

We could also have like Aboriginal representatives on things like the SAC [student council], so they can make their own events. So they can put their opinions and their views into different dances and stuff. So you can actually incorporate that stuff in the activities that the school puts on.

iii. Rethinking transition programs

Many non-Aboriginal students, particularly at the secondary level, made note and observations about remote Northern Aboriginal students transitioning to Thunder Bay and their extra difficulties. Non-Aboriginal students made suggestions on how they believed these transitions could be more effective. They also interestingly noted that, “there could be a transition for both sides,” meaning that non-Aboriginal students might also need *transitioning* into Aboriginal education, culture and protocols in order to better understand their Aboriginal peers transitioning from northern communities.

If we just have transitions on one side, the other side is not gonnago with it ... so if we have it on both sides, then it just makes it a lot easier for people to take down those walls...and then become friends easier...and stuff like that...

4b. Recommendations by the UAEP-Research Team

Recommendations from the UAEP-Research team for improving non-Aboriginal student engagement in Aboriginal education include the following seven items:

1. Make anti-racism a high priority within schools. Assist teachers, administrators, and other staff, through professional development and other supports, to pass from inaction to action (should they not be there already). Adopt leadership styles and policies that make anti-racism the school climate and that make racism, as well as turning a blind eye to racism, inexcusable. Non-Aboriginal adults in schools need to become both anti-racist and cross-cultural leaders.
2. Support teachers, administrators, and other staff to engage in decolonizing processes, through professional development that helps them to recognize, understand, and disrupt Eurocentrism and White privilege. Non-Aboriginal educators can demonstrate directly to non-Aboriginal students decolonizing behaviours.
3. Continue ongoing support, financing, and facilitation of professional development opportunities for teachers to engage/explore/discuss and learn about teaching practices that address cultural identity/awareness and Aboriginal education, and provide tools that assist in the delivery of such.
4. Continue supporting the inclusion of Aboriginal community members, especially Elders, within the classrooms as a means of increasing cultural learning opportunities for all students.
5. Within the context of high school, examine the (often times un-official) streaming process which effectively segregates many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.
6. Make Aboriginal language courses, and other Aboriginal focused courses, available to all students. Also, encourage these courses to be centred in the knowledge of the local Aboriginal community and/or co-taught with cultural instructors from the community.
7. Encourage and support teachers to teach curriculum that explicitly and critically examines dominant cultural norms, and that encourages all students to learn about their personal cultural heritage.

6. Limitations

Limitations of the collected information about the non-Aboriginal student stakeholder group include the following issues:

1. The majority of high school students participating within the focus groups were, for the most part, in grades 11 or 12, with grade 12 students being the most numerous and prominent of the two. Furthermore, these high school students were in most cases either in academic or IB streams. As such, these student voices may not reflect students who are in applied or general streams. Most of the secondary non-Aboriginal students in the focus groups stated that they do not have many Aboriginal students in their classes due to streaming.
2. While grade 8 students are best situated to reflect upon their elementary school experience as a whole, their views may not be representative of the majority of the elementary student body (even those students in the J/I grades) .
3. Non-Aboriginal students were mostly selected by a teacher or an administrator, at the secondary level. The focus group students that we received may have been selected, or self-selected, for various reasons (such as the ability to articulate ideas or want to express themselves) which may not make them “typical” or representative of most non-Aboriginal students who have more classes with Aboriginal students.

Aboriginal Student Stakeholder Group

What is the response and reception of the UAEP programs by the LPS Aboriginal students?

Aboriginal Student Stakeholder Group Description

The Aboriginal student stakeholder data and findings presented in this section of the report are based on eight focus group meetings conducted with 53 Aboriginal students (26 students in grade 8 and 27 students in secondary grades). There were four Grade 8 Aboriginal student focus groups and four secondary Aboriginal student focus groups. All focus group meetings were conducted at the students' schools during their lunch breaks and lasted on average one hour. Students participating in these focus groups either self-selected to take part or were invited by a teacher or administrator within their school. Participation in the research was remunerated with a pizza lunch.

The findings from the focus groups provide the Aboriginal student perspective on the role and impact of the UAEP in the Lakehead Public Schools (LPS).

1. UAEP programs and resources

Overall, the discussions by the Aboriginal student participants in the focus groups indicate that there is some positive awareness of the UAEP programs in the schools. While unable to name specific UAEP initiatives, some students state that their help with extra reading [Later Literacy project] improved their literacy skills and many of the Aboriginal students, without referring specifically to the Learning Through the Arts, stated that Aboriginal artists were brought into their classrooms to share their teachings.

Related to the LPS's engagement in Aboriginal education, students mentioned field trips to Aboriginal gatherings in the community such as the Fall Harvest, along with Aboriginal guest speakers and visitors to their schools. Some students identified the special presentations by Aboriginal organizations at their schools as forms of Aboriginal education:

A few months ago, Anishinawbe Mushkiki and the Health Unit came and did a presentation here...this particular presentation was on suicide prevention and awareness.

The presence of Aboriginal content in the form of field trips and guest speakers may or may not be specifically UAEP funded programs, however, from the Aboriginal students' perspective, it is an improvement to Aboriginal presence and topics in their schools. The research team contends that these community partnerships are related to the board-wide teacher professional development and SAT and resource (funded by the UAEP) because schools and teachers are more aware that these guest presenters and field trips are needed for greater Aboriginal infusion and presence in schools.

2. General overview of Aboriginal students' impressions of Aboriginal education in LPS schools

A review of the focus group transcript data suggests that, overall, Aboriginal students feel that Aboriginal education is improving in some small ways in the LPS but that there remains much that needs improvement and that Aboriginal education efforts need to increase. Most of the Aboriginal student participants still perceive that they are targeted and treated differently by their peers and teachers because they are Aboriginal. They still do not see themselves reflected in the daily curriculum or their Aboriginal identity recognized and encouraged by their schools. Often, this different or disconnected treatment causes barriers to learning for these students and negative feelings of isolation or exclusion in their schools.

Overall, almost every Aboriginal student focus group at some point discussed racism from peers, or teachers, or the broader Thunder Bay community as a challenge in their school lives. Other Aboriginal students expressed concern about the difficulties for northern students or themselves in transitioning from northern First Nations communities to the Thunder Bay urban centre and new school. Several students felt that there remains large social and academic barriers that Aboriginal students need to overcome and that there is a concurrent lack of support in the schools for contending with these significant barriers. Although Aboriginal students feel they have many challenges, the general findings from the focus groups also suggest that Aboriginal students maintain a strong sense of identity and positive vision for their future in LPS schools. In spite of the many systemic issues and challenges, LPS Aboriginal students are strong and resilient in their resolve to earn a good education through LPS schools and programs.

Based on a review of the data collected from the Aboriginal student focus groups, the following barriers remain for Aboriginal students in public school boards: Racism, Transition support, Lack of Aboriginal content or positive indigenous knowledge integration in the curriculum, Few inclusive school environments, Stereotypes and deficit perceptions by peers and teachers, and Lack of promotion for cultural identity and pride. This ongoing set of barriers and negative perceptions by Aboriginal students reveals how deep and systemic are the misunderstandings, erasure or ignorance about Aboriginal peoples, content and Indigenous knowledge in any school board or non-Aboriginal education system. While the UAEP programs in the LPS have certainly helped and improved conditions for learning for Aboriginal students, the Aboriginal student focus groups were a reminder of how much damage and misunderstandings in education there is due to the ongoing legacies of residential schools and difficult Aboriginal-non-Aboriginal relations. The perceptions of the Aboriginal students remind all stakeholders and governmental levels involved in the UAEP that there are deep divides to bridge and deep scars to heal in the manner of the Truth and Reconciliation commission. According to Justice Murray Sinclair of the TRC and Bill Mussell respected Elder, “The greatest challenge in the process of reconciliation may be in achieving fundamental changes in the thinking and belief systems of both colonizers and the colonized” (Mussell, 2008, p.332). Or, to paraphrase for the UAEP, the greatest challenge of any UAEP in an Ontario provincial school board, is the long process of

reconciliation or shifting all stakeholders’ thinking and belief systems across deep divides and accumulated mistrust in the education system.

The issues noted above are described in greater detail through Aboriginal student voices in the following section.

3. Key Issues

3a. Relationships

The issue that Aboriginal students reported on the most was that of relationships with their non-Aboriginal peers and teachers. As evidenced by the focus groups, the majority of Aboriginal students want to improve these relationships and experience more consistently a feeling of ownership and belonging in their schools. Aboriginal students did identify racism as the greatest detractor from their education and their learning. Many students perceive that they are treated negatively by their peers if they appear or act too Aboriginal. Unfortunately, many students were able to speak directly to recent experiences of racism:

- *Racism...it's pretty much what we face here [at school] ...*
- *In [bathroom] stalls people write stuff like "Natives go back to your home..."*

Some students also felt that teachers responded differently to them if perceived as Aboriginal or because they are Aboriginal. One student discussed how they perceive teachers enabling or allowing non-Aboriginal students to be racist because they would not address the racism or would not give any consequences to non-Aboriginal students for being racist:

- *If I tell (a teacher), 'Oh, he's [non-Aboriginal student] saying I'm dirty because I am Aboriginal', the teacher will only say, 'Don't say she's dirty because she's Aboriginal'. The teacher won't take it any farther than that.*

One focus group discussion of Aboriginal students compared how certain teachers respond favourably to non-Aboriginal 'visible minority' students in contrast to themselves as Aboriginal students:

- *I've noticed too that there is an African American student who goes here and certain teachers talk to him different than they talk to us, not in a bad way, in a better way than they talk to us.*

Another student stated that the real issue is teachers' lack of awareness of racism or poor treatment of Aboriginal students by non-Aboriginals. The focus group students offered examples of the teacher ignorant behaviours and attitudes that they regularly witness or receive:

- *No offense but they're a little bit blind towards the severity of what we face as Aboriginals.*

Quite a few of the Aboriginal students felt that their history was not recognized in the curriculum or by their teachers. One participant discussed the hurt and trauma when a teacher was discussing the history of residential schools:

- *XXX [*name of teacher removed] said 'they were sent to residential schools to learn better education and they were all taken care of and we fed them... some of the Natives said that they were sexually harmed, sexually abused, but it is not proven.' I wondered if XXX was kidding me. If it wasn't proven then why are some of our Aboriginal people still scarred and live as though it [residential school] was yesterday.*

3b. Change and Barriers

The topic that emerged with the second most comments from Aboriginal students is the concern for change and the barriers that remain in the LPS. Many of the Aboriginal students discussed the experience of moving into the city from their First Nations community as an immense change in their lives. These students stated that their LPS schools, teachers, and classmates do not understand the severity or difficulty of the change from a small First Nations community to the large urban and often alienating non-Aboriginal city. Two students describe the shock of leaving their tight-knit communities to start school in Thunder Bay:

- *Then I came here for High School...and there is a big change, a huge change...you have to change the way you act and behave and your mannerisms... it's like a big shock. It has taken me about 4 years to get used to it...*
- *Where I grew up everyone was a bit more reserved...then I came here and everyone was really loud and expressive. It was shocking that way.*

Aboriginal students also expressed concerns that the supports or resources they receive in schools pales in comparison to their social needs and academic gaps. Specifically, students identified how important an Aboriginal Student Counsellor or support staff were in their schools but bemoaned the very rare or few numbers of support personnel in their schools or the lack of continuity in these positions. Students also stated that more Native Language courses, greater numbers of Aboriginal teachers or staff in their schools, and more Aboriginal content in all subjects would help their transition and conditions for success.

When asked specifically for examples of Aboriginal content in curriculum, some Grade 8 students did state that there was some information on residential schools and Aboriginal veterans taught in their social studies. Students were not able to recall or give examples of any Aboriginal content or Indigenous knowledge integration in other subject areas. The students were also asked if there were any clubs, cultural groups, or extracurricular groups such as an Aboriginal student council, offered in their schools. Most of the Aboriginal students indicated that they had never hear of these groups or approaches but showed keen interest. Students were enthusiastic about opportunities to identify themselves in cultural and personal ways as Aboriginal in school organized functions,

clubs and activities and were Aboriginal focussed. It was clear that the students believed they would develop greater attachment, investment, and ownership as a member of their schools if these opportunities were part of the school's culture.

- *I think that the school system now is built for White people...Like there is nowhere for Native people to fit in...that's what I noticed right away when I came here...and it's terrible because it's built for white people but you have like this population of Native kids coming in...and because of that [lack of supports for Aboriginal students] a lot of them are dropping out and going back to their reserves.*

3c. Positive Pedagogy

The third most common theme that emerged from the focus group transcripts is that Aboriginal students have a strong sense of identity and pride in their culture and they want to merge this strength with academic or school-based success. The Aboriginal students were clear that they want to finish school and achieve their dreams and aspirations to share with their families and communities. There was ample evidence from the focus groups that Aboriginal students maintain a lot of hope for the LPS assisting them along with their families and communities, to achieve a better future.

- *I am trying to get somewhere. It is some kind of truth that most Aboriginal families are poor. Education for them may cost a lot to go to university or college. But there is a lot of potential in Aboriginal people.*
- *Before I was just like whatever. I hate coming to school...but now it's like I need High School or else I can't go anywhere...I'm gonna be on welfare my whole life if I don't, you know...you can't do that...you can't get nowhere with your child doing that...you'll just barely make it... you know, it's hard.*

The focus group discussions indicate that many students trust the actions, education and abilities of their teachers when it comes to academic matters and subject competencies. One focus group discussion makes reference to one specific incident where a teacher seemed to have intentionally treated an Aboriginal student unfairly. The Aboriginal student who reported this incident to the focus group stated that 'Teachers know better...because they are smart.' Many of the other participants were in complete agreement. This discussion demonstrates that Aboriginal students trust their LPS teachers to act in the best academic interest of all students. The presence of this trust indicates that there is a growing opportunity to both continue and foster more healthy, effective, and respectful relationships with Aboriginal students and their families.

Many of the Aboriginal students were also quite open in providing suggestions and strategies for the positive and respectful integration of Indigenous knowledge into their school's curriculum and learning. As one student articulated:

- *First, I would talk about the Creator because the Creator comes first in all we do. We should teach drumming and dancing because it is such a beautiful thing and everyone should be able to experience it.*

4. Recommendations by participants

The recommendations described in this section are based on the transcript data of the Aboriginal student focus groups and their perceptions of what will improve Aboriginal education in the LPS. These recommendations provide insight into what this stakeholder group wants implemented for school board Aboriginal education to become more responsive to Aboriginal students, their families and their communities. These findings are also a reflection of some of the ongoing challenges that Aboriginal students face as students in the LPS.

4a. Aboriginal presence in the schools.

Every focus group discussion included calls for more Aboriginal presence in the schools. When asked what recommendations students had for increasing Aboriginal presence, all of the students stated that more Aboriginal teachers were desperately needed in schools.

- *Maybe have Aboriginal people actually teaching the Aboriginal courses.*
- *I think it would be a good way to see positive role models...like teachers, Aboriginal teachers.*
- *All of the students want more Aboriginal content in the curriculum.*
- *Just because I think our traditions and stuff like that would be incorporated into every class [with an Aboriginal teacher].*

Along with real efforts to integrating Aboriginal content and positive Indigenous knowledge throughout the general curriculum, students stated that there was a need for more Aboriginal-specific or Aboriginal-focused courses in the LPS.

- *You asked a question earlier about is it better to have more Aboriginal classes...I say it's better to have it because some [Aboriginal] people around the area [of Thunder Bay] don't even know half the stuff they learned when they're in this [Native studies] class...like XXX [*name removed]. She didn't know about a Treaty until like a couple weeks ago.*

Students also noted that there needs to be greater awareness raising for their peers on the daily issues that Aboriginal students and their communities face. One suggestion that many of the students offered is to make Aboriginal-specific courses such as Native Studies mandatory or recognized as academic credits for non-Aboriginal students .

4b. Native Language Classes.

Every focus group also identified and emphasized the need for Native Language classes in all grades at all schools. Aboriginal students were clear that they believe Native Language is a critical part of Aboriginal education.

- *I wish we had the choice of taking Native as a Second Language instead of taking French.*
- *I wish I had a choice, especially in elementary, during the younger grades.*
- *I don't like that they only teach one other language. A lot of us don't want to learn French. I feel that we are being forced into it.*

It was apparent in all the focus groups that Aboriginal students seem construct their identity and Aboriginal culture with Native Language instruction and revitalization. One student participant described their desire to learn the language in an attempt to preserve their family knowledge and history:

I want to learn Ojibwe because most of my family used to speak Ojibwe but barely any of them speak it anymore.

4c. More personnel support in the schools specific for Aboriginal students.

Many students identified both the help and benefits along with the ongoing need for an Aboriginal student counsellor in every school.

- *That [Native counsellor] would be really cool...to talk about like the issues...that people face every day and stuff like that.*
- *Like have a Native Counsellor.*
- *The guidance counsellor there was Native...and XXX [*name removed] used to kind of act like the Elder...liked to participate and do different things with the Native students...that was really cool.*

Many students also suggested that Native counsellors and support personnel could participate in, lead or design transition courses and programs that would support Aboriginal students new to the city and urban public school systems.

4d. Develop teacher awareness of Aboriginal culture, issues and community. Aboriginal students stated that most non-Aboriginal teachers were not regularly aware of the challenges that Aboriginal communities face. Many students stated that they want more cultural awareness from their teachers and they want more training or Aboriginal education courses for these teachers.

- *I would like to see teachers taking cultural sensitivity courses.*

- *All they need to do is just be more open about different cultures...and not so close minded.*

4e. Develop teacher understanding of the unique needs of Aboriginal students.

When asked how non-Aboriginal teachers could provide more support to their Aboriginal students, a few students at one school were able to identify clear and personal examples of effective and engaging teacher -student relationships.

- *If you can't change the school then you should just have more teachers like XXX [*name removed].*
- *To not judge everybody by their look...like their skin...we're all the same on the inside...we still want to learn.*
- *This teacher knows everything about us...you ask this teacher anything... 'what's my favourite colour?' ... 'green' ... 'what do you like to eat?' ... 'pizza'.*
- *This teacher got to know who we were as people ...instead of just another student...that's what made us feel welcome.*
- *And it made love going to class and enjoying learning from XXXX [name and sex of teacher not identified]*

5. Recommendations by the Research Team for improving the UAEP for Aboriginal students

Nearly all of the Aboriginal students in the elementary focus groups named and identified the Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS) programming and youth outreach workers as positive forces of Aboriginal education in their schools. Although the UAS and UAEP have a similar mandate in engaging the school community and Aboriginal education, they are two separate groups funded by different Ministries. Aboriginal students observed that they felt the presence of the UAS youth workers was very important for promoting a positive and welcoming Aboriginal presence in their school lives and that most of their Aboriginal education experiences came from the UAS programs and culture instructors:

- *You learn about the four sacred teachings. They read stories and we do art about it.*
- *I like the programs that they have that help students when they don't have lunches.*
- *XXX [*name removed] is really cool and makes me feel proud that I am Anishinaabe.*
- *I like to come to school when XXX [*name removed] is here.*

Many of the students identified with the UAS outreach workers as Aboriginal teachers or culture instructors in the schools. Overall, the Aboriginal students demonstrated keen interest in participating in traditional activities and celebrations such as Powwows and Native Language classes when organized with the UAS outreach worker:

- *Our class's [members] families came [to the Powwow] and it turned out really good...everybody participated and there were little kids dancing around the circle.*

The Aboriginal students in this research were clear that they need more Aboriginal presence in their schools by having more Aboriginal educators, Indigenous knowledge integration, and specific courses in order to see their LPS schools as offering or engaging in Aboriginal education. Along with ongoing teacher and administrator cultural awareness and sensitivity training, more instructional and class time partnerships with Aboriginal organizations such as the UAS and community members were emphasized by the students.

6. Limitations of the collected information about the Aboriginal student stakeholder group include the following:

- Participant selection. The Aboriginal students were almost always selected by a teacher or an administrator, and often at the last minute. At almost each Aboriginal student focus group, administrators or SATs were calling for parental or family permission for students to participate before we could begin the session. This last minute organizing did not happen with the non-Aboriginal student groups, hence, in the research process itself, we recognize that there were cultural gaps in communication between school and Aboriginal students/families that may require innovative strategies in the future.
- Time constraints. The focus groups were conducted during the student lunch break. This short time period may have limited the student participation. Time is necessary to develop relationships, trust, and honest conversation. While the focus groups were designed to be as inclusive and welcoming of students' participation and sharing, all focus groups only met one time. As such, student participants may not have been fully trusting or sharing not only with the university researchers but also with the other Aboriginal students, who were not necessarily in their grade or classes.
- Safe Spaces. There were some interruptions during the focus groups such as staff entering and leaving the meeting room, participants joining or leaving, and bell warnings indicating the end of the lunch period. Again for the purpose of establishing a safe and comfortable space in which to share stories and

experiences of Aboriginal education, this was difficult to do in the very short lunch period when we had access to these students.

Aboriginal Parents, Elders and Community Stakeholder Group

What is the response of the Aboriginal community to the UAEP programs and initiatives thus far?

Description of the Aboriginal Community Stakeholder Group

The Aboriginal community stakeholder group in this qualitative phase of the UAEP study was comprised of parents with children attending the Lakehead Public Schools (LPS) as well as Elders and Aboriginal community members associated with the UAEP or directly involved in Aboriginal education initiatives with the LPS. Overall, twenty-five Aboriginal community members participated in five focus group sessions for the UAEP research. Three of the focus groups involved parents who participate in programs directly tied to the UAEP funding or who have children in the LPS. One focus group included First Nations and Métis Elders who gave generously of their time to share their perspectives on what is Aboriginal education. Another focus group included Aboriginal community members at large, including staff that work in the schools through after-school or non-classroom activities, offering cultural instruction. The focus groups took place at the Lakehead Adult Education Centre, the Lakehead Public School Board offices, at an LPS school and at the Shkoday Abinojiiwak Obimiwedoan building where a table was set up and a smudge ceremony opened the discussions.

The findings presented below are divided into four sections: 1. UAEP programs, 2. General overview of stakeholder experiences and perceptions of Aboriginal education in the LPS, 3. Key issues, and 4. Recommendations.

1. UAEP Programs

Aboriginal community members in the LPS were aware of the UAEP programs in a mostly general sense of Aboriginal education versus awareness of specific UAEP programs by name, unless they were directly working on a UAEP initiative. One Aboriginal community member, however, spoke directly about the UAEP with detailed knowledge of its mandate, "... to improve urban Aboriginal education, to improve student success, create a welcoming environment through teacher professional development and curriculum." Many community members spoke about Aboriginal education in general and LPS classrooms overall as critical sites for the rejuvenation of culture and the revitalization of Aboriginal languages and Indigenous knowledge.

2. General Landscape of the Aboriginal Community Stakeholder Group

A review of the focus group transcript data collected suggests that overall, the Aboriginal community members were positive about the benefits and progress of the UAEP programs and initiatives by the LPS. There was, however, a widely held belief that much more could be done to improve Aboriginal education on the whole. Aboriginal community members were able to give examples of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy in the LPS, positive relationships with the Aboriginal community and the LPS, and the importance of the inclusion of Aboriginal teachings and Indigenous knowledge integration in the LPS. On the other hand, the volume of feedback on needed areas of

improvement in Aboriginal education did exceed the volume of feedback on success stories and experiences of the UAEP in the LPS thus far.

The Aboriginal community members felt there was an ongoing need to enhance, nurture and strengthen relationships and partnerships between the LPS and the Aboriginal community. This need was emphasized throughout the focus groups and, as one community member pointed out, “Aboriginal parents don’t have a choice to send their kids to a certain kind of school [such as an Aboriginal school].” It was clear and evident that the LPS needs to continue to improve relations with the Aboriginal community, including Elders and parents. It can also be concluded from the feedback by Aboriginal community members that a school environment that is lacking active Aboriginal engagement in classrooms by community members is an impoverished, even harmful, environment for Aboriginal students. Overall, LPS schools need to continue to become even more proactive in Aboriginal education by engaging more community and parental participation to create effective, meaningful conditions for student success.

3. Key Issues

The key issues or themes that received the most comments from Aboriginal community members, in descending order, were: a. Change Mechanisms, b. Relationships with Aboriginal Community, and c. Supports for Change. Aboriginal community members spoke often about the need for the LPS to recognize and acknowledge that Elders, parents and Aboriginal community members at large know a great deal about their own culture and their own children. It is evident from the community stakeholder data that the LPS needs to continue to move away from the typical top-down, one-sided, hierarchical organizational approach by school boards, that those with “credentials” know best how to educate Aboriginal children. Only through more parental and community consultation along with direct involvement at the school level will Aboriginal students believe that there is an Aboriginal presence and authentic commitment to Aboriginal education in their schools.

3a. Change Mechanisms and Barriers

The Aboriginal community members commented frequently on various change mechanisms and barriers to improving Aboriginal education. Most of the community comments described a perceived attitude of non-Aboriginal school boards towards Aboriginal education in general, to comments about specific teacher attitudes and practices. As one Aboriginal parent commented upon her own experiences, she summarized that, “Every school should be open and not take short cuts with kids.” Other Aboriginal parents had this to say about teachers and their abilities to be either supports for change or barriers to changes in Aboriginal education:

- *Sometimes the teachers are a challenge, they need to know more, and there is a lack of knowledge, guilt and shame. There are positive and negative responses. The curriculum is not flexible and teachers are not flexible.*
- *I think that teachers – even though it might be a ten minute conversation after school – for teachers once the bell rings, they’re out. If a parent is*

there, it's almost as if, 'I'm here to teach, do my job, get my pay check.' I want to see that the teacher...notices this kid is acting out.

Parents here were expressing concerns that teachers who do not go beyond their 9-to-3:30 duties are not spending enough time to establish real relationships with Aboriginal students and families. As one parent explained, if a child is not given enough attention for who they are as an Aboriginal person, "... it's going to have a profound effect on how that kid looks in the mirror every day...that'll affect his self-worth, his self-esteem, his self-image".

The majority of Aboriginal parents felt they were not receiving enough communication from their children's teachers and realized that their roles as Aboriginal parents would have to change by becoming better advocates for their child's education, "Like if I don't say anything, if I don't go in there and talk, nobody's going to talk to me." The Aboriginal parents and community members also questioned the level of sincerity and commitment by some LPS schools and teachers to Aboriginal education. As one Aboriginal community member stated, "You can see the difference in each school, some schools are only doing it [Aboriginal education] because it looks good on paper." Other Aboriginal community members and parents were concerned about whether or not the majority of non-Aboriginal teachers were supportive of their children or genuine in their efforts to assist Aboriginal students. From all these comments, two interpretations can be made: firstly, Aboriginal parents recognize how important the teacher is for their child's academic success; and, secondly, they have had good experiences with some teachers leading them to recognize those teachers who are not as successful.

Other parents discussed the barriers or limitations to community members as education contributors, due to the accreditation and professionalization of classroom teaching. Parents were concerned that family members would not be welcomed into schools to share knowledge and traditions because school board professionalization discounts or limits their contributions:

- *Native people are willing to teach in the schools but they don't have their papers. My grandma can do it all, offer to teach but she doesn't have the credentials, instead she is a special guest. I want Elders into the schools, I want it forever.*
- *...When I know what topic they're on, you know, 'if you want any help, I can help – as a parent...I can help you bring in someone or maybe I can come in' but the teachers that I present that to are not open to that.*

Aboriginal community members, as evidenced in these comments, are concerned about the ways in which the Ministry mandated curriculum is taught only by most non-Aboriginal teachers with credentials who may not recognize or have the ability to integrate the Indigenous knowledge and wisdom that the Aboriginal community has to offer. Laypersons from the Aboriginal community have the potential to enhance curriculum and provide students with the means to connect their own cultural identities as members of the Aboriginal community with the education system. Again, this is not an issue specific to the LPS but one that is generalizable to all Ontario school boards.

Aboriginal community members who offer complementary cultural programming in LPS schools also referred to the perceived “closed” or authorized professionalization of classroom teaching as a potential barrier to improving Aboriginal education:

- *Many in the LPS do not trust us, we are not up to “their” standards. But we’re there for the kids, that’s our main role. They don’t trust us, there are control issues.*

Other perceived barriers to change by the Aboriginal parents and community members is the ongoing experiences of racism, ethno- or Eurocentrism, and ignorance about Aboriginal culture, Indigenous knowledge and traditions/protocols in school boards. These perceptions are illustrated in the following experiences shared by Aboriginal community members. What is interesting to note is that these experiences with schools were elicited as parents described and contrasted their “school” experiences with the Aboriginal Head Start (Shkoday Abinojiiwak Obimiwedoan), early childhood education program in Thunder Bay.

One Aboriginal community member who visits LPS classrooms regularly, shared a story about the importance of cultural teachings for all students:

I went into a school last week...I brought my hand drum and my rattle, and I said, ‘What do you think this land was like 200 years ago?’ And this one little white boy said, ‘It was a virtual wasteland’. ‘No it wasn’t,’ I said. ‘It was full of trees...it was beautiful wasn’t it?’ You see how they grow up thinking different? In our world, ever since I was a little boy, it didn’t matter if it was in a city or a farm or out in the bush, anywhere. I was always taught that we were connected. And it’s very hard to make the non-Natives and even our Natives now think about the way it was.

An Aboriginal parent shared this story about the importance of Indigenous knowledge and Aboriginal pedagogy for children:

To pick blueberries, you can’t read about it in a book, you need to get some grandmas and Elders in here to smarten up these teachers and principals [laughter ...] Not to single them out, teachers are on edge about these things. It’s not only teachers but it’s also the curriculum too.

Furthermore, another Aboriginal community member who visits LPS schools made this statement on the loss of community controlled education:

*I read the Ontario Education Framework. I read it and I have the same outcomes. Some people in the schools think that drumming is just fooling around, they say, ‘quit fooling around.’ You can’t fund self-esteem. I’ve been in the schools and there is a lot of learning through the arts. The Canadian government did a good job of **not** teaching us.*

Another Aboriginal community member spoke at length about the importance of Aboriginal education for cultural awareness for Aboriginal students in the LPS, “They owe it to us to not wait until we go to University to learn about who you are.” Several

parents used the Aboriginal Head Start (referred to simply as Shkoday) program in Thunder Bay as a frame of reference to compare and contrast their LPS experiences of Aboriginal education. At Shkoday for instance, there is a reverence for teaching Aboriginal children about their ancestral history, as one parent explains, “Look at Shkoday, where else can you see a rabbit skinned?... I loved Head Start because of its Aboriginal content.” Another parent says, “Get those young children from Head Start because you’re already building up those skills, those parenting skills and then it just leads into the school-age piece.” Referring to the pedagogy at Shkoday, another Aboriginal parent observed:

... for kids going from that program to an [LPS] program, I can see how, I mean they do smudging every day and they have feasts all the time. They have speakers come in all the time, they do outdoor stuff all the time, they set up the tipi outside you know? And they have the workers that are dedicated to nourishing the culture that’s being revived, I guess. ...[At Shkoday] you’re immersed in the culture, you’re soaking in it. So to go from that to, especially for children who are 4 or 5 years old, to go into a [LPS] classroom where that may not be the norm. Like you don’t get to smudge anymore, there isn’t language instruction; there isn’t the cultural outings, a feast. It is a big shock.

Teaching students from within an Aboriginal pedagogy includes learning by doing, teachings from the Elders and collaborating with Aboriginal community members on integrating Indigenous knowledge to build the curriculum. An Aboriginal community member who visits LPS schools, explains it this way:

When you bring children back to the way the Elders taught and you teach them with dignity, you treat them with respect... I’m treating them as equals with all the teachings that I have and the teachers I have talked to after they can’t understand the connection that I’m able to make or the spirits have allowed me to make with the teachings as I speak because I’m more of a conduit at that point rather than the person doing, it’s not about me, it’s more about the teachings... I use the medicines.

An Elder who also visits LPS schools spoke to the contrast of Aboriginal pedagogy with the Ministry mandated curriculum:

My language is Ojibwe and I know it in and out and I have to respect that when I teach the language to the people. There’s always a little story with it and those words that you teach, especially the spiritual in those words. I always talk about my grandmother, those little stories that come along. Lots of my students will say, ‘I just love your little stories.’ There’s always a little story that goes... if you have a little story, you’ll remember the word.

These Aboriginal community members are addressing pedagogy and the differences between traditional Aboriginal learning models versus mainstream Eurocentric schooling in which the teacher is often portrayed as the authority figure who wants to be in charge. A culturally relevant and responsive curriculum in the LPS would focus more on intrinsic motivation versus extrinsic motivation. This is illustrated clearly in the following

comments from an Aboriginal community member, reflecting on Aboriginal knowledge and teachings:

The one thing I just wanted to say is with the teachings that were taught to me, it was the hardest time having gone to mainstream schools...having gone through the education system as a Canadian rather than Anishinaabe, the teachings and our connection to Mother Earth are a way of life, they're instinctual...The one thing about the Anishinaabe way is that it's a lifetime of learning and hearing the teachings and walking the path. It is not something that I can sit down, pick up a book and be able to write an exam six months later after studying it. So it's really, really important that we understand that the teachings are very simplistic lessons to be learned at the times we're ready to hear them and not something that can be structured and taught as our technology and the way that the dominant society education system is run. It's not a criticism, it's a fact. Thank you.

Another Aboriginal parent cautioned that there are limits to what can and should be taught in Aboriginal education. At a session in one school, a guest speaker was talking about spirits. The FG parent commented, "I'm okay with my child learning that, but what if you have somebody not open to that? It's not right and you shouldn't be teaching spirituality...It's how you communicate it right, and you're not imposing on someone else's belief system."

In summary, the perceptions of change mechanisms and barriers that emerged through the comments by Aboriginal community members included the attitudes of schools and teachers towards Aboriginal education and Indigenous knowledge, little to no positive communication between schools and Aboriginal parents, little relationship building or personal investment in Aboriginal children by teachers, and a perceived prevalence of Eurocentrism in the curriculum.

3b. Relationships with the Aboriginal Community

The theme that received the second most comments from the Aboriginal community members was on school and school board relationships with the Aboriginal community. A goal of the UAEP is to ensure schools are welcoming environments and incorporate Aboriginal content, resources and materials. Yet, are schools a safe place where students can connect to their own identities and build a foundation of confidence, self-esteem and self-awareness? This line of inquiry generated a great deal of discussion, and as one Aboriginal community member remarked, "The LPS needs to establish a relationship with parents because of residential schooling", there remains a great amount of mistrust, discomfort and wariness on the part of Aboriginal community that is an accumulation of years of pain and trauma from the Indian residential school damages.

Many of the focus group comments included personal experiences in growing up as an Aboriginal community member, as well as comments about relationships between school boards and the Aboriginal community. Specifically, this theme centred on the schools' cultures or the board's organizational climate currently in the LPS for Aboriginal community members. Some comments focused on the physical environment of schools

while many focused on the social environment. Regarding the physical environment, one parent commented that, "... the school my son is in right now is very plain, there's nothing there that's welcoming, to me anyway." Another parent, at a different school, had a significantly different experience, "It's amazing what he's [the principal] done with the language component as far as putting... Ojibwe or Oji-Cree outside the building [on signs], or in the daycare or lunch room...it's all over, so, I think it's very welcoming."

One Aboriginal parent shared a story about visiting their child's school and explains the distance that schools will need to go to invite Aboriginal parents into their children's schools. "I even find it difficult to go into my kids' school sometimes. I went there once and this teacher came up to me and said, 'where's your sign in card? Did you sign in?' ...So I felt a bit like a criminal, before a parent."

Several of the Aboriginal parents addressed the legacy of racism and its enduring impact on relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in LPS schools. Some parents, in fact, recounted their own negative experiences of school and schooling as Aboriginal children:

I wasn't a favourite – they [teachers] had favourites – Jeff so-and-so somebody and Amber so-and-so were the favourites of all the teachers because he was the sexy jock and she was the pretty rich girl, you know what I mean? So the little Native girl that is below the poverty line – she's down over there somewhere. [pointing to the back of the room]

Another parent related a story about being teased as a youngster, being called "you bogan, you stink," and another parent spoke about the history of education for Aboriginal peoples: "Look at our ancestors, why did it all have to change? Back then, kids did not have school, we actually taught white people how to survive. But now it's a white man's world... they stabbed us in the back." Another parent, talking about life as an Aboriginal community member in a predominantly non-Aboriginal urban centre and how that experience impacts their level of involvement in schools, explained: "I don't feel on par with the people at the school system and that I could be part of it. I don't know? But, maybe that's part of it too. Why, sort of that reluctance to get involved, right? Well, what do I know? What can I contribute?"

An Aboriginal Elder reflected on the historical legacies of Aboriginal-non-Aboriginal relationships in education:

But that's the way it was then – you had no voice in the public schools. So of course you had no voice in Residential Schools...But it came about later on when I started getting involved. I was the first woman [Band] Councillor so they gave me the opening of being able to speak wherever. But since parents, although they're shy it seems, I sit on the school board periodically and it seems like the Native parents are there with them at that meeting and they're the young people...they have a voice there for the students. And it seems they're still nervous – the parents are still nervous. But the more that they are there, the more they could get more comfortable. Because they should be involved with their kids...there are a few parents that you have to encourage to go.

The Aboriginal community has historically experienced mainstream schooling as a place of damage, exploitation and cultural negation which has resulted in a tense relationship of mistrust and is reflected in the comments from the Aboriginal community. The legacy or historical poison of residential schools is a legacy that all provincial school boards will need to contend with and reconcile. The painful legacy is often a barrier for Aboriginal parents to be strong advocates for their children in education systems. Thus, the LPS must recognize the need to actively nurture trust and comfort with the Aboriginal community and that it is incumbent upon the LPS (and all school boards) to take action steps to address these ongoing legacies and damaged relationships.

Some parents specifically addressed the improvement of welcoming environments at the LPS due primarily to the work of the UAS Youth Outreach Workers⁴ (YOW) program in Thunder Bay. One Aboriginal parent explained, “I have a child in the system and I get to meet a lot of parents who don’t feel welcome, won’t go to parent interviews. A YOW though is now creating a welcoming environment, embracing culture and all people, have never felt that in schools before.” Another Aboriginal community member commented, “They [YOW] teach about the drum for example. After school programs on Friday is a segue into weekends.” Another Aboriginal parent observed, “I noticed that my son was getting to the point where he couldn’t be controlled in school. And then I noticed that when those people [YOW] stepped in, he was a little bit calmer.” This parent further stated that her son says the YOW that visits his school, “...is awesome.”

There are also LPS teachers who want to help to create a more welcoming environment for Aboriginal parents and community. As one Aboriginal parent remarked, “...there are some ambassador-teachers that just say hi to everybody. They really know the kids and the parents too.” Another parent commented that school leadership is important: “It is the principal that sets the tone.”

Lastly, one of the Aboriginal community members expressed frustration with the way school boards often seem to view cultural programming in only economic terms:

There was a study on bullying and our program was not at all mentioned... It was a slap in the face. The [program, named removed] is a cultural tool and it has done amazing this year. Yet, all that work was claimed in the bullying study as a success. The only way the schools relate to the value of a powwow is in dollars, to host a proper powwow would cost a community \$6000.

This community member was relating how a school or school board cannot advertise a welcoming environment while evaluating a cultural activity, such as a powwow, (mis)valued and (mis)understood mainly in terms of cost or investment.

3c. Recommendations for Change and Improvement of Aboriginal education

⁴ The Youth Outreach Workers (YOW) program is an initiative of the Neighbourhood Capacity Building Program, part of the Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS) in Thunder Bay that works in partnership to offer cultural programming in the LPS

Aboriginal community members made numerous to building cultural awareness among students and educators while supporting Aboriginal student success. The key themes in these recommendations were *language revitalization*, the hiring of *more Aboriginal staff and teachers*, and the adoption by the LPS of a more *broadly defined definition of curriculum*, including Indigenous knowledge imparted by Aboriginal knowledge holders (“uncertified” community members) in the classroom.

Aboriginal Language Revitalization

As Ontario’s Aboriginal Education Strategy⁵ acknowledges, Aboriginal language carries with it the spirit, culture, history and philosophy of a people, and is the principle means by which a culture is preserved and transmitted. Several Aboriginal parents and Elders commented on the importance of an Aboriginal language option for students to replace French or to complement French language options. As one Aboriginal parent recommended, “My dad took me out of French. They should have Native as a second language option instead.” Another Aboriginal parent stated, “...just like French immersion, so we should have an Anishinaabe school.” A third Aboriginal parent shared this experience:

We just moved here and to this school. My eldest daughter she took Native [language] all the time back where we’re from...This is the first time that she’s doing French and she’s having a hard time...She is used to the Native [language].

While another Aboriginal parent projected this wish:

...So for my daughter just starting school, it’s my hope that she will at least be bilingual, but I wish I spoke Ojibwa or Oji-Cree right, cause then she’d speak three languages for sure, you know and then she just has more opportunities.

In summary, Aboriginal parents and community members recognize that culture and language are intimately entwined and cannot be separated. Aboriginal community members want their children to have the opportunity and the option to study Aboriginal languages in an effort to learn, preserve and protect their culture.

The Hiring of More Aboriginal Staff and Teachers

One of the goals of Ontario’s Aboriginal Education Strategy through the First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework⁶ is “increasing the number of Aboriginal staff working in school boards.” When asked about the best way to improve Aboriginal education in the LPS, many Aboriginal community members stated simply, “more teachers.” Strong recommendations were given by members of the Aboriginal community that Aboriginal education must include the hiring of Aboriginal staff and teachers within the LPS. As one Aboriginal parent voiced:

⁵ Via the Aboriginal Education Strategy Ontario’s Native language curriculum offers study in seven Native languages. Courses are available at both the elementary and secondary level.

⁶ Ontario’s First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Framework was released by the Ontario Ministry of Education in 2007 as a key part of Ontario’s “Aboriginal Education Strategy”

If there are Aboriginal teachers, it's better. A white person goes through a book but doesn't really know it, is not living it. An Aboriginal person knows what they are saying. It's better if an Aboriginal person teaches Aboriginal education.

In addition to teachers, it was recommended that there be more Aboriginal guidance counsellors. As one Aboriginal parent noted, "Maybe the Anishinaabe [students] would rather, instead of talking to the school counsellor... would open up to the Native one." Also, Aboriginal community members spoke about hiring advocates at the board level so that parents had someone "...to go to" when they needed assistance. In addition, the School Board might hiring experts in conflict resolution and advocacy or, as a parent commented, "...maybe hire a few people that are experts in that type of stuff and taking care of conflicts [in schools]."

The of a More Broadly Defined Definition of Curriculum (including Indigenous knowledge imparted by Aboriginal community members, as partners in Aboriginal education, in the classroom)

Another one of the key goals of Ontario's Aboriginal Education Strategy through the First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework is "encouraging more parents to get involved in their children's education or school." Consistently, members of the Aboriginal community spoke about the need to have Aboriginal people teaching Aboriginal education, including more community members in the classroom setting. One Aboriginal community member stated the view quite clearly: "Role models cannot just exist on posters, role models need to be in the schools." Another Aboriginal parent commented, "I think for people to switch how they think about the involvement of Aboriginal people is where it [Aboriginal education] needs to be changed." Members of the Aboriginal community also spoke of the added value of Aboriginal knowledge holders in classrooms for increasing positive Indigenous knowledge and awareness amongst all students.

An Aboriginal parent related the benefits of having an Elder go into classrooms and who could teach both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, "...and no, it isn't their culture per say, sitting in a predominantly white class...but it just so happens our country has a lot of Native Canadians in it."

One Aboriginal parent spoke about the exceptional value of having Aboriginal people in the classrooms to teach about Aboriginal culture:

...Way, way back... they used to tan, dye all the clothes... because they killed their own back then... I think having to learn a little bit about their culture would maybe help with the pain. Maybe a white girl would become friends – best friends – all throughout high school, with an Indian.

And speaking about heritage days or cultural days one Aboriginal Elder stated:

I'd like to see the School Board get more of them days into all the schools because that was absolutely great...The drums were there and the Indian dancing and even the Ukrainian society... you know, it's just a heritage day for what

happened hundreds of years ago and that was excellent. The kids got an education that day and it was great.

Other parents spoke specifically about parental involvement as a way to improve Aboriginal education. One Aboriginal parent emphasized that “more Aboriginal teachers” are needed and that as a parent they would not mind “...going in there and volunteering, like at least one hour.” Another Aboriginal parent declared, “I’m a very engaged parent, so if teachers want to start building relationships and if they want help with that area, you need to allow for those opportunities for parents to be engaged in the classroom, if they can do that.”

4. Recommendations

Taking all of the reviewed transcript data into account, the idea that Aboriginal community expertise in the area of Aboriginal education can offer positive effects on creating welcoming and engaging environments for Aboriginal students, seems to be reasonably well substantiated. The following recommendations regarding program development of the UAEP for engagement with the Aboriginal community are suggested by the UAEP Research Team:

- 1) The LPS needs to continue to reach out to the Aboriginal community, open up spaces for Aboriginal community members to discuss the issues that effect their community on the whole and the impact these issues have specifically on Aboriginal student achievement. It is also a way to provide opportunities for members of the Aboriginal community to get involved in Aboriginal education advocacy and collaborate with the LPS on curriculum improvement and Indigenous knowledge positive integration.
- 2) Increase the number of Aboriginal peoples in schools by (1) hiring more Aboriginal teachers, administrators and staff and (2) inviting Aboriginal role models from the community into the schools, including the effective UAS/YOW workers and Aboriginal guidance counsellors.
- 3) Incorporate Aboriginal languages into the curriculum in meaningful ways, including the development and implementation of more Aboriginal language courses and the hiring of more Aboriginal language instructors from the Aboriginal community.

Appendix 1

Research CODES for analysis in Atlas.Ti

1. **UAEP PROGRAMS** (could any of the participants name or identify a UAEP-funded program that they were involved in? Could they name/remember other programs—UAS, etc. By the sheer act of remembering or not remembering UAEP programs, these are indicators of the UAEP's **impact**.)
2. **RESPONSIBILITY** (who has the problem, whose responsibility is this issue, who should change to address it? LPS members ranged in just questioning or wanting to pass the responsibility to someone else or realizing that it needed to be either non-Aboriginal people's turn or Aboriginal community's primary responsibility)
 - **RESPONSIBILITY + UNSURE**
 - **RESPONSIBILITY + ADMIN OR SCHOOL BOARD**
 - **RESPONSIBILITY + NON-ABORIGINAL** (of non-Aboriginal people/non-Aboriginal community at large)
 - **RESPONSIBILITY + ABORIGINAL** (of Aboriginal Peoples/Aboriginal Community at large)
3. **KNOWLEDGE** (knowledge of culture, content knowledge, curriculum knowledge, traditional knowledge, current issues)
 - **KNOWLEDGE + POSITIVE (WORKING TOWARDS ENGAGEMENT, UNDERSTANDING)**
 - **KNOWLEDGE + NEGATIVE (DISENGAGED, STUCK, UNINTERESTED, "DONE ENOUGH")**
4. **PEDAGOGY** Practices (teaching focused, at the site of being stuck or of change, culturally responsive pedagogy, un/willingness to go beyond curriculum add-ons of content)
 - **PEDAGOGY+ POSITIVE (WORKING TOWARDS ENGAGEMENT, UNDERSTANDING)**
 - **PEDAGOGY+ NEGATIVE (DISENGAGED, STUCK, UNINTERESTED, "DONE ENOUGH")**
5. **CHANGE MECHANISMS** (Barriers-negative) –change mechanisms and impediments towards engagement by teachers, administrators, parents, students (obstacles, constraints, entrenched positions)
 - **BARRIERS + REMOTE COMMUNITY/FAMILY** (special mention may be needed of the cultural obstacles, isolation, difficulties, culture-shock of remote First Nation families and students transitioning to the urban school/Thunder Bay)
6. **SUPPORTS** (positive) for change in engagement (possibilities, openings, positive enabling) This may be especially the case for Urban Aboriginals when their

families are in Thunder Bay and they have made the cultural/linguistic/academic transition to urban schooling.

7. Cultural **AWARENESS** (self-reflexivity, in/ability to see one's culture—mainly non-Aboriginal for recognizing their own cultural positions, for Aboriginal participants, it is about Cultural Pride and need for recognition)
 - **AWARENESS + POSITIVE+NON-ABORIGINAL (WORKING TOWARDS ENGAGEMENT, UNDERSTANDING, RELATIONS WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLES,**
 - **AWARENESS + POSITIVE+ABORIGINAL (ABORIGINAL CULTURAL-PRIDE)**
 - **AWARENESS + NEGATIVE +NON-ABORIGINAL (DISENGAGED, STUCK, UNINTERESTED, "DONE ENOUGH" TOWARDS DEVELOPING MY CULTURAL AWARENESS IN RELATION TO ABORIGINAL PEOPLES)**
 - **AWARENESS + NEGATIVE +ABORIGINAL (ABORIGINAL PEOPLE'S LACK OF SELF ESTEEM; LOSS OF CULTURAL PRIDE THROUGH/IN SCHOOLING)**

8. **RELATIONSHIPS--POSITIVE** (Integrated relationality—recognition and honouring of cultural distinctions --bringing together both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students/content/knowledge as education-for-all, **positive**, multiple converging discourses/perspectives/values; teacher demonstrates commitment to educating Aboriginal children; respectful; Decolonizing-Culturally Responsive; attempts to reconcile and improve their relations with Aboriginal people.)

RELATIONSHIPS—NEGATIVE (Erasure or denial of cultural distinctiveness in the relationship; ignoring Aboriginal values and culture; keeping Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures/content/knowledge **apart**, for negative reasons, where Aboriginal discourse and values are erased; includes Racist-Neo-colonialism-deficit.–e.g., “those people”)

9. **RECOMMENDATIONS** (What have the research participants recommended for improving Aboriginal student engagement; non-Aboriginal teacher PD/development; school board organization; programs; Aboriginal community involvement/engagement; etc.)

Appendix 2

Focus Group Open-ended Questions for Conversations

Elementary Principals Focus Group

1. What do you understand as the purpose and mandate of the Urban Aboriginal Education Project here at the LPS?
2. What are the unique/specific needs of Aboriginal students/community at your elementary school? How would you describe them? Can you give examples/illustrations?
3. How does the UAEP impact your elementary school—currently? (e.g., specific examples of programs/program components)
4. What (critical) needs do your teachers/staff have in response to Aboriginal students/community and Aboriginal content/material?
5. How would you describe the (PD) development needs of your staff in response to urban Aboriginal education?
6. How would you describe your (personal) leadership role in urban Aboriginal education for the LPS? [How big of a role/part is urban Aboriginal education in your overall job and time as an elementary principal?]
7. How would you like to develop your leadership in response to the demands/needs of urban Aboriginal education (students, families, community)?
8. How would you like to see the LPS Board support you in your efforts or your school/staff efforts? [How can we address “**engagement**” by both Aboriginal students/families and by LPS personnel? How can we increase cross-engagement and community building?]
9. If there is one thing you could change about your school (staff, building, curriculum, resources) to improve urban Aboriginal education, what would you change?
10. Given your experiences with the UAEP as an elementary principal in the last 1-3 years, what do you think the LPS Board is going to face in urban Aboriginal education in the coming 3-5 years? What would you recommend as points of change or next steps of shifts towards greater achievement/improvement in urban Aboriginal education (student achievement)?

Elementary Teachers Focus Group

1. How did you arrive in this PD? How did you hear about it? Who asked you to attend?

2. What needs do you have as teachers of Aboriginal students? What (pedagogical, personal) needs do you think this PD is/will be addressing?
3. What do you understand of the UAEP component (Gr. 7 Socials) after day 1 of the PD? How would you describe it to a spouse/friend when you go home?
4. Have you had any previous experiences in Aboriginal education?
5. How would you describe those experiences?
6. Can you describe a pivotal event that made you realize that urban Aboriginal education was an issue that you would need a) to think about b) to learn about or c) actively address?
7. How do you see yourselves as actors/drivers of this process (or shift of emphasis) towards urban Aboriginal education?
8. Can you describe conditions and (student success) outcomes that you believe need to be addressed?
 - ...by yourselves as elementary teachers? By secondary teachers?
 - ... by the school?
 - ... by the LPS board?
 - ... by the Ministry?

Grade 8 Aboriginal Student Focus Group Questions:

1. What is Algonquin school like as a community? What is it like to be Aboriginal at Algonquin? Can you describe your interactions with non-Aboriginal students/teachers?
2. Do you remember participating in any of the following programs when you were in Gr. 7 (for Aboriginal students --Later Literacy or extra reading/coaching; for both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal students --Aboriginal cultural events or visits from Elders or LTTA Aboriginal artists ...)
3. Do you think you have received any Aboriginal education in your last year's class --when you were in Gr. 7-- or in this year's class, Grade 8?
4. What happened that you would call Aboriginal education?
5. Can you tell me any stories or events or people/visitors/guests you have met as a result of Aboriginal education?
6. What did you experience or learn? What do you now understand of Aboriginal peoples, issues, history, culture ... that you learned here at Algonquin school? (or that you didn't know before)
7. Does school feel different with these Aboriginal education programs (more welcoming, more interesting, more community-oriented, more inclusive ...)?

Aboriginal Community Members and Culture Instructors

1. What do you understand as the mandate/purpose of the UAEP?
2. How do your roles in LPS schools fit into or promote the goals of the UAEP?

3. Where do you think you have been the most effective in improving Aboriginal education in LPS schools (conditions, relationships, welcoming environments, community-building, etc.)?
4. From your perspective, what are some of the obstacles/difficulties that Aboriginal students face in LPS schools (elementary, secondary)?
5. From your perspective, what are some of the successes/gains that Aboriginal students have achieved in LPS schools (elementary, secondary) with the advent of the UAEP?
6. From your perspective, what are some of the obstacles/difficulties that Aboriginal parents face in being advocates for their child's education in the LPS?
7. If you could change one thing (miraculously, ideally) in the LPS schools tomorrow, what would you change?
8. If you could change or extend your role as a culture instructor or community participant in the LPS schools to improve Aboriginal education, what would you do?
1. If you could recommend or promote your role or approach to Aboriginal education in every school board in Ontario, how would you do or advocate?