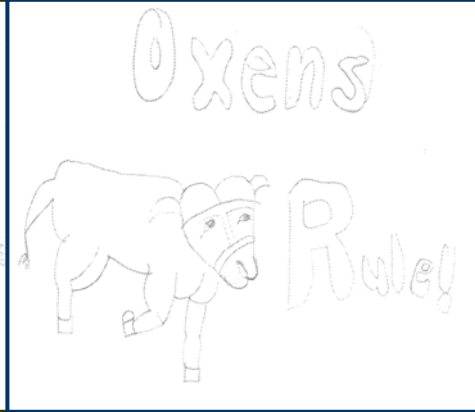


UAEPP



Urban Aboriginal Education Pilot Project

Student Perspectives:

Executive Summary

August 2009

**Haig-Brown
Research & Consulting**

Executive Summary

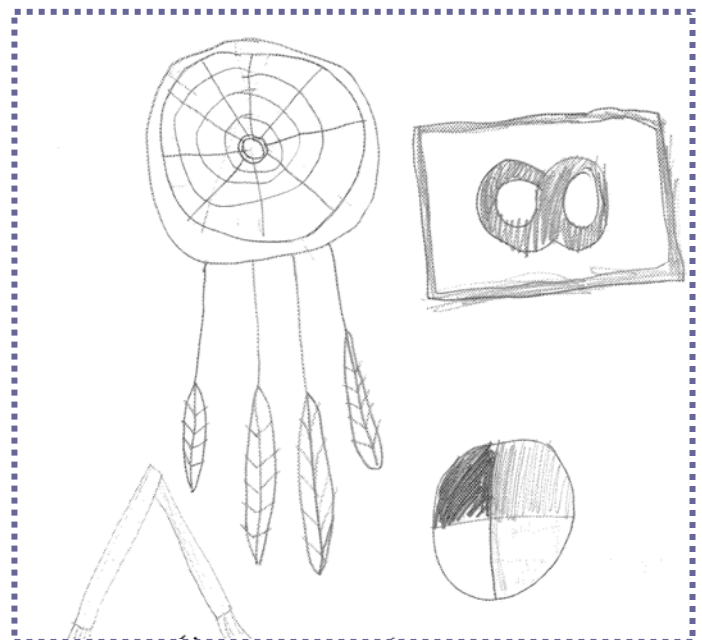
The Urban Aboriginal Education Pilot Project (UAEPP), initiated in January, 2008, invited four ‘site’ schools in Barrie to embrace the infusion of Aboriginal content into regular school teaching while recognizing the unique learning needs of Aboriginal youth. The project included several cultural activities, whole-school awareness initiatives, the development of a physical space (“The Lodge”) where students could become involved in activities rooted in Aboriginal culture, the presence of Child & Youth workers and Resource Teachers as supports for both staff and students. This document is a compilation of reflections of elementary students’ response to the project. Their perspectives and contributions have helped to offer valuable insight into the benefits and challenges of the Urban Aboriginal Education Pilot Project (UAEPP). Many thanks are offered to these students for their time, thoughtfulness, and honesty.

1. Objectives

The development of identity and agency of Aboriginal youth is a critical part of supporting their learning needs. The Policy Research Initiative (Horizons, 2008) notes that ‘Spaces to congregate with peers, take a break from having to meet expectations, share experience and gather information are critical’ (p.11) to open doors for Aboriginal youth. The UAEPP gathered information from the community about what would help foster greater cultural understanding in our schools. The community responded that there needed to be a welcome environment at schools as well as a separate area for Aboriginal cultural development, echoing the findings of the Policy Initiative. The

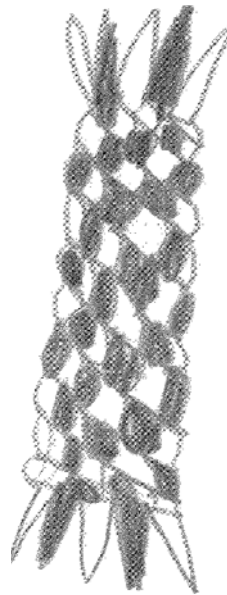
UAEPP undertook to address these two concerns. The first concern was addressed by infusing Aboriginal culture into activities and classrooms while the second concern was addressed by establishing a “Lodge” in each site school.

At the end of the first year of the project, the ‘interim’, an evaluation was undertaken to determine some of the benefits and challenges of the UAEPP. This report is a summary of the results of that evaluation. The objectives of this report are to determine whether the program made an impact on student experience and cultural growth.



2. Lodge Activities

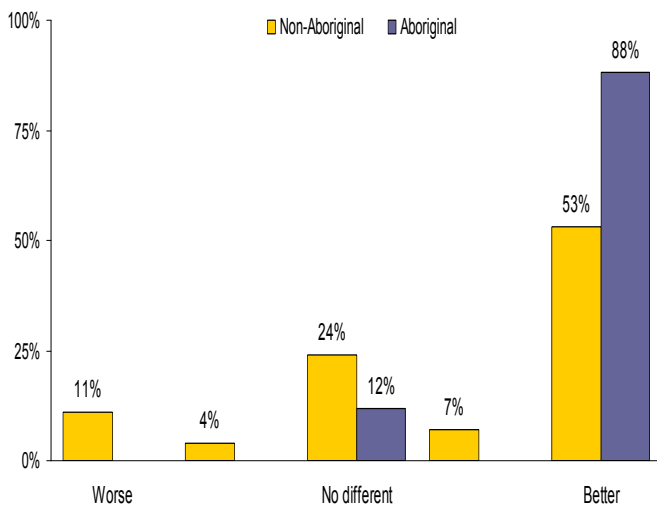
Students reported to have enjoyed the activities associated with the Lodges and to have learned about Aboriginal peoples. When asked what it was that they liked the most about the activities, grade 3 students enthusiastically wrote such comments as, ‘Helping other people’ and ‘I liked it because it was challenging’.



Older students (grades 4 – 8) were asked what they learned in the activity and some responses included,

‘How the art is amazing’
 ‘I learnt to Respect others and They will respect you back’, ‘I learned that all beliefs are important’, and ‘I learned how to say I like your shirt’.

Although half of the students indicated that doing the lodge activity made them feel ‘better’ about themselves, a clear majority of students who had self-identified as Aboriginal had this sentiment, as seen in the graph below.

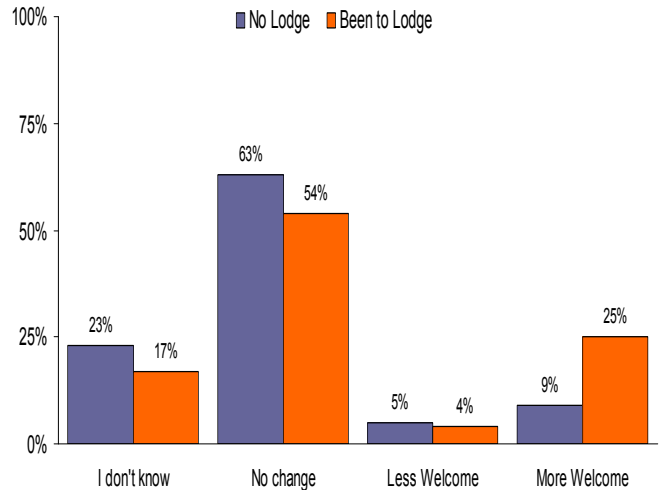


3. Welcome Environment

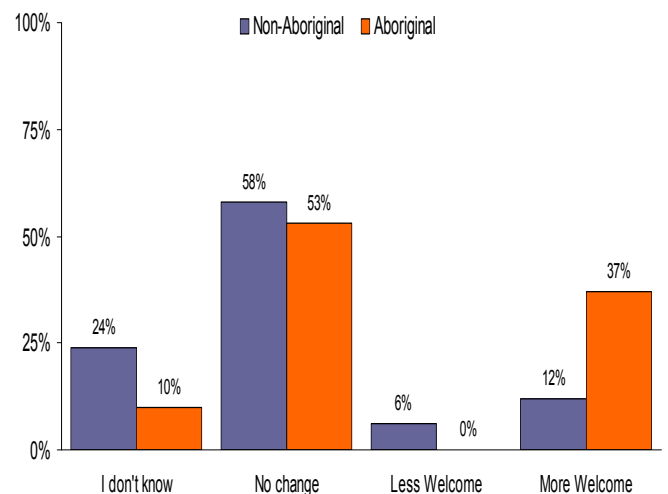
Students indicated that, in general, they felt pretty welcome or very welcome at school. For grade 3’s, 85% felt welcome, while for students in grades 4 through 8, 73% felt welcome. When

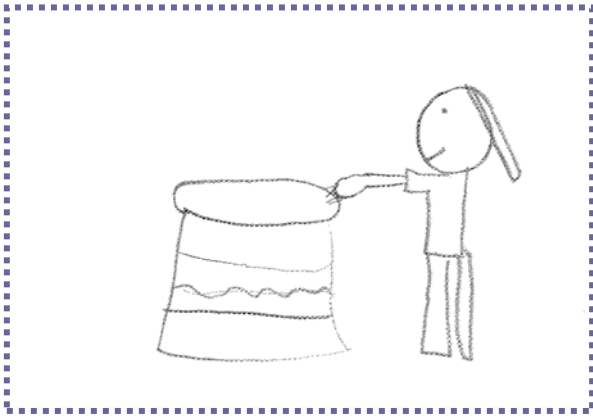
asked if their feeling of being welcome had changed since the UAEPP, students answered differently, depending on whether they had been to their Lodge. As can be seen below, a quarter of those who had been to the Lodge felt more welcome since the UAEPP while 9% of those who had not been to the lodge felt more welcome since the UAEPP.

Another difference emerged between students



who had self-identified as Aboriginal and those who had not. Over a third of Aboriginal students indicated that they felt more welcome since UAEPP while just over 10% of non-self-identified students indicated this change (below).





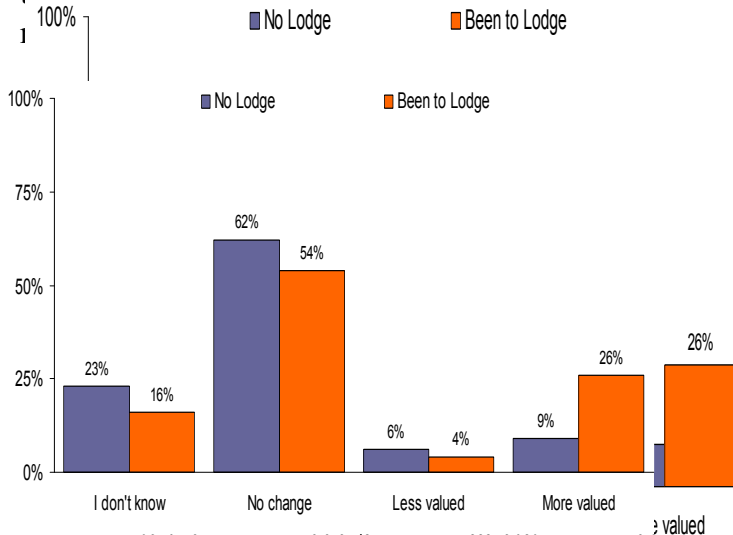
Aboriginal peoples. When students were asked whether they knew more about First Nation, Metis, Inuit in the project year than in the year before. 79% of grade 3 students indicated that they learned ‘way more’ or ‘some more’. Of the older students who had indicated that they had participated in a Lodge activity, 72% noted that the activity had given them a better understanding of Aboriginal peoples. They reported to have learned about Art, Culture, History, Spirituality, Language, and Government.

Comfort with Material

Students were asked how comfortable they were when Aboriginal content was discussed in class. 91% of grade 3 students indicated that they felt either ‘pretty’ or ‘very’ comfortable, while 61% of older students had the similar responses. For older students, if they had visited the Lodge at their school, 81% noted that they were pretty or very comfortable learning about Aboriginal content, while 52% who had not been to the lodge had this level of comfort.

4. Feeling Valued

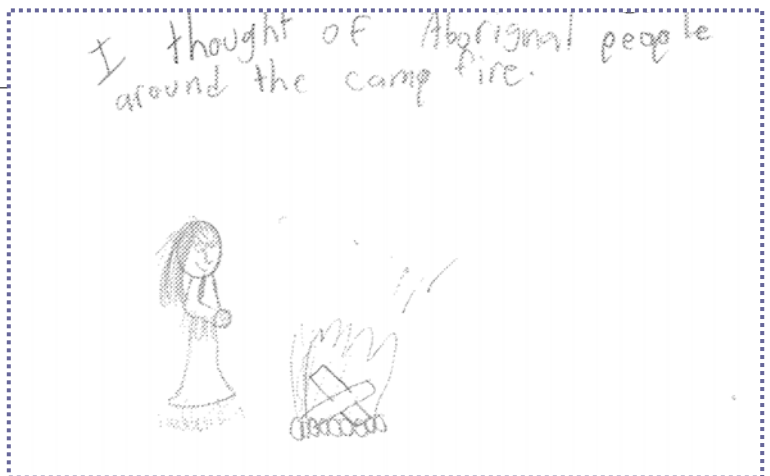
Fifty percent of students indicated that they felt ‘pretty’ or ‘very’ valued at school. When asked whether their feeling of being valued had changed as a result of the UAEPP, students who had been to the Lodge were more inclined to a positive



5. Aboriginal Content Material

In general, younger grades (4 – 5) indicated that they learned about Aboriginal art if it were being taught in classes, while older grades indicated that they were learning about Aboriginal culture and history. Indeed, when asked in which classes students were learning about Aboriginal peoples, younger grades were more inclined to say ‘Art’ while older classes were more inclined to respond with ‘Social Studies’.

One of the main goals of the program was to infuse Aboriginal content into classrooms such that students would increase their understanding of



6. Changes

Grade 3 students were asked if school was different because of the UAEPP. 61% of students indicated that school was better. When this question was analyzed by ancestry, proportionally more self-identified Aboriginal students indicated that school was better since the UAEPP than non-Aboriginal students. This difference is seen on the right.

