

## ***The Listening Stone***

Learning From the Ontario Ministry of Education's  
First Nations, Métis and Inuit–Focused Collaborative Inquiry 2013-2014



*SD Dion Consulting ♦ Indigenous Research & Education*

***Dr. Susan D. Dion***  
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## MESSAGE FROM THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

*We know what we know from where we stand.*  
(Kovach, Margaret, 2009, p.7)

Anushiik, Miigwetch, Nia:wen, Yaw^ko, Marsee, Qujannamiik, to the Elders, students, parents, community members, teachers, principals, District School Board (DSB), and Ministry staff who participated in the *Listening Stone Project*. Thank you, for sharing your stories of teaching and learning with the research team. In this report, my objective is to document the inquiry process and participants' learning reported at the face-to-face gatherings, during phone interviews and in an online survey.

My work in the field of Indigenous Education began almost twenty-five years ago when I was an elementary school teacher and the mother of three children attending school in Ontario. At that time, advocating for Aboriginal Education in provincially funded schools was lonely work. When I observe the progress made over the past 25 years and especially the work accomplished through the Collaborative Inquiry, I am impressed and overwhelmed with feelings of hope for the future of Indigenous students. However, it is not my intention to allow my positive feelings and response to what I heard, erase the ongoing struggle this work involves. I heard the presentations, the questions, and the challenges. I know that resistance to this work is still sometimes very strong, that Indigenous students, parents and families far too frequently confront disrespect and misinformed judgments. I also see the progress made and the commitment to change supported by many. I am proud to work with teams of good people committed to integrating FNMI content across the curriculum and incorporating Indigenous ways of teaching and learning at all levels of education.

I wrote this report in service of advancing the project of transforming schooling experiences for FNMI students. I hope that all participants in the Collaborative Inquiry hear their voices represented here and that it is a useful resource as we move forward with the work.

***Kwatanushiik***



Susan Dion  
July 31, 2014  
Toronto, Ontario

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research report titled *The Listening Stone Project: Learning From the Ontario Ministry of Education's First Nations Métis and Inuit Focused Collaborative Inquiry Initiative 2013-2014*, is informed by the voices of First Nations, Métis and Inuit community members as well as Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators who participated in the initiative.

Started in the fall of 2013, *the FNMI Focused Collaborative Inquiry Initiative* (FNMI CI) was intended to support the success of First Nation, Métis and Inuit students. The Leadership and Implementation, Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, Student Achievement Division, of the Ontario Ministry of Education provided direction and support to the 15 District School Boards (DSBs) who participated in the Initiative. Boards were asked to invite the participation of Collaborative Inquiry Teams from schools where there are high numbers of self-identified First Nation, Métis and/or Inuit students who are facing academic and/or engagement challenges. Inquiry designs were grounded in local contexts, CI teams were established, and local FNMI community partners were invited to participate. Each participating DSB identified a Board Lead and school communities to participate in the initiative. Working in collaboration, educators and FNMI Community members composed inquiry questions to guide their work.

Drawing on data gathered between April and May of 2014, I document, evaluate, and provide an analysis of what was accomplished and what was learned through the work of the CI Initiative. The report is based on the findings of *The Listening Stone Project*, a research and evaluation project requested by the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE). The purpose of the research and evaluation was to learn from the inquiry how educators, policy makers, and community members contribute to FNMI student well-being and achievement in provincially funded schools.

This research shows that when educators work in collaboration with FNMI community partners, there are positive impacts on school systems including increased presence of FNMI people in the schools and consequently increased opportunities for teachers and students to learn from Aboriginal people. The presence of Elders, Traditional Knowledge and Wisdom Keepers, Indigenous artists, and language and culture teachers, supports and fosters FNMI students' experiences of belonging and well-being in schools.

Most significantly, the FNMI Collaborative Inquiry built on the following: expansion of relationships with FNMI community members, improvements in FNMI students' attitudes toward schooling, and augmentation of teachers' knowledge and understanding of FNMI history, culture, and present circumstances. These accomplishments are due in part, to the value and legitimacy shown to Indigenous knowledge.

This research and evaluation supports the continuation and expansion of the FNMI CI. Specifically, it offers evidence for the efficacy of a continued focus on cultivating positive relationships between schools and FNMI communities and especially, on reaching out to FNMI parents, on providing ongoing support of classroom teachers' own learning about Indigenous peoples, and on attending to the needs of FNMI students.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

Research informing this report includes analysis of observation notes taken during face-to-face gatherings at three sites where participating DSBs presented their CI projects. It includes interviews with CI participants and the results from an on-line survey of participants.

The research has generated 6 key findings.

1. The FNMI Focused Collaborative Inquiry was successful in supporting positive relationships between FNMI communities and school communities; however engaging FNMI parents continues to be a challenge.
2. The FNMI Focused Collaborative Inquiry was successful in providing educational opportunities to significantly improve the knowledge of students and educators in the participating DSBs about the rich cultures and histories of FNMI people. It also identified this as an area of ongoing need.
3. There is anecdotal evidence that the FNMI Focused Collaborative Inquiry had a positive impact on FNMI students' attitudes toward schooling and increased participation in school activities. There was insufficient time to document and collect empirical evidence of the impact on student achievement.
4. The FNMI Focused Collaborative Inquiry supports a complex understanding of the relationship between the education system's capacity to demonstrate respect for the legitimacy of Indigenous knowledge and FNMI students' well-being and achievement.
5. The FNMI Focused Collaborative Inquiry provided opportunities for teachers to engage with and teach FNMI content. It also uncovered ongoing discomfort with the inclusion of FNMI content by some educators. CI participants identified "learning in relationship with FNMI community members" key to their learning how to teach FNMI content.
6. The FNMI Focused Collaborative Inquiry provided a positive experience to the majority of participants (teachers, principals, students, parents) who expressed a desire to continue participating in the initiative.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Eight key recommendations emerge from this research.

1. Building on the significant and positive impacts of the FNMI Focused CI, it is recommended that that the initiative be expanded to other interested District School Boards and continue to prioritize boards with a high FNMI student population.
2. There is evidence of ongoing discomfort to engage with FNMI content by teachers. Close analysis of interview data suggests that the discomfort derives from the teachers' lack of knowledge and understanding and their fear of making mistakes. Continued support for the development and delivery of professional learning opportunities for all staff working in provincially funded schools is recommended.
3. Improving relationships between school communities and FNMI communities had positive impacts for teachers and students. It is thus recommended that the Ministry and DSBs continue to cultivate these relationships and provide specific support to schools for programs that support parent outreach.
4. The provision of financial support to participating DSBs allowed boards to provide FNMI specific education opportunities for FNMI students, their teachers and peers. It is thus recommended that financial support for this initiative be maintained.
5. Many classroom teachers are aware of the need to integrate FNMI content across their curriculum, but they are not necessarily aware of how to do so successfully. Therefore, it is recommended that the teachers be provided with ongoing support for integrating FNMI content across the curriculum, including making available access to quality FNMI resources and information about how to make use of those resources.
6. The FNMI CI contributes to educators' understanding of the complex relationship between teachers' appreciation of Indigenous knowledge and FNMI student well-being and achievement. Ongoing attention to this relationship will contribute to a deeper understanding of the FNMI student achievement gap and successful strategies for responding to the gap.
7. Research results provide anecdotal evidence of positive impacts on FNMI student achievement and well-being. It is recommended that the Ministry and DSBs work in collaboration with community partners to develop culturally appropriate methods of tracking students' participation, attitudes, and achievement.
8. Participants expressed appreciation for opportunities to discuss and learn from each other during the provincial gatherings. A final recommendation is that opportunity for cross-district dialogue be explored that focus on participants' sharing of their teaching and learning, accomplishments, and challenges.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*Listening requires the concomitant involvement of the auditory and visual senses, the emotions, the mind, and patience. The act of story listening occurs in relation to using our other senses. (Archibald, 2008, p.76)*

### 1.1 Opening Story

*Chatter in the large yet crowded room reflected familiarity among the small groups of people gathered together at tables enjoying breakfast and good-company. Once breakfast finished and dishes were cleared away, people helped to rearrange the furniture. Tables were pushed back and space was made. The circle was large, some might even say it was awkward. People shuffled and slid their chairs in an attempt to make more room so as to include everyone; First Nations, Metis and Inuit Community Members and educators, classroom teachers, Ministry of Education Staff, DSB superintendents and students sat side by side.*

People were gathered to share stories of teaching and learning from their participation in the FNMI Collaborative Inquiry Initiative (CI). Lisa Ewanchuk,<sup>1</sup> held a stone in her hand and explained the significance of holding and passing the stone. As I understand her words, her teaching addresses the responsibilities of speaking and listening. Informed by Indigenous pedagogy, both the stone and the circle are significant. In the circle, the person holding the stone is expected to speak, others are responsible for listening. The circle is about balance, each person comes to the circle with their own skills and capacities, and balance is achieved when people are received respectfully. As Stó:lo storyteller Jo-ann Archibald explains the work of listening involves emotion, thought and patience.

Each of the face-to-face gatherings started with a circle, an Elder began with a traditional opening, reminding us of our responsibilities. Each time the words and stories told were somewhat different but the message was always the same; we were gathered to attend to Aboriginal education in the province of Ontario, with a focus on understanding and responding to the needs of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students, families and communities.

The FNMI CI is rooted in the circle and in listening. The diversity of people gathered in the circle signifies the collaboration required to accomplish systemic change and a shift in the culture of schooling. People were present and willing to do the work of active listening – hearing across difference, in support of transforming Aboriginal Education in Ontario. The title of this report signifies the place of listening in the inquiry. As I attended to presentations, participated in interviews, reviewed transcripts and poured over survey results, what emerged is a story of the serious work of *listening* to understand FNMI perspectives – OME staff listening to FNMI educators, school principals and classroom teachers listening to FNMI community members, SWSTs listening to FNMI students and parents. Drawing on the fundamentals of Indigenous pedagogy and the practice of collaborative inquiry, people worked across difference and through resistance to understand each other and to address the knowledge gap in service of FNMI student well-being and achievement. The CI initiative contributes to the ongoing work toward systemic change through:

1. The recognition and integration of Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy,
2. The cultivation of respectful, trusting relationships between FNMI communities and school communities,
3. The provision of leadership and support from the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (LNS) Student Achievement Division, and
4. The guidance, participation, and financial support provided by the Aboriginal Education Office.

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<sup>1</sup> Lisa Ewanchuk is the Central Principal of FNMI Education in the Simcoe District School Board. She was seconded to the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat Student Achievement Division to guide and support the FNMI Collaborative Inquiry.



Participants in the CI approached the initiative conscious of their position in the circle and with a willingness to listen and learn from and with each other. In this report, I document their work and share findings that reflect what was accomplished and what was learned.

### 1.2 Overview and Research Context

The voluntary, confidential self-identification of First Nation, Metis, and Inuit students is a key priority for the Ministry of Education. Since 2007 school boards in Ontario have made progress in establishing First Nation, Métis and Inuit student self-identification policies, advisory groups, and Aboriginal Education system leads. However, the 2013 OME Progress Report baseline data shows that gaps in achievement continue to exist for many First Nation, Métis and Inuit students. Through a series of discussions about how to respond to student needs, Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (LNS) Student Achievement Officers came to realize how little they know and understand, how much they have to learn, and that they really have to work alongside members of the First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities in their regions to do the learning.<sup>2</sup> The aim of the FNMI Focused Collaborative Inquiry Initiative is to create positive relationships with FNMI communities, increase knowledge and understanding of FNMI students, families and communities and ultimately to have a positive impact on FNMI student achievement.

Continuing their support of Aboriginal education, in March 2014 the ministry released the Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework Implementation Plan (Framework Implementation Plan). The plan identifies strategies and actions to support ministry and school board implementation of the Framework in this current school year through to 2016.

### 1.3 About the FNMI Focused Collaborative Inquiry Initiative

The 2013-2014 FNMI Focused Collaborative Inquiry Initiative (FNMI CI) is focused on supporting the success of First Nation, Métis and Inuit students. Self-identification data was a consideration in the selection of District School Boards for this initiative. Boards were asked to invite the participation of Collaborative Inquiry Teams from schools where there are high numbers of self-identified First Nation, Métis and/or Inuit students who are facing academic and/or engagement challenges. The analysis of data for self-identified Aboriginal students was considered in identifying these schools, e.g., self-identified First Nation, Métis and Inuit student enrolment, EQAO assessment results and/or other data sources, including School Climate Surveys. Fifteen District School Boards (DSBs) signed onto the project. Each participating Board received funding and created a project unique to their community context. During the 2013-2014 school year, members of the FNMI Collaborative Inquiry Project participated in a series of web-conferences and received support from LNS Student Achievement Division.

15 District School Boards Funded to Participate in the FNMI Collaborative Inquiry Project			
Northwest Boards	Northeast Boards	Southern Boards	French Board
Lakehead DSB	Rainbow	Thames Valley	CSC catholique Franco-Nord
Thunder Bay Catholic	DSB North East	Grand Erie	
Keewatin Patricia	Near North	Toronto	
Rainy River	Algoma	Simcoe County	
	Nippising Catholic	Hastings Prince Edward	

Table A Participating District School Boards

<sup>2</sup> FNMI Collaborative Inquiry Web Conference (2013) #1 Script p.3



## 1.4 The Listening Stone Research and Evaluation Project

The *Listening Stone Project: Learning From the Ontario Ministry of Education's First Nations Métis and Inuit Focused Collaborative Inquiry Initiative 2013-2014* is a research and evaluation project. The purpose of the project is to document, evaluate and learn from the FNMI CI. The Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) commissioned the project with the intention of learning about and learning from the CI. The aim of the project is to document what was accomplished, expand understanding of what supports FNMI student well-being and achievement, and to develop an understanding of how to accomplish change. As Principal Researcher, I worked closely with the Internal Team Lead: Leadership and Implementation, Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, Student Achievement Division, Ministry of Education, on the design and implementation of this minor research and evaluation project. I also worked in collaboration with my research team members however I am responsible for the interpretations and findings that inform this report.

### 1.4A Research Purpose, Rationale and Questions

#### Purpose

The purpose of the *Listening Stone Project* is to evaluate the success of the First Nation, Métis and Inuit Collaborative Inquiry Initiative. The LS Project involved 14<sup>3</sup> DSBs, each funded \$23,000 to participate in the FNMI Focused Collaborative Inquiry Initiative. Informed by the OME FNMI Policy Framework the CI has three goals:

1. Increased community engagement of First Nation, Métis and Inuit partners,
2. Increased knowledge, understanding and awareness of First Nation, Métis and Inuit histories, cultures and perspectives for all staff and students and
3. Increased student achievement and self-confidence.

#### Rationale

The *Listening Stone* research and evaluation project will assist the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat to:

- Understand the successes and challenges of the work as it has been carried out this year.
- Determine next steps to continue improve the outcomes of the work in the 2014-15 school year.
- Determine whether or not to expand the number of participating boards in 2014-15.

#### Research Questions

The following questions guided the work of the research and evaluation project.

1. To what extent did the FNMI CI achieve the three Collaborative Inquiry goals:
  - a) Increase community engagement of First Nation, Métis and Inuit partners,
  - b) Increase knowledge, understanding and awareness of First Nation, Métis and Inuit histories, cultures and perspectives for all staff and students, and
  - c) Increase student achievement and self-confidence.
2. What were the most significant learning experiences for school board staff and for FNMI community members?
3. What contributed to the success of the project?
4. What challenges and barriers were encountered and how did the team work through them?

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<sup>3</sup> One of the 15 DSBs participating in the CI opted out of the research and evaluation project.

### 1.4B Research Methodology

Writing about Indigenous approaches to research and theory, Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith explains that decolonization "is about centering our concerns and world view and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes" (1999, p.39). In keeping with Indigenous Research Methodologies, this research is guided by the following principles: respect for existing knowledge and relationships within community, respect for Indigenous worldviews and traditions, action in support of the development of capacity and skill building, collaboration throughout the process, and ongoing response to community requests for involvement (Absolon and Willett, 2004).

Specifically, the **Listening Stone Minor Research and Evaluation Project** made use of a variety of research methods for gathering data including:

- Observation notes collected during the Collaborative Inquiry Face-to-Face sessions in the spring 2014,
- Phone interviews with FNMI Collaborative Inquiry participants, including board staff and community partners, and
- An online survey created and circulated for the collection of quantitative data from school board and community participants.

Data Sources	Total
Presentations Observed at Face-to-Face Gatherings	18
Phone Interviews with CI Participants	46
Online Survey of CI Participants	64
<b>Total</b>	<b>128</b>

**Table B Total Data Sources Collected**

Data collection was completed in April and May of 2014. Data Analysis was completed in June and the final report was completed in July 2014.

### Ethical Review Process

In early April, the Director, Leadership and Implementation Branch, The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, Student Achievement Division made personal phone calls to each of the DSB Directors introducing the Evaluation and Research Project and explaining that participation was voluntary. One DSB opted out of the evaluation and Research Project. Additionally, the Principal Investigator sent a letter of introduction to each of the participating DSB Directors. Data collection commenced after permission to proceed was received from the Directors of each DSB. Each potential interview participant was contacted through email and invited to voluntarily participate. Prior to the start of each interview, participants were asked for their consent. Each participant was informed that they could pass on any question, and/or stop the interview at any time. In service of protecting anonymity aggregate data is presented. Participants are identified by the role they occupied not by their DSB. See Appendix A for copies of the letters of introduction and statement of consent. Copies of the interview schedule and the survey questions can be found in Appendix B.

### Limitations

This minor research and evaluation project is limited by 4 key constraints.

- 1) Time was a constraining factor in two ways. First many participants noted that they were just getting started when they were required to present on what they had accomplished. Second, the data collection phase was likewise truncated, lasting only 4-6 weeks.

- 2) Although one of the goals of the inquiry was to positively impact Aboriginal Student well-being and achievement, DSBs did not have sufficient time to document shifts in achievement. Evidence in support of this goal is limited to anecdotal observations.
- 3) Relationship of the PI to the participants had little time to develop. Although steps were taken to establish a positive relationship between the PI and the DSB and FNMI community members, limited time together meant that in most instances, the relationship was new.
- 4) Data collection was limited to participants' observations and interpretations. There was no opportunity for on-site observations by the research team.

#### 1.4C The Research Team

Principal Investigator (PI) *Dr. Susan D. Dion*, is a Potawatomi /Lenape scholar who has been working in the field of education for over thirty years. Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at York University in Toronto, she is Academic Director for Indigenous Education at the Centre for Aboriginal Student Services and Director of the Master of Education Cohort in Urban Aboriginal Education. Her research interests include the social and political contexts of education; disrupting memories of post-invasion First Nations – Canadian Relations; Indigenizing and Decolonizing Education; feminist post-structuralist theory and violence prevention in Aboriginal communities. Dr. Dion is widely consulted by diverse community groups, workplaces, and institutions on developing methods for building more equitable, respectful relationships between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal people.

#### Research Assistants

*Angela Salamanca* was born in the mountains of Colombia and has called Ontario home for the last 13 years. She is the project coordinator for *Walking The Prevention Circle*, a project that researches capacity-building systems and practices with Indigenous communities, and is currently completing her Masters in Education at York University. Her interests are centred on decolonizing curriculum and spaces of schooling in urban communities.

*Susanne Waldorf* is completing a Ph.D. at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto and is a former high school teacher. She is currently working as a Teacher Education Program Assistant in the Initial Teacher Education Program at OISE. Her research interests are centred on anti-racism and anti-colonial pedagogies for teacher education.

*Michael Dion* is an independent Potawatomi /Lenape researcher/creative writer. He is co-author of the *Braiding Histories stories*. M. Dion provided minor assistance conducting telephone interviews and participating in data analysis during project meetings.

## 2. LEARNING FROM THE FNMI FOCUSED COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY REGIONAL GATHERINGS

During April 2014, the PI and one Research Assistant (RA) attended face-to-face gatherings: April 3, in Richmond Hill; April 16, in Sudbury; and April 30, in Thunder Bay. During these gatherings, CI teams from each of the participating DSBs shared results from the Inquiry in their district. Teams were asked to include the following key points in their presentations:

- Focus of the Inquiry,
- Strategies to impact FNMI achievement, well-being and build relationships,
- Evidence of impact, and
- Implications for future learning / directions.

Researchers gathered observations notes during each of the presentations. Four significant themes emerged from those notes.

## 2.1 Relationships with Community Members

*School boards will strive to build strong positive connections with local First Nations and other Aboriginal organizations, such as Friendship Centres. (OME FNMI Policy Framework, p. 18)*

The practice of including Aboriginal community members in the planning process had a positive impact on the relationship. Community Members (CMs) reported, “this is the first time we were acknowledged by the education system as valued and legitimate partners in education” (Observation Notes C, p.1). DSB team members reported moving from a place of distrust and tension in the meetings, to a place of comfort in the relationship. They learned the significance of relationship to the learning process and classroom teachers reported that through the process of listening to each other, they gained a better understanding of FNMI experiences and perspectives. In some districts the collaborative planning sessions became *talking circles* during which both FNMI community members and board staff shared stories of schooling. For some classroom teachers these sessions proved to be important learning opportunities. As one classroom teacher explained, “*After listening to people tell their stories I became more confident teaching FNMI content*” (Observation Notes B, p.1).

DSB staff appreciated the opportunities the CI afforded them to participate in FNMI community events including community feasts, pow wows, and workshops taught by Elders, Knowledge and Wisdom Keepers, artists and academics. Participants described these as important learning experiences. In some DSBs staff sought input from local post-secondary institutions and invited Indigenous instructors from colleges and universities to participate in the CI initiative. In some boards academics took on a consulting role and in other boards they presented guest lectures for CI teams.

Relationships with FNMI community members also contributed in positive ways to teachers’ capacities to hear students’ perspectives. Under certain circumstances, CMs and/or Aboriginal SWSTs were able to act as advocates for FNMI students and families. Improved relationships between the school and FNMI community created possibilities for hearing alternative perspectives. (Observation Notes, E, p.2)

Creating positive school – FNMI community relationships takes time; it is a long-term investment. DSB staff acknowledged both the significance of learning in relationship and the challenges of this kind of learning. Through their relationships they gained confidence in their capacity to teach but were also at times profoundly uncomfortable as they came to realize how much they did not know about the history of the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. For some teachers, engaging with the history was not easy.

Funding provided through the CI allowed DSBs to create or expand their Elders programs. In some DSBs staff were able to ensure that FNMI students had daily interactions with Elders. DSBs did outreach to local FNMI service providers and created in-school or after-school programs for students. In DSBs with large FNMI student populations who must leave their home communities to attend school, boards created peer mentorship programs for students. “Staff at some schools observed increased parent engagement as a result of [FNMI focused] activities in the school” (Observation Notes C, p.3).

Cultivating positive relationships with FNMI community members is a strategy supported by the OME FNMI Policy Framework. The CI brought school communities together with FNMI communities to plan and carry out their inquiry goals. Planning and working together in support of improving school experiences for FNMI students improved relationships and had a positive impact on teachers capacities to teach FNMI content. Additionally, FNMI students responded positively to seeing members of their communities present in the schools.

## 2.2 FNMI Student Well-being and Success

*Indigenous youth feel their Indigeneity, they are conscious of their difference and the particularity of their position. ... This then is their first need, to understand and survive as Indigenous people.*  
(Dion & Salamanca, 2014, p. 119)

More than one DSB carried out a student survey in an effort to hear students' perspectives. Through these surveys, students asked for greater access to traditional teachings; and, boards responded by bringing traditional teachers into the schools and by taking students onto the land with Elders and traditional teachers for land based experiential learning.

When asked for their ideas about what teachers and students needed to know about FNMI people, one student responded, "Our classmates and teachers don't know a thing about us. They think we live in tipis down that road" (Observation Notes A, p. 1). Another team reported a student's response "we're here, we're not just some myth in a closed history book" (Observation Notes E, p. 11). Boards approached the challenge of FNMI student well-being and success differently, but in most DSBs it included a two-part approach. Part one involved providing FNMI students' opportunities to learn more about their own Indigenous cultures. Sometimes offering a space, teachings, and food would engage students who had not previously participated in school events. Part two involved providing opportunities for the broader school community to learn from and alongside FNMI students about what it means to be Indigenous.

Some schools were able to create, as many schools have done, an Aboriginal-specific space (e.g. the "culture room") where teaching FNMI language and culture happened. These spaces were devoted to FNMI students, who understood it was a space where they were able to meet with Elders, access traditional teachings, and participate in drumming, smudging and the preparation of traditional foods.

During the face-to-face meetings teachers reported, "when students saw their Indigeneity acknowledged at school, students showed more interest in being at school" (Observation Notes E, p.49). Students were described as being "engaged, belonging, hopeful, encouraged, visible and celebrated" (Observation Notes C, p.3). These findings are supported by current literature including Schissel and Wotherspoon (2003), Ball and Pence (2006) and Dion and Salamanca (2014) who argue that acknowledging and responding to Indigenous student's understanding of themselves as Indigenous, is a student's first need (p. 119).

## 2.3 DSB Staff Knowledge

*Build capacity to support identity building, including the appreciation of Aboriginal perspectives, values, and cultures by all students, school board staff, and elected trustees. (OME FNMI Policy Framework, p. 18)*

Increasing teacher knowledge was a priority identified by teachers themselves. Workshops and presentations by Elders, Residential School survivors, artists and academics were arranged in most boards participating in the CI. Specifically one DSB offered workshops for educators titled *Anishinaabe 101* focused on history and traditional teachings and *Anishinaabe 201* focused on best practices for teaching FNMI content (Observation Notes C, p. 3).

In addition to learning about traditions and culture, DSB staff took on the challenge of learning about the history of colonialism, its impact on FNMI communities and the ways in which non-Indigenous people benefited from that history. This was particularly important in one DSB where community members were interviewed and a film documenting local history was shared with teachers and students. Teachers acknowledged that having an understanding of their students' history was important in terms of their capacity to "work with" students rather than "judging students" (Observation Notes C, p.3).

Many CI teams shared descriptions of the ways school communities integrated Indigenous content in their curriculum. This included inviting FNMI experts into the schools to do presentations. Topics covered included:

pow wow regalia and dancing, drumming and drum teachings, wild rice teachings, and lessons from trappers and hunters. These experiences were significant learning opportunities. Rather than simply providing demonstrations that contribute to a romantic notion of FNMI people as a people of the past, CMs were positioned as experts called upon to share their knowledge. For example, dancers shared their knowledge of the regalia, teaching all students about the significance of colour, sound and movement. They also taught students the technical skills required to make the regalia, the place of dance in ceremony, in celebration, and in teaching community responsibility. Teachers reported that these opportunities to learn about the skills required and the knowledge embedded in traditional practices had a positive impact on their understanding and appreciation for their FNMI students. CMs and FNMI students were impressed by the school staff's willingness to acknowledge traditional practices as sites of legitimate knowledge that was finally, in some instances, being recognized and valued by the education system.

## 2.4 Understanding Indigenous Pedagogy?

During the presentations, it became clear that in some DSBs, teachers and students were not only engaging with and learning FNMI subject material, they were also learning through Indigenous pedagogy. Descriptions of meetings that became *story circles*, the inclusion of *ceremony* to identify the space of learning as sacred space, and learning through *participation* provided opportunities for DSB staff to understand and appreciate Indigenous approaches to teaching and learning. "They keep relationship at the core of their work and learned from each other's stories. They found storytelling to be the most profound way to learn" (Observation Notes B, p.1). Recognizing the place of *spirit* in the learning process, integrating Aboriginal language into how they were conceptualizing their work together, and framing their learning according to the *Seven Grandfather Teachings* are ways that DSB teams demonstrated their learning from and about Indigenous pedagogy.

## 2.5 Next Steps

CI teams concluded their presentations with their plans for continuing and identified the following next steps;

- Share what was learned with colleagues at their school and with other schools in their DSB,
- Continue seeking out opportunities for professional learning for teachers and principals,
- Continue to provide culture specific teaching for students, including opportunities to meet with Elders, to have access to teachings that advance students understanding of themselves as Indigenous people,
- In support of FNMI students, some CI teams want to understand the relationship between confidence, self-esteem and teachers' knowledge,
- In some DSBs, CI teams realize that they do not have a good understanding of FNMI students' needs and they have identified this as a focus for their ongoing work,
- Participating teachers are committed to learning more and doing more to integrate FNMI content across the curriculum. They would appreciate assistance with accomplishing this task,
- Plans are in place to continue working on the good community relationships that were started this year, particularly with Language and Culture teachers who are in the school,
- CI teams expressed a desire to do more outreach to improve relationships with parents,
- There is an emerging awareness about the lasting impacts of colonialism and the consciousness of the animosity that exists. More than one CI team expressed a commitment to continue to learn and understand historic harms and to take on a restorative approach to repair the relationship, and
- CI teams acknowledge that the inquiry has had a positive impact on their understanding of FNMI people but they need to know more.

Most boards have a strategic direction for addressing staff professional development needs. The Aboriginal Education Office has provided specific funding for this. The findings from the CI affirm this already identified need that is being addressed.

### 3. LEARNING FROM PARTICIPANT INTERVIEWS

Between April and May 2014, the research team conducted phone interviews with 46 CI participants. The majority of interviews were individual although in some cases two or more DSB team members asked to be interviewed together. In all but one case, at least two people from each of the participating boards were interviewed. Members of the research team made contact with participants through email and invited people to take part. The data-gathering phase was fairly short and this imposed limits on the number of interviews conducted.

In service of maintaining confidentiality I am presenting aggregate data, participants are not identified by their DSB. Members of the CI teams included Community Members (CM), District School Board Leads (BL), Principals (P), Resource Teachers (T), Student Work Study Teachers (SWST), Classroom Teachers (T), and Parents. Participants' observations and impressions were in part informed by the particular role they had in relation to the project. Reporting on the extent to which Boards accomplished each of the three CI goals, I found it useful to consider the data in "clusters" organized according to the individuals' roles and responsibilities.

#### 3.1 Research Question One: To what extent did the FNMI Collaborative Inquiry Initiative achieve the three Collaborative Inquiry goals?

I did not ask participants to directly assess how successful they were in accomplishing the CI goals. I did ask a series of questions that provided the opportunity for people to reflect on their experiences as participants in the inquiry. Looking closely at their interview transcripts I noted patterns in responses and created the following levels of achievement.

Level	Descriptors
Initial Steps	Beginning Stage, getting programs started, observing initial signs of change
Steady Progress	Establishing programs, events that create observable change
Expanding Programs	Building and/or expanding on already existing programs, observing significant change

#### A) Increase community engagement of First Nation, Métis and Inuit partners

Participants	Initial Steps	Steady Progress	Expanding Programs	Total
Board Leads	3	9		12
Parent	1			1
Community Members	2	5	1	8
Principals	4	2	2	8
Teachers	3	4	2	9
SWSTs	5	3		8
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>46</b>

#### Key Quotes

*I am a residential school survivor and it is so opposite to see the things that the school is doing (involving grandparents, pow wow, drum and language teaching) for me, I really like seeing that, seeing that they are open and really supporting this ... I am a grandmother now and I like the change I am seeing. (CM 3, p. 1)*

*The CI has tried to provide a framework for the school and community to come together to build a strong and sustainable relationship. The relationship is key to moving forward. (BL 6, p.1)*



*As an Aboriginal person and stakeholder in Education, this sent a strong message that the schools are invested and there is care and concern on being able to work with our students and their communities in the best way possible. The CI sent a message that the school boards are invested in Aboriginal Education. (CM 6, p.1)*

**Strategies Included:**

- DSB staff made visits to local First Nation communities; for example, to conduct parent-teacher interviews, to participate in the celebration of feasts, or to attend a pow wow,
- Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers worked with DSB staff to present workshops for teachers,
- School Principals established relationships with community members who work in the local Aboriginal Service Agencies and invited these community members to participate in school events,
- FNMI Secondary School students took on leadership roles sharing their knowledge and experiences with both younger students and classroom teachers, and
- In some instances, parents and grandparents were invited to participate as culture teachers in schools.

**Significant Impacts reported in participant interviews included:**

- Contributed to establishing trust,
- Student response was positive, and
- Community members reported emerging confidence in the school system's willingness to recognize and value Aboriginal people's knowledge, perspectives and experiences.

**Discussion and Next Steps**

The growing and ongoing active participation by members of DSBs in cultivating relationships sent a strong message to the FNMI community that the DSBs and the OME were serious about needing and wanting input from the community. What most impressed the FNMI community was the consistent efforts and genuine interest demonstrated by teachers, principals and superintendents. Community members were accustomed to being asked for their help in solving problems, but the CI was different. In this case, community members were positioned as expert partners in a long-term project aimed at initiating systemic change. Funding provided through the CI made it possible for community members to receive payment for their work.

In some instances, Board Leads described having to make a number of calls before receiving a response from community members but persistent efforts achieved results. FNMI Community Members are often overwhelmed with the demands of their work in the community. The key to successful relationship building included not giving up easily and understanding that many FNMI Community Members are focused on attending to the specific needs of their community. Reaching out, asking respectful questions, and relying on key contacts for introductions were successful strategies used by DSB staff in their efforts to establish relationships.

All participants spoke about wanting to continue with the CI. Most felt that progress had been made and they wanted to continue cultivating positive relationships between schools and FNMI Communities. This commitment is significant, it suggests that people consider the initiative to be worthy of their time and energy. Keeping in mind the challenges this work involves, it is noteworthy that people want to continue working toward accomplishing their objectives.

**B) Increase knowledge, understanding and awareness of First Nation, Métis and Inuit histories, cultures and perspectives for all staff and students**

Participants	Initial Steps	Steady Progress	Expanding Programs	Total
Board Leads	3	9		12
Parent	1			1
Community Members	2	6		8
Principals	2	4	2	8
Teachers	3	4	2	9
SWSTs	5	3		8
<b>Totals</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>46</b>

### Key Quotes

*Hearing the perceptions of community members, the teacher's practice shifted. ... They know their students better. (BL 3 p.1 & p.3)*

*However, people who were initially asked to participate and didn't (at the high school level) are asking questions about it now. Where there was reluctance there is now interest. (SWST 1, p.4)*

*Having time to talk with a First Nations SWST made all the difference to me. I was very naïve. I did not know, and I did not make it my business to know. There was, **there is**, so much I don't know. (P 5, p.1)*

*People in the system need to develop cultural competence if they're going to work with First Nations students. This competence needs to be more than cultural. It also needs to be historical so that people gain an understanding of the situations that are impacting our students today. (CM 1, p. 1).*

### Strategies Included:

- Workshops by Elders, Traditional Knowledge Keepers, and other Community Members,
- Aboriginal artists visited classrooms and shared their knowledge and perspectives,
- Talking Circles with CI team members brought together FNMI Community Members with DSB staff, including principals, classroom teachers and SWSTs,
- Native Language teachers were invited into classrooms to share their knowledge and experiences with all students,
- Visits to reserve communities by DSB staff,
- Consistent outreach to local FNMI service agencies, for example local Friendship Centres, and
- DSB staff participated in pow wows and feasts where teachings by Elders were shared.

### Significant Impacts:

- When FNMI people were recognized for their knowledge, this had a positive impact on relationships,
- Being in relationship made it possible for non-Aboriginal DSB staff to quell their fears and feel safe enough to ask questions,
- Increased knowledge and understanding contributed to a change in some teachers' attitudes toward FNMI students,
- Some Educators began to understand the link between historical events and current circumstances confronting FNMI students and their families, and

- Teachers who increased their knowledge, understanding and awareness were better able to integrate FNMI content across their curriculum.

**Discussion and Next Steps**

DSB staff at all levels including teachers, principals, superintendents and some Directors of Education took the work of learning from FNMI experiences and perspectives seriously and actively participated in workshops and presentations. This learning supported classroom teachers in how to successfully integrate FNMI content in their teaching.

When FNMI students, parents and community members observed concerted efforts by DSB staff to do the work of learning it contributed to positive relationships. FNMI students responded with engaged interest in their teachers’ efforts to learn about their culture and experiences. In some cases students and teachers learned together, in some cases students took on leadership roles and taught their classmates and their teachers about what it means to be a FNMI person.

During the interviews DSB staff explained that their next steps include plans to continue learning and to focus attention on how to extend their inclusion of Indigenous content across the curriculum.

**3.1C Increase student achievement and self-confidence**

Participants	Too Early to Tell	Initial Signs	Consistent Markers	Total
Board Leads		12		12
Parent	1			1
Community Members	2	5	1	8
Principals		5	3	8
Teachers		8	1	9
SWSTs		8		8
<b>Totals</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>46</b>

**Key Quotes**

*Students responded to the FNMI Collaborative Inquiry Initiative by attendance. They started to feel safe, that they belonged, that they have a voice, and that they do contribute to the class and school community. (SWST 2, p.2)*

*I have noticed in the Elementary schools an increase in confidence; I could tell from the story telling that was happening, that the children had learned skills that enabled them to speak up freely and confidently, where they had been seen as incapable learners before. (SWST 3, p.3)*

*Some high school students have expressed gratitude that this is starting to happen at the primary level, saying that they did not have this opportunity in primary school and it was difficult. (BL 8, p.5)*

**Strategies Included:**

- Regular inclusion of FNMI content across the curriculum,
- Inviting FNMI guest speakers into the classroom to share their teachings,
- Regular use of FNMI authored resources,
- Inclusion of specific lessons to address local FNMI history, and

- The creation of particular units of study that were completed in collaboration with FNMI culture teachers.

**Significant Impacts Included Initial Evidence of:**

- Increased FNMI student attendance,
- Increased FNMI student participation in classroom and school community events,
- Shift in classroom teachers' attitudes toward FNMI content and the recognition of FNMI students as knowledgeable students, and
- Increased achievement in literacy and numeracy scores.

**Discussion and Next Steps**

The majority of participants noted that it was too early to tell what specific impact the CI was having or would have on FNMI student achievement. However, many also provided anecdotal evidence of positive impacts. Most specifically SWSTs, many of whom work closely with FNMI students, described the students as having a more positive attitude toward schooling. Three points are particularly significant.

- a) Findings from the CI draw attention to the inadequate use of “self-confidence” as a measurement of potential academic success. CI participants did not describe the FNMI students as lacking self-confidence, they described students who responded positively to being recognized as knowledgeable and capable learners. When their teachers took an interest in FNMI history, culture and perspectives, FNMI students experienced themselves as valued members of the school system. The CI supports the argument that creating classroom and school environments that are inclusive of FNMI experiences and perspectives is one of the successful ways of addressing the FNMI achievement gap.
- b) When teachers created opportunities for FNMI students to demonstrate their knowledge, students stepped into those spaces and spoke up. Like all students, FNMI students require opportunities to show what they know and opportunities to build on their prior learning. In particular, parents and community members have a profound understanding of the link between experiences that teach FNMI students that they are capable and valued members of the school community and FNMI student achievement, mental health and well-being.
- c) Like all students, FNMI students care about the knowledge and opinions of their peer groups. FNMI students need to have a favourable status among their peers. Consequently, what non-Aboriginal students know and don't know about FNMI history, culture and current circumstances, matters a great deal. All students need access to FNMI content.

In response to the question of FNMI student achievement, the majority of participants want to continue the practices implemented during the CI. They want time for the changes to settle in and have an impact on the students, as well as an opportunity to track the impact.

### 3.2 Research Question Two: What were the most significant learning experiences, for DSB staff, FNMI community members, and FNMI Students?

The CI provided a variety of learning experiences for participants who occupied different roles in the initiative. In this section I report on what participants describe as significant learning.

#### 3.2A For School Board Staff

They learned that:

- Deep gaps in their own knowledge contributed to their fear and resistance to teaching FNMI content,
- Colonialism has ongoing and significant impacts on FNMI students and families, including that some students have been denied access to FNMI cultural teachings and history,
- Indigenous cultures and worldviews hold a high degree of significance for FNMI students and their families,
- Organizational and leadership skills informed by Indigenous worldviews, and
- Details about Indigenous cultures.

#### Key Quotes

*Being part of the CI just confirmed it is a real challenge for teachers with a limited knowledge to teach about FNMI culture. The teachers are nervous and anxious about what they could and could not teach. (Parent 1, p.1)*

*Knowing how important it is to incorporate the content was new to teachers. Hearing the perceptions of community members - teacher's practice shifted. (BL 3, p.1)*

*I knew that the parents and grandparents went through tough times because of Residential schools, but was surprised to hear that students today are feeling that they were not taught enough about their culture. (T 1, p6)*

#### 3.2B For FNMI Community Members

Learning included:

- That the DSB staff, including teachers were serious about learning from Elders and community members, and
- That while many DSB staff are serious about doing the learning, it will take time and effort to accomplish learning and to create real change in the education system.

#### Key Quotes

*I am starting to see some inroads with local school boards and this CI has been a catalyst for that. Mainstream educators have a passion and desire to learn more, but many of them don't want to offend. Having community members available to them has really helped alleviate this feeling. (CM 1, p.2)*

*This is an ongoing process and we just keep expanding community partner relationships...Developing trusting relationships is huge. To feel authentically heard and listened to was important and this happened in the CI. There was authenticity in the dialogue. (T 3, p.3)*

### 3.2C For FNMI Students

They learned that:

- The DSB staff, including their classroom teachers, were willing and interested in learning about their experiences and perspective as FNMI students,
- They could teach their teachers and their classmates about their culture and history, and
- Learning about the history of colonialism helped them understand their present.

#### Key Quotes

*It opened up their eyes that their teachers are willing to learn (as non-native), that the teachers are interested in learning about them and to teach [about their history and culture]. There is such a big gap between non- Anishinaabe teachers and FNMI kids. (CM 4, p.1)*

*All the children are responding wonderfully in the talking circle. They are showing initiative and self-regulation, focusing on learning skills. Teachers are seeing improvements and a sense of community is building in the classrooms. (SWST 2, p.1)*

#### Discussion

In discussions of schooling and learning the focus is often on the students. In these interviews, attention was overwhelmingly focused on teachers and their learning. The CI had a profound impact on teachers' understanding and appreciation of FNMI history and culture, most significantly; teachers and other DSB staff began to think about the impact that their lack of knowing had on FNMI students. This is a challenging move for educators who are expected to be the knowers in the teacher-student relationship.

### 3.3 Research Question Three: What contributed to the success of the project?

Most participants determined the CI was a success and expressed a commitment to continue working on their inquiry goals and objectives. People identified the following factors as contributing to the success:

- Support from OME gave the project legitimacy,
- Financial support allowed the DSB to pay Elders, Traditional Teachers, and Aboriginal artists. Financial compensation sends a message to the FNMI Communities that the school system and the people in the system, value Indigenous Knowledge,
- Time and support for Educators and FNMI Community Members to network with one another and learn from and with each other, and
- Attention to the need for local control.

#### Key Quotes

*It created a bridge of understanding that will continue. Most people want to learn more and want to be part of it. (CM 3, p.1)*

*The teachers in the CI shared that they are less fearful to ask or make a mistake. They are much more engaged in reaching out to those whom they've built relationships with. (BL 8, p.3)*

*Teachers are more aware, cognizant. They are honouring students and what they have to offer. (SWST 6, p.1)*

## Discussion

Hard work and commitment by participants were key factors contributing to the success of the CI. Additionally the willingness of participants to work through fear and distrust were critical to accomplishing change. Following CI methodology, the inquiry was grounded in concerns defined by local communities. Local control was an important factor in the success of the project. FNMI Community partners were willing to be involved in a project where they had some control. It is equally important to note that most of the participants acknowledged that although the CI supported the first steps toward change, there is an immense amount of work to be done to ensure that what was started continues to build toward systemic change.

### 3.4 Research Question Four: What challenges and barriers were encountered and how did the team work through them?

Participants identified common key challenges and barriers including:

- Ninety-three percent of participants interviewed identified teachers' lack of knowledge; and consequent fear of teaching FNMI content as the most significant barrier,
- The legacy of the Residential School System and the consequent, lack of trust on the part of FNMI parents and community members was also articulated as a significant challenge,
- There is ongoing discomfort from non-participating teachers to the inclusion of FNMI content and at times this created tension for participating teachers,
- Racism is an identified persistent issue deeply embedded and informed by a lack of knowledge and understanding, and
- Logistics, including time to organize, time to build relationships, and a perceived expectation that solutions will have immediate and measurable positive impacts in a short period of time were also identified as problems.

## Key Quotes

*There can be a bit of resistance. It is one more thing we have to do and plan for but we have to get to know where our student are. Getting the community to open up to us. There is mistrust with the school system (T 6, p.2).*

*The biggest challenge for the teachers is discomfort. They don't understand, and have a lack of knowledge. Students are standing up to say, "we didn't know who we were, our past was taken from us, and we did not grow up with it; we grew up with shame" (SWST 2, p.2.).*

*They are also afraid of what non-Aboriginal parents may say and do. (BL 8, p.7)*

*Living in the community, I heard stories of racism and there are a lot of subtle ways that racism plays out. It has been through these conversations with family and friends that I have been able to see it more in practice and in the schools. (SWST 1, p.6)*

*There is a lack of trust on the part of parents. It runs deep and teachers do not understand this – parents don't trust the school – teachers don't know the parents. These families live in "rough" neighborhoods how to cultivate a positive relationship is a challenge. (SWST 8, pp. 2, 3)*

## Discussion

Creating change within a system is challenging work, and participants in the CI were insistent on this point. As much as they wanted to share their excitement about what was accomplished, they also want others to know how difficult it can be to do the work. Participants felt that what was accomplished is just a start to the work required to accomplish systemic change. Dialogue and access to FNMI community members who could offer expert knowledge was key to working through challenges. Drawing on academic experts in the field was also helpful. The strength of the few FNMI teachers and their commitment to FNMI student well-being was also a



significant source of support. Indigenous teachers relied on their relationship with Elders for support when they encountered difficulties.

Within the education system identifying and talking about racism is especially difficult. The anti-racist discourse makes racism a taboo topic for many teachers. Learning how to teach about the history of racism in Canada and ongoing experiences of racism is an ongoing challenge for CI participants.

### 3.5 Additional Findings From the Interview Data

#### A) Access to FNMI Resources

- Many participants identified human resources including Indigenous Elders, Wisdom and Knowledge Keepers, Artist and colleagues as the most important resources.
- The majority of participants acknowledged that there were FNMI text resources available in their schools; however, they were under-utilized.
- Participants noted that they would appreciate some assistance with learning more about what resources were available and how to use them.
- One DSB identified the acquisition and distribution of resources as a priority. Members of the CI wrote descriptions of particular resources that included a short synopsis and suggested uses. These information pages were then circulated to teachers in the school.
- Increasing teachers' comfort with using the resources was identified as an issue to be addressed.

#### B) What is the most significant need in your school/DSB with regard to FNMI Student Success and Well-Being?

Answers to this question included:

- Access to FNMI content across the curriculum for FNMI students and their peers,
- Positive relationships between FNMI communities and their school communities, and
- Access to traditional teachings, Elders and opportunities to participate in ceremony.

#### Key Quotes

*What contributes to student well-being is having community and school connected. (T 6, p.3).*

*This project has given us the opportunity to think about what matters in terms of student success that is the building of relationships with community partners. Before students can learn, they have to feel valued; they have to trust and see that we value them and for them to feel a sense of belonging. (SWST 7, p.3)*

*I think for more education on FN cultures and for students to be included with their peers. Their peers need to have an understanding of FN cultures. The High School kids did not have a positive experience in their primary school. I didn't expect to hear this. (T 1, p.5)*

*They need teachers who aren't afraid to answer their questions or let them know where to go to get answers. (T 2, p.6)*

#### Discussion

CI participants demonstrate an emerging understanding of the complex relationship between FNMI student performance, the inclusion of FNMI content across the curriculum and classroom teachers understanding and appreciation of Indigenous people's experiences and perspectives. This is a significant shift on the part of educators. Rather than holding individual students responsible for the achievement gap, responsibility is shared by an education system that is, in many ways, just beginning to provide students with a culturally responsive education experience.

#### 4. LEARNING FROM THE SURVEY DATA

I created an online survey and circulated the link to DSB Leads through email with a request that they share the link with their CI team members. Sixty-three people from 12 of the 14 DSBs participating in the **Listening Stone Project** responded to the survey. Primarily, the survey questions asked respondents to address the success of the CI in achieving the goals as articulated by the OME.

##### 4.1 Increase community engagement of First Nation, Métis and Inuit partners

Participation in the FNMI Collaborative Inquiry:	Not at All	Fair	Good	Very Good	NA
Increased my knowledge of FNMI community concerns?	3%	10%	16%	53%	18%
Increased participation of FNMI parents in school events?	19%	24%	16%	30%	11%
Had a positive impact on school & local FNMI community relationships?	5%	14%	19%	49%	13%

According to the survey, participants believe the FNMI CI had a positive impact on school – FNMI Community relationships with 68% of participants rating the impact as Good to Very Good. Improving School – FNMI Community relationships is a critical first step in establishing a positive learning environment for FNMI students. The survey results show that while relationships with the broader community are improving, schools continue to experience challenges with increasing FNMI parent participation.

These results support findings from the individual interviews. Teachers observed that community members' participation in school events had a positive impact on students who were seen smiling, walking tall and participating more in school activities that involved community members. Interview participants acknowledged that parent involvement continues to be a challenge.

##### 4.2 Increase knowledge, understanding and awareness of First Nation, Métis and Inuit histories, cultures and perspectives for all staff and students

Participation in the FNMI Collaborative Inquiry:	Not at All	Fair	Good	Very Good	NA
Had a positive impact on my knowledge and understanding of FNMI history, culture and perspectives?	2%	9%	18%	63%	8%
Had a positive impact on my capacity to teach FNMI content.	2%	9%	18%	46%	25%
Changed my approach to teaching FNMI content.	7%	7%	25%	33%	28%
Increased my willingness to include FNMI content in my teaching.	5%	4%	11%	40%	40%
Raised awareness in the school community of the ongoing presence of FNMI people?	6%	8%	21%	53%	12%

Bearing in mind that 93% of interview participants identified the lack of knowledge, understanding and awareness as the most significant barrier to accomplishing the CI goals, the opportunities for learning that the CI provided, are significant. 81% of survey participants reported that participation in the CI had a good, to very good impact, on their knowledge and understanding of FNMI history, culture and perspectives. The CI is making a significant impact in building capacity for teaching Aboriginal subject material, a key goal in the FNMI Policy Framework.

### 4.3 Increase student achievement and self-confidence

Participation in the FNMI Collaborative Inquiry:	Not at All	Fair	Good	Very Good	NA
Increased FNMI students' feelings of belonging at school?	2%	11%	16%	63%	8%
Increased FNMI student attendance rates?	13%	15%	31%	27%	14%
Increased FNMI students' participation in the school community?	10%	11%	27%	37%	15%
Had a positive impact on FNMI student achievement.	5%	17%	33%	33%	12%

In light of the plethora of research (Battiste, 1998; Dion, 2010; McGregor, 2010) documenting the alienation and marginalization of Indigenous students from institutions of formal schooling, these survey results are promising. Although most interview participants acknowledged that it was "too early to tell" if the CI is having a positive impact on FNMI student achievement, the survey results indicate a positive impact.

### 4.4 Use of FNMI Resources

Participation in the FNMI Collaborative Inquiry	Not at All	Fair	Good	Very Good	NA
Increased my use of FNMI resources in my teaching.	5%	4%	11%	40%	40%

These results align with results from the interview data. In addition to getting resources into classrooms, teachers need support in learning how to confidently use the resources.

### 4.5 Sharing Learning from the FNMI beyond the participating schools

Participation in the FNMI Collaborative Inquiry:	Not at All	Fair	Good	Very Good	NA
Encouraged me to share my FNMI teaching experiences with colleagues at my own school.	4%	4%	11%	53%	28%
Encouraged me to share my FNMI teaching experiences with colleagues at other schools.	7%	5%	16%	46%	26%

Dialogue among teachers is an efficient method of sharing professional knowledge. Additionally sharing of positive experiences contributes to raising the profile of Aboriginal Education, increasing teachers' interest, reducing their fear of teaching Aboriginal subject material and increasing their capacity to respond positively to FNMI student needs.

### 4.6 Rating overall experience in the FNMI CI

Participation in the FNMI Collaborative Inquiry:	Not at All	Fair	Good	Very Good	NA
I would advise my colleagues/community members to get involved in the FNMI Collaborative Inquiry Initiative?	2%	5%	9%	66%	18%

In part, the success of any project is determined by the response of participants. Considering that 75% of the survey participants would advise their colleagues to get involved in the CI, this is a measure of the initiative's success.

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## APPENDIX A

**To:** Directors of Boards of Education, Participating in the OME FNMI Collaborative Inquiry

**From:** Dr. Susan D. Dion, Educator/Researcher

**Date:** March 31, 2014

**Re.** Research & Evaluation of the FNMI Collaborative Inquiry

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**Dear Directors,**

I am writing to share information and invite members of your board to participate in a research and evaluation project titled *The Listening Stone: Learning From the FNMI Collaborative Inquiry*.

As you know during the 2013-2014 school year your board has participated in the FNMI Collaborative Inquiry initiative. The purpose of this initiative has been to foster positive relationships with FNMI communities, increase knowledge and understanding of FNMI students, families and communities; and ultimately, to make a positive impact on closing the gap of FNMI students. In service of identifying, documenting and sharing what has been learned and to inform future directions the next phase of the initiative is a minor research and evaluation project.

As an Indigenous Researcher/Educator with more than 25 years of experience I am pleased to be leading this project. Informed by Indigenous research practices and protocols my work is guided by the following principles: respect for existing knowledge and relationships within community, respect for Indigenous worldviews and traditions, action in support of the development of capacity and skill building, collaboration throughout the process, and ongoing response to community requests for involvement (Absolon and Willett, 2004).

The project will involve gathering data from both Indigenous community members and school board members who participated in the FNMI collaborative inquiry. Members from your school board team will be invited to participate in this project. The purpose of this research is to *determine the impact* of the First Nation, Métis and Inuit Collaborative Inquiry Project's relative to the following three goals of the initiative:

- increased community engagement of First Nation, Métis and Inuit partners;
- increased knowledge, understanding and awareness of First Nation, Métis and Inuit histories, cultures and perspectives for all staff and students in participating DSB's or project schools; and,
- increased student achievement and self-confidence.

Participants will be asked to complete a survey and if interested to participate in individual phone or Skype interviews. The confidential interviews will be conducted outside of regular school hours. The focus of the project is to gather stories that reflect what has been accomplished through this initiative.

Research Assistants working on the project include Susanne Waldorf, Researcher, PHD Candidate OISE/UT, Angela Salamanca, Med Candidate, Faculty of Education York University, and Michael Dion, First Nations, Researcher/Writer. Data will be gathered between April 3, 2014 and May 31, 2014.

Research findings will be shared with both CODE and OME in summary form. Individual and identifying makers will be removed from the data. Participants will provide Informed Consent verbally and or electronically. Anonymity of the participants and confidentiality of the data will be ensured. If you have further questions and or concerns please contact principal investigator Dr. Susan Dion at 416 435-8930 or via email at [sdion@edu.yorku.ca](mailto:sdion@edu.yorku.ca).

Sincerely,

Dr. Susan D. Dion

**Assent Script for Over-the-Phone Interviews\***

**Date of Interview:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name of Researcher:** \_\_\_\_\_

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm a researcher with the Listening Stone Project led by Dr. Susan Dion. Can I ask you questions about your experience participating in the FNMI Collaborative Inquiry?

You can say "pass" if there are any questions you do not want to answer. If you want to stop the interview at any time, just say so. The interview will take approximately 30 -40 minutes depending on your responses.

## APPENDIX B

### *Interview Questions Teachers and other DSB Educators*

(Note some questions are specific to classroom teachers)

- 1) Describe your involvement in the FNMI CI.
- 2) How has being a part of the FNMI CI impacted your learning and your work in the DSB?
- 3) How has the FNMI CI affected school-FNMI community relationships?
- 4) How has the Inquiry impacted individual teachers and school communities as a whole?
- 5) Did the CI have an impact beyond the participating schools? Yes/No
- 6) What would you do next to further cultivate positive relationships between local FNMI communities and the school communities?
- 7) What and how has participation in this project impacted the relationship between FNMI students and the whole of the school community?
- 8) What are the most significant challenges teachers confront in teaching FNMI content?
- 9) How did FNMI students benefit from this project?
- 10) What would you say is the most significant need in your school/DSB with regard to FNMI student success and wellbeing?
- 11) How did students respond to the initiative, what stories do they tell about their learning?
- 12) Is there anything else you want to share about the FNMI CI?

### *Interview Questions FNMI Community Members Participating in Collaborative Inquiry*

- 1) Describe your involvement in the FNMI CI.
- 2) How has being a part of the FNMI CI impacted your understanding of schools and school systems?
- 3) What was the most significant learning moment/event for you?
- 4) How has the FNMI CI affected school-community relationships?
- 5) What would you do next to further cultivate positive relationships between local FNMI communities and the school communities?
- 6) What and how has participation in this project impacted the relationship between FNMI students and the whole of the school community?
- 7) How did FNMI students benefit from this project?
- 8) What did you do that had a positive impact on FNMI students at school?
- 9) What would you say is the most significant need with regard to FNMI student success and well-being?
- 10) How did students respond to the initiative, what stories do they tell about their learning?
- 11) Is there anything else you want to share about the FNMI CI?



**On line Survey Questions**

1. What District School Board are you associated with?
  - a. Rainy River
  - b. Lakehead
  - c. Keewatin Patricia
  - d. Thunder Bay Catholic
  - e. Near North
  - f. Northeast Catholic
  - g. DSB North East
  - h. Nipissing Catholic
  - i. Rainbow
  - j. Simcoe County
  - k. Toronto
  - l. Grand Erie
  - m. Hastings Prince Edward County
  - n. Thames Valley
  - o. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. What is your position/association with the DSB?
  - a. Parent
  - b. Teacher
  - c. Principal/Vice Principal
  - d. Support Staff
  - e. SWST
  - f. Consultant
  - g. Student Support
  - h. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Do you self-identify as FNMI? Yes/No

If you are a teacher/educator employed by the DSB proceed to question Question #4.

If you are a FNMI community member working in collaboration with the DSB proceed to Question #12

When responding to the questions use this scale            0-not at all   1-fair   2-good   3-very good   4-Not Applicable

**Participation in the FNMI Collaborative Inquiry:**

4. Had a positive impact on my knowledge and understanding of FNMI history, culture and perspectives.
5. Had a positive impact on my capacity to teach FNMI content.
6. Changed my approach to teaching FNMI content.
7. Increased my willingness to include FNMI content in my teaching.
8. Increased my use of FNMI resources in my teaching.
9. Encouraged me to share my FNMI teaching experiences with colleagues at my own school.
10. Encouraged me to share my FNMI teaching experiences with colleagues at other schools.
11. Increased my knowledge of FNMI community concerns.
12. Increased participation of FNMI parents in school events.
13. Had a positive impact on school & local FNMI community relationships.
14. Raised awareness in the school community of the ongoing presence of FNMI people.
15. Increased FNMI students' feelings of belonging at school.
16. Increased FNMI student attendance rates.
17. Increased FNMI students' participation in the school community.
18. Had a positive impact on FNMI student achievement.
19. I would advise my colleagues/community members to get involved in the *FNMI Focused Collaborative Inquiry Initiative*.

**Rate the following in order of importance with 1 being the most important 5 being the least important**

20. The most significant benefit of the FNMI Collaborative Inquiry was
  - a. Improved FNMI Community Relationships
  - b. Improved DSB staff knowledge & understanding of FNMI history, culture and perspectives
  - c. Improved acceptance and recognition of FNMI student presence in the school
  - d. Improved relationships between FNMI students and the whole of the student population
  - e. Improved FNMI student achievement
  - f. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
21. The most significant challenge of the FNMI Collaborative Inquiry was
  - a. Lack of teaching resources,
  - b. Need for PD for teachers,
  - c. Lack of positive relationships between school and local FNMI communities
  - d. Lack of certainty about what was appropriate
  - e. Lack of support from colleagues
  - f. Other \_\_\_\_\_

