

***Listening Stone Year Two:
Deliberate Inquiry, Complex Questions, Deep Learning***



The First Nations, Métis and Inuit–Focused Collaborative Inquiry 2014-2015

SD Dion Consulting ♦ Indigenous Research & Education

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research report titled *Listening Stone Year Two: Deliberate Inquiry, Complex Questions, Deep Learning* provides documentation, assessment and analysis of and recommendations for year two of the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Focused Collaborative Inquiry Initiative (FNMI CI). The report is informed by the voices of FNMI community members and Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators who participated in the initiative.

Building on year one of the FNMI CI year two of the inquiry expanded from fifteen to include twenty-two District School Boards (DSBs). The primary goal of the inquiry is to improve First Nation, Métis and Inuit student achievement and well-being. The Leadership and Implementation, Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, Student Achievement Division, of the Ontario Ministry of Education provided direction and support to the 22 DSBs that 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 June of 2015, 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 Year Two Project*, a research and evaluation project requested by the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE). The purpose of the research and evaluation is to learn from the inquiry how educators, and community members contribute to FNMI student well-being and achievement in provincially funded schools.

Overall, the research shows that the FNMI CI had positive outcomes in year two. Positive impacts reported in year one continued and expanded to the additional school boards participating during year two of the inquiry. Establishing and strengthening partnerships with community members continues to have a significant and positive impact on FNMI student achievement and well-being. Community members also make a significant contribution to advancing knowledge and understanding of FNMI histories, cultures and perspectives for all members of the broader school community. Most significantly, in year two of the inquiry principals, teachers and in some cases DSB Leads took time to listen and respond to the voices of FNMI students. Gathering student voice through surveys, talking circles and tea and bannock sessions, school staff got to know the FNMI students. This contributed to improved teacher-student relationships with positive impacts on both students and teachers.

Participants report positive experiences they also acknowledge the challenges involved in accomplishing the goals of the CI. FNMI content is still being integrated through specific cultural and special events. CI participants are thinking through ways to integrate FNMI content throughout the curriculum. Parent engagement improved between year one and year two of the CI, but this is still an area of needed improvement. In year two of the CI, there has been an increase in professional development for teachers, yet 80% of participants still identified teachers' lack of knowledge of FNMI cultures, histories, and worldviews as a primary challenge (as compared to 98% the year before). Additionally, participants note a supportive principal is important for the work of the CI to be successful.

This research and evaluation supports the continuation and expansion of the FNMI CI.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Research informing this report includes analysis of observation notes taken during face-to-face gatherings at three sites where participating District School Boards (DSBs) presented their Collaborative Inquiry (CI) projects. This report includes analysis of 15 Board Reports, 22 presentations made at the face-to-face meetings and individual interviews with 40 FNMI Collaborative Inquiry participants.

The research has generated 6 key findings.

1. As in Year One, the FNMI Focused Collaborative Inquiry was successful in supporting positive relationships between FNMI communities and school communities. During Year Two of the inquiry some DSBs achieved moderate success with engaging FNMI parents. In most participating Boards parent engagement 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. During Year Two some DSBs established a specific program of Professional Development for staff. While improvements are being made, 80% of interview participants identify Teachers' lack of knowledge as a significant barrier.
3. FNMI Collaborative Inquiry participants continue to report anecdotal evidence of the positive impact on FNMI student achievement and well-being. Participants require assistance with both documenting and developing procedures for reporting impact on students.
4. The FNMI Focused Collaborative Inquiry encourages DSB staff to hear and respond to FNMI student voices supporting positive teacher – student relationships, and creating leadership opportunities for FNMI students.
5. The FNMI Focused Collaborative Inquiry draws attention to the significant role school principals occupy within schools. Participants, including many principals, acknowledge that a supportive principal is critical to a successful CI.
6. The FNMI Focused Collaborative Inquiry provided a positive experience to the majority of participants (teachers, principals, students, parents) who are committed to the work and want 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 the initiative be expanded to other interested District School Boards with a high FNMI student population.
2. As in Year One, participants continue to identify teachers' lack of knowledge and understanding and their fear of making mistakes as a significant barrier. Continued support for the development and delivery of professional learning opportunities for all staff working in provincially funded schools is recommended.
3. Participants in the FNMI Focused CI recognize the significant work required to improve their capacities to accomplish the goals of the inquiry. Learning from and with each other is particularly important. More time to share their work and to dialogue with each other is recommended.
4. Improving relationships between school communities and FNMI communities has 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 and community outreach.
5. The provision of financial support to participating DSBs allowed boards to provide FNMI specific education opportunities for FNMI students, their teachers and peers. Financial compensation for Elders, Artists, Traditional Teachers and guest speakers is necessary. It is thus recommended that financial support for this initiative be maintained.
6. Many classroom teachers continue to experience challenges in identifying exemplary resources to support their teaching of FNMI content. It is recommended that the teachers be provided with ongoing direction in identifying and accessing quality FNMI resources and information about how to make use of those resources.
7. The FNMI CI contributes to educators' understanding of the complex relationship between teachers' appreciation of Indigenous knowledge and FNMI student achievement and well-being. Ongoing attention to this relationship will contribute to a deeper understanding of the FNMI student achievement gap and successful strategies for responding to this gap.
8. Research results provide anecdotal evidence of positive impacts on FNMI student achievement and well-being. It is recommended that the Ministry and District School Boards work in collaboration with community partners to develop culturally appropriate methods of documenting and reporting students' participation, attitudes, and achievement.

Elders direct our people to live their lives in a way that promotes positive relationships with the land, their families and all of Creation. (Simpson, 2011, p.68)

1.1 Introduction

In year two of the First Nations, Métis and Inuit – Focused Collaborative Inquiry (FNMI CI) there is evidence of an emerging focus on developing positive relationships. This includes relationships between teachers and students, teachers and community members, teachers and principals, students and students. Learning from and building on what was accomplished during year one¹ of the FNMI CI participants are continuing to listen with the intension of learning and deepening their understanding of themselves and each other. A shared commitment to improving education experiences for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students and for improving knowledge and understanding of all staff and students informs the work of this Inquiry. District School Board (DSB) staff are engaging with members of First Nations, Métis and Inuit community to bring Indigenous knowledge and worldviews into schools and strengthen community relationships. Accomplishing the goals of the CI is a long journey accepting that it will take time, energy and work from all involved contributes to the ongoing success of the project.

The *Listening Stone Year Two Report* includes four sections. Section one is an introduction and overview of the project and includes the research questions. Section two focuses on learning from the Board Reports. It explores the different ways boards approached the FNMI Inquiry and their plans for going deeper in the upcoming school year. Drawing on observations made during the Face-to-Face presentations, section three reflects the voices of teachers, students and community members as they engage with each other in service of accomplishing the goals of the inquiry. In section four I draw on interviews with forty collaborative inquiry participants, their observations and reflections illustrate what they are learning, the successes and challenges they are experiencing as they work to accomplish the goals of the FNMI CI.

1.2 Overview and Research Context

Background and Current Context

Since 2007 school boards in Ontario have made progress in establishing First Nations, 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 Nations, 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 Nations, Métis and Inuit communities in their regions to do the learning.² 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 well-being and achievement.

¹ The report on year one titled *The Listening Stone: Learning From the Ontario Ministry of Education's First Nations, Métis and Inuit–Focused Collaborative Inquiry 2013-2014* is available at http://www.ontariodirectors.ca/downloads/Dion_LS_Final_Report%20Sept_10-2014-2.pdf

² FNMI Collaborative Inquiry Web Conference (2013) #1 Script p.3

The FNMI CI is not happening in isolation. Actions and interactions within institutions of Education are informed by what is happening in the broader social political context. In recent years, Indigenous activists, artists, and scholars have worked successfully to bring “Aboriginal issues” into public discourse. In December of 2012 the Idle No More (INM) movement exploded across Canada, with public round dances, teach-ins, meetings, blockades, protests, and substantial writing and artistic intervention. As the Kindo-nda-niimi Collective explains, INM provided “an important moment for conversations about how to live together meaningfully and peacefully, as nations and as neighbours” (p. 23). Public discussion and historic events surrounding the work of Truth and Reconciliation Commission --- similarly highlighted the importance of attending to the history and ongoing trauma of the Indian Residential School system. Public attention has also increasingly turned to missing and murdered Indigenous women. From the first small rallies in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, beginning in 1991 (see Culhane), rallies, vigils, feasts, and gatherings now take place in growing numbers and frequency across Canada, with growing demands for a national inquiry. Combined, these efforts and movements contribute to raising awareness among educators of the need for Aboriginal education.

About the FNMI Collaborative Inquiry Initiative

The 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.

During the first year of the initiative Fifteen District School Boards (DSBs) signed onto the project. In year two, seven additional boards joined the FNMI CI.

15 District School Boards Participating in the FNMI Collaborative Inquiry Project 2013			
Northwest Boards	Northeast Boards	Southern Boards	French Boards
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	
	Nipissing Catholic	Hastings Prince Edward	

Table A. District School Boards Participating for a Second Year

7 District School Boards Funded to Participate in the FNMI Collaborative Inquiry Project September 2014			
Northwest Boards	Northeast Boards	Southern Boards	French Boards
Kenora Catholic	Huron Superior Catholic	Kawartha Pine Ridge	
Superior North Catholic	Moose Factory Island	Lambton Kent	
		Ottawa-Carleton	

Table B. District School Boards Participating for the First Year Beginning in September 2014

Each participating Board receives funding and creates a project unique to their community context. During the school year, members of the FNMI Collaborative Inquiry Initiative participate in a series of web-conferences and receive support from LNS Student Achievement Division.

1.3 The Listening Stone Research and Evaluation Project

The *Listening Stone Year Two: Deliberate Inquiry, Complex Questions, and Deep Learning* is a research and evaluation project. The purpose of the project is to document, evaluate and learn from year two of the FNMI CI. The Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) commissioned the project with the intention of learning about and learning from the second year of the FNMI CI. The aim of the project is to document what was accomplished, expand understanding of what supports FNMI Student achievement and well-being and develop an understanding of how to accomplish change. As Principal Researcher, I work 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 research and evaluation project. As the principal investigator, I also work in collaboration with my research team members, and am responsible for the interpretations and findings that inform this report.

1.3A Research Purpose, Rationale and Questions

Purpose

The purpose of the *Listening Stone Year Two* is to evaluate and learn from the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Focused Collaborative Inquiry Initiative. In its second year this CI involved 22 DSBs, each given \$23,000 to participate in the FNMI Focused Collaborative Inquiry Initiative. Informed by the Ontario Ministry of Education (ME) FNMI Policy Framework, in year two the Inquiry's stated goals include a primary goal with two supporting goals.

Primary Goal:

- Increased First Nation, Métis and Inuit student achievement and well-being

Supporting Goals:

- Increased knowledge, understanding and awareness of First Nation, Métis and Inuit histories, cultures and perspectives for all staff and students
- Increased community engagement of First Nation, Métis and Inuit partners

Rationale

The *Listening Stone Year Two* 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 during the second year;
- Appreciate the complex processes required of educators and school boards as they work toward accomplishing deep and systemic change; and
- Determine next steps to continue to improve the outcomes of the work in the 2015–2016 school year.

Research Questions

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

1. To what extent did the FNMI CI Project achieve these three Collaborative Inquiry goals?
 - A. Increase First Nation, Métis and Inuit student achievement and well-being
 - B. Increase community engagement of First Nations, Métis and Inuit partners
 - C. Increase knowledge, understanding and awareness of First Nations, Métis and Inuit histories, cultures and perspectives for all staff and students
2. What were the most significant learning experiences, for students, school board staff, for FNMI community members and for the ME participating staff?
3. What contributed to the success of the project?
4. What challenges and barriers were encountered and how did the team work through them?
5. What strategies did DSBs use to document impact on student learning and what were the strengths and limitations with these strategies? What did DSBs learn about the impact on students?
6. Reviewing the DSB reports, what were the most significant strategies that contributed to overall success?
7. Reviewing the DSB reports, what were the strategies that created challenges?
8. Reviewing the DSB reports, what changes were noted between year one and year two?

1.3B Research Methodology

Writing about Indigenous approaches to research and theory, Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) 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" (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 & Willett, 2004).

Data Collection

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

- Fifteen DSB reports received from the Ontario ME;
- Observation notes collected during three Collaborative Inquiry face-to-face sessions in the spring of 2015; and
- Phone interviews with FNMI CI participants.

Data Sources	Total Spring 2015
Review of DSB Reports	15
Presentations Observed at Face-to-Face Gatherings	22
Phone Interviews with CI Participants	40
Total	77

Table C. Total Data Sources Collected

Observation Notes were collected during the spring face-to-face sessions in April and May 2015, 40 interviews were completed in May and June 2015. Data analysis of was completed in July and August 2015.

Ethical Review Process

In April 2015, the Director, Leadership and Implementation Branch, The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, Student Achievement Division made phone calls to each of the DSB Directors introducing the Evaluation and Research Project and explaining that participation was voluntary. Following up on the phone call, 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 Director of each Board. 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 questions can be found in Appendix B.

Limitations

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

- 1) Labour action across the province in the spring of 2015 had a significant impact on completion of the CI and on data collection.
- 2) 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. Additionally, interviews were done after the face-to-face meetings in the spring. This year the final gathering took place on May 6. This shortened the period of time available for interviewing participants.
- 3) Although one of the goals of the inquiry was to positively impact First Nation, Métis and Inuit student well-being and achievement, DSBs staff continue to report challenges in documenting and reporting shifts in Aboriginal student achievement and well-being. Evidence in support of this goal is limited to anecdotal observations.
- 4) Data collection was limited to participants' observations and interpretations. There was no opportunity for on-site observations by the research team.

1.3C The Research Team

Dr. Susan D. Dion, Principal Investigator (PI), 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

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

Toni Goree is an educator, writer, group facilitator, and researcher. She completed a Master of Education at York University. Goree's research on racialized youths' perceptions of the relationship between health, well-being and education is currently being presented at education and health studies conferences.

John Waaseyaabin Hupfield is Anishinaabe from Wasauksing First Nation and currently resides in Toronto, Ontario. As a Master's Candidate in the Faculty of Education at York University his research focuses on the importance of culture and Indigenous pedagogy in education.

Angela Salamanca was born in the mountains of Colombia and has called Ontario home for 13 years. She is the project coordinator for *Walking The Prevention Circle*, a project that researches capacity-building systems with Indigenous communities. Salamanca completed her Master of Education at York University; her research interests are centered on decolonizing curricula and spaces of schooling in urban communities.

Tasha Smith is an emerging First Nations educator and researcher. Currently completing a Master of Education at York University Smith has participated as a research assistant on four research projects. Her research interests include integrating Indigenous perspectives in Ontario classrooms, Aboriginal student achievement and well-being and the use of Indigenous literature in secondary school English classes.

2. LEARNING FROM DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD REPORTS

As of July 12, 2015, fifteen District School Board Reports were given to the research team for review. Each report is a snapshot of the Board's Collaborative Inquiry work. Considered together the reports provide a synopsis of what is being accomplished across the province.

2.1 Summary Tables

These tables provide a summary of the information in the Board Reports. Boards frequently site more than one strategy, focus, experience, thus totals are not included. After collating the information, common strategies for success, challenges and concerns became evident.

1. Community Partners

	What strategies were used for engaging/collaborating with community partners?	No. of DSBs
A	Leaders in the Local FNMI Community, Artists and Authors	13
B	FNMI DSB Staff Members (SWSTs, Language & Culture Teachers)	5
C	Elders, Traditional Knowledge & Wisdom Keepers	12
D	FNMI Parents	3
E	FNMI Community Organizations (Friendship Centres, Health Centres)	9
F	Education Counsellors from local FNMI Community	2
G	Partnerships with Local Reserve Community Schools	1

District School Board staff are working to develop relationships with their local FNMI communities. Staff worked in collaboration with their community partners to plan the inquiry focus, to bring Indigenous knowledge into the schools, to support students and to assist teachers in developing their knowledge and understanding. In some Boards well-established relationships existed prior to the start of the CI, in other Boards relationships are at an initial stage of development. In at least five DSBs, CI teams relied heavily on Board staff including SWSTs, language and culture teachers and the Board Leads in Aboriginal education to take on leadership positions in the CI. These individuals are frequently called upon to act as the liaison between the CI Teams and the local FNMI community.

2. Inquiry Question Focus

	What was the inquiry question?	No. of DSBs
A	Infusion of FNMI content will contribute to well-being and achievement	12
B	Focus on math skills	4
C	Focus on oral language skills	2
D	Focus on learning skills and self-regulation	3
E	Focus on hearing and responding to <i>Student Voice</i>	2

The infusion of FNMI content is a focus for the majority of DSBs. Additionally in most cases CI teams make an effort to align the FNMI Inquiry question with the broader school board goals. Two CI teams worked in close collaboration with an OISE Professor's research project in math education.

3. Use of Data

	What DSB/School data was used to arrive at the inquiry focus area?	No. of DSBs
A	EQAO, Math Diagnostics, CASI	12
B	Teacher observations and concerns	10
C	Attendance records	8
D	School surveys and writing samples to collect student voice	6
E	Report Card data	7
F	FNMI Student Voluntary Self-Identification data	3

Informed by the overall FNMI CI goals DSBs are relying heavily on a combination of teacher observations/concerns and EQAO results to inform their inquiry focus.

4. Strategies

	What strategies, actions, interventions and resources were implemented?	No. of DSBs
A	Collaboration with FNMI community partners	13
B	Professional learning about FNMI knowledge and perspectives for teachers	7
C	Provision of resources to support teachers' learning	7
D	Use of sharing circles as a knowledge transfer and relationship building strategy	5
E	Integration of culturally relevant activities and events for teachers	8
F	Integration of culturally relevant activities and events for students	13
G	Student and family surveys and or feedback cards	6

Boards report that working in collaboration with community partners is a key strategy for identifying and accomplishing CI goals in their specific context. Additionally seven DSBs noted the use of professional resources to inform teachers' practice.

5. Success Indicators

	What were the indicators of success and how were these captured?	No. of DSBs
A	Improvement in students' attitudes and participation	10
B	Anecdotal observations of a greater sense of well-being	8
C	Improvements in students capacity to use learning skills	4
D	Improvement in report card marks	2
E	Increase in community and parent engagement	11
F	Increase in self-identification of FNMI students	2
G	Attendance Records	7
H	Test scores and assessments including EQAO and oral language assessments	3

Anecdotal evidence of a shift in First Nation, Métis and Inuit students' attitudes toward school continues to be the primary indicator of success. Recognizing the chasm that exists between FNMI students, families and school communities, this observable shift is significant. Some DSBs are beginning to identify additional indicators. Video interviews with students (see discussion of face-to-face presentations in Section Three of this report) provide documentation of improvements in attitude and increased experiences of well-being.

6. Evidence of Impact

	What was the evidence of impact?	No. of DSBs
A	Observed expressions of pride by FNMI students	7
B	Observed improvements in motivation and engagement of FNMI students	10
C	Observed improvements in parent and community participation	9
D	Increase in teachers awareness of Indigenous culture and perspectives	6
E	Observed increase in FNMI students self-regulation and coping skills	4
F	Integrated acknowledgement of FNMI people during morning opening exercises	2
G	Improvements in EQAO results	2
H	Increased and improved communication between teachers and FNMI students	3

At this time DSBs are primarily relying on anecdotal evidence to document impacts. They are observing evidence of improvements in students' motivation and engagement. In two reports Boards noted the use of Indigenous language in their morning announcements. While this is a fairly simple act it signifies a commitment by the school community to acknowledge and honour Indigenous presence.

7. Key Learning

	What key learning have you had and how /with whom will you share them?	No. of DSBs
A	Students respond positively to culturally relevant content	5
B	Community connections are critical to the success of the project and must continue	6
C	Responding to student, community and staff voices is critical	4
D	Including a hands on approach to learning is beneficial	2
E	Cultivating trusting relationships between teachers and students is critical	6
F	Students want a voice in their own education	5
G	Teachers need opportunities to learn and gain confidence teaching FNMI content	3

In the majority of DSB Reports work with community partners continues to be the most significant site of learning for both teachers and students. During the second year of the CI, some Boards report increased attention to teachers learning about their FNMI students, which is having a positive impact on teacher–student relationships.

8. Future Directions

	What are the implications for future learning, directions/needs?	No. of DSBs
A	Continue to develop relationships with community members	12
B	Continue to work at embedding Indigenous knowledge across the curriculum	3
C	Continue providing educational opportunities for staff to learn FNMI perspectives	5
D	Continue to provide opportunities for students to engage in inquiry experiences	3
E	Continue to attend to student voice and well-being by integrating FNMI content	7
F	Continue to honour and acknowledge Indigenous presence in the school	3
G	Continue to purchase texts and other resources that address FNMI content	2
H	Implement a mentorship program	2

CI teams are committed to the work of the inquiry and express an interest in expanding what they have accomplished thus far. Most DSBs have identified working in collaboration with community partners as a priority.

9. Recommendations

	What Recommendations would you make to support the 2015-2016 FNMI CI	No. of DSBs
A	Hire additional FNMI SWSTs, youth workers, mental health workers	1
B	Increase varied opportunities for sharing best practices within & between boards	7
C	Increase opportunities for PD including understanding the CI process	7
D	Continue to cultivate connections with FNMI community partners	3
E	Add FNMI CI coaches to help with the planning and implementation	3
F	Increase access to resources for teachers and students in classrooms	2
G	Continue the CI beyond one year to allow DSBs to build on their learning	5
H	Opportunities to learn more documentation and assessment to measure success	1

In the Board Reports the most common recommendation is for increased opportunities to share their work and learning with each other. The reports recommend more time for discussion during the webinars as well as during the face-to-face gatherings.

2.B Observations and Key Questions From the Board Reports

FNMI Student Well-being and Achievement

Many of the positive impacts noted in year one are continuing in year two. Boards are reporting anecdotal evidence of improved engagement, attendance and positive attitudes. FNMI students appear to be happier at school and there is an observed reduction in the number of office visits.

Progress is being made in creating school environments that support FNMI student well-being. Acknowledging Indigenous presence, inviting community members into the school on a regular basis, creating Aboriginal-specific spaces and working in collaboration with native language and culture teachers are strategies employed by DSBs in their work to transform school spaces. While these actions are having a positive impact on FNMI student well-being there is an ongoing need to clarify the relationship between academic achievement and student well-being. Well-being does not come before learning—learning is a critical component of well-being.

The DSB Reports reflect educators' growing awareness of the array of complex needs many FNMI students bring to school. The legacy of colonialism, including the impacts of the Residential School System, means that many FNMI students experience poverty and stress in their home/living environments. The Board Reports reflect progress in understanding and appreciation of the stress in students' lives; this is also an area of ongoing need. The distance between the world of many FNMI students and the world of teachers is often immense and teachers require assistance in understanding the colonial legacy and its impact on students, their families and communities. Some DSB have taken this challenge seriously, committing a substantial amount of time to professional development for teachers.

Attending to the Voices of FNMI Students

During year two of the CI, hearing and responding to *Student Voice* was a priority for many DSBs. CI teams used surveys, talking circles and tea and bannock sessions as strategies for hearing students' voices. In some DSBs students became partners in community engagement, taking on leadership roles in organizing a community feast and inviting their community members to get involved in their school. Information for teachers wanting to expand their understanding of accessing student voice is included in Appendix C.

Integration of FNMI Content

DSBs continue to rely on special events—including drumming and beading workshops, attending powwows, holding community feasts, hosting guest speakers, and art activities—as a way of integrating Indigenous content. Many CI participants are asking how to shift from an events approach to making Indigenous content an integrated part of the curriculum.

The use of Indigenous literature provides access to Indigenous knowledge, worldviews and FNMI experiences and perspectives. Board teams are beginning to search out Indigenous-authored texts to integrate into their language programs and are looking at other subject areas to identify places in the curriculum where Indigenous content fits. Some resources, even those produced by Aboriginal people, can reproduce stereotypical ways of knowing Indigenous people. Boards would like assistance with identifying resources that provide positive, respectful representations, also direction for using those resources with their students.

Responding to Teachers' Need for Knowledge and Understanding

Some DSBs have specifically responded to teachers need for Professional Development, and have provided workshops, learning circles and guest speakers for staff. DSBs are addressing teachers' need for awareness and understanding of Indigenous knowledge and their understanding of the relationship between Indigenous worldviews, Indigenous pedagogy and Indigenous students. In their reports, Boards document teachers' willingness to try new approaches to teaching Indigenous content. Information for teachers wanting to expand their understanding of Indigenous Pedagogy is included in Appendix C.

Learning From and With Community Partners

Most DSBs have established good partnerships with community members; many work with one or two key contacts that assist the CI Team in establishing links with the broader community. While most have good partnerships, some DSBs continue to experience challenges in establishing genuine engagement of community members. This can be a result of geography. In some areas of the province the local FNMI community is clearly identifiable, and leaders in the community are well known. In other areas the community is not as visible and potential partners are more difficult to locate. Strong community partnerships are critical to a successful CI. Sharing strategies for identifying and working in collaboration with community members and developing a shared protocol for working with community members would be useful to the CI teams. A draft protocol for engaging community members is included in Appendix C.

In more than one report Boards noted that DSB staff are heavily relied on to do the work of cultivating relationships. Some expressed concern that adding the demands of community liaison to an already full workload is an unfair expectation to place on an individual. Many Aboriginal people in professional fields

experience the intense demands of community service. Commitment to supporting community is part of an Indigenous ethic. Attending to the demands placed on FNMI staff is a legitimate concern.

Going Deeper

Boards are in different places in their responses to the FNMI CI goals, some are at a beginning stage in their work toward responding to the goals; others, particularly those that are participating for a second year, are acknowledging their need to go deeper.

The phrase *going deeper* references awareness of and concern with a number of key issues including;

- Moving from a project approach to a situation in which Aboriginal education is fully integrated across the curriculum at all grade levels;
- Teachers having the requisite knowledge and understanding to comfortably teach a range of topics within the field of Aboriginal education;
- Understanding Indigenous worldviews and the relationship between worldview and teaching and learning practices;
- Developing awareness and appreciation for the ways in which colonialism continues to impact Aboriginal students, families and communities, and understanding how those impacts impede students' capacities to navigate the demands of schooling; and
- Understanding how the demands of school impose expectations on students that conflict with FNMI students' lived realities and learning how to navigate those tensions in ways that serve the needs of all teachers and students and are respectful of Indigenous students ways of being.

3. LEARNING FROM THE REGIONAL FACE-TO-FACE GATHERINGS

During the spring of 2015, the Principal Investigator (PI) and one research assistant (RA) attended face-to-face gatherings: April 22, in Thunder Bay; April 30, in Sudbury; and May 6, in Brampton. During these gatherings, CI teams from each of the participating DSBs shared results from their Inquiry. Teams were asked to include the following key points in their presentations.

- Focus of the Inquiry
- Strategies to impact FNMI student achievement and well-being
- Evidence of impact
- Implications for future learning and directions

As CI teams described what they did and what they learned researchers gathered observations notes.³ Learning from the gatherings is organized according to the goals of the inquiry.

3.1 FNMI Student Achievement and Well-being

*Missing home, missing family, the work is hard, feeling like you are not able to do it.
(Video Interview, 2015)*

These words reflect the stressful learning context many young First Nations students confront. This student like many of his peers has to leave his home community to attend school. Other Aboriginal students experience similar levels of stress. Expectations at school can be overwhelming when students are consumed with adjusting to living away from their families and communities. During the second year of the CI, recognizing and supporting Aboriginal students was a priority in many DSBs. During the face-to-face presentations CI teams described their efforts to hear and respond to Aboriginal students' experiences and to create school environments that will support Aboriginal students particularly those living away from home.

3.1A Supporting Positive Relationships

FNMI Student – Teacher Relationships and Student – Student Relationships

*A little extra attention, a little recognition, a little encouragement, a little support
and the results exploded. (PI Notes, p.11)*

Many of the face-to-face presentations reflected a concerted effort by teachers to build trusting relationships with their FNMI students. Teachers' actions reflect an emerging understanding of the link between their lack of knowledge and the lack of trust in their relationships with FNMI students. Additionally, teachers reported an emerging awareness of not previously taking the time to get to know their Aboriginal students. Getting to know their students as individuals and as capable learners contributes to improved relationships between teachers and students. During the presentations teachers shared stories that included details about students' interests and capacities. As teachers come to know their students – students come to know their teachers.

³ Some DSBs shared copies of their power point presentations allowing for close analysis of their presentations.

Some CI Teams recognized the need for and created opportunities for students to get to know and build trust within their peer groups. This was especially important in schools where First Nations students came from different reserve communities as well as for FNMI students who are transitioning from an on-reserve school to a provincially funded school. CI Teams are developing mentorship programs for FNMI students. Information on an Indigenous Mentorship Program is available in Appendix C.

3.1B The Integration of Culturally Relevant Content

I like the fact that we are actually learning about something that I can relate to and that makes sense to me. (PI Notes, p.7)

CI teams were surprised at the positive response to the inclusion of cultural content. In some Boards teachers were able to learn alongside students, getting to know their students while participating in beading and drumming workshops. In some instances the beading classes were integrated into the math program, students learned math skills while learning beading skills and techniques. Teachers and students both learned some of the traditional teachings shared through the practice of beading. As teachers accessed Indigenous knowledge, their understanding of their students shifted and when students felt seen they responded with participation. As one CI team member noted, “I am witnessing positive change” (Notes, RA TG, p.1). As teachers and students experience and learn about traditional culture alongside one another, some teachers responded with enthusiasm, others expressed initial anxiety and some continue to struggle with their responsibilities in this area. In response to this challenge some CI teams continue to rely on support from community members and DSB staff that have expertise in teaching FNMI content.

3.1C Opportunities for FNMI Students to Take On Leadership Roles

In some Boards FNMI students took on leadership roles, they visited with community members and were invited to share what they learned with their teachers and classmates. In other instances teachers made particular effort to reach out to individual students who were experiencing difficulty and offered them specific tasks to “hook” the students into school. In one case a teacher asked a student to become the photographer for her Facebook page. This task gave the student a positive experience of achievement and a purpose for attending school. Keeping in mind the stress and anxiety experienced by students, providing them with roles and responsibilities that match their specific interests and creative capacities provides a source of security and an experience of success.

3.2 Increased Knowledge, Understanding and Awareness of FNMI Histories, Cultures and Perspectives for all Staff and Students

We are on a journey of learning, and this journey is going to take some time. We are willing to persevere and put in the time for the good of our students.
(PI Notes, p.13)

The gap in educators' knowledge about Indigenous people and the history of colonialism is well documented (Dion, 2009; St Denis Schick, 2005). Researchers have examined the significance of that gap for all learners and for Indigenous learners in particular. During the face-to-face presentations the research team observed a surprising and hopeful shift in educators' responses to the knowledge gap.

Many educators are willing to

- a) Identify their own knowledge gaps,
- b) Recognize the significance of the gap as it impacts on Indigenous student achievement,
- c) Accept the relationship between the knowledge gap and their discomfort teaching Indigenous content, and
- d) To take action in response to their learning needs.

Reviewing the Observation Notes from the face-to-face presentations, six conditions support this response.

- a) The collaborative inquiry project not only gives teachers' permission to be learners it is actually a requirement of the project. Taking up the position of learner reduces the expectation of being knower, opening space for learning.
- b) Within the context of the Collaborative Inquiry educators know they are not being blamed or judged for their lack of knowledge. Rather they are provided with opportunities to learn.
- c) Participants in the Collaborative Inquiry are provided with opportunities to share their learning, their learning is acknowledged and appreciated.
- d) Most importantly, classroom teachers see that their learning is having a positive impact on their teaching and for their students.
- e) The broader social context is having an impact. Increased attention and awareness in the public consciousness is reaching teachers and contributing to their investment in learning.
- f) Educators are responding to *the leadership provided* by the Ministry of Education. The ME identified Aboriginal education as a priority and is actively supporting work across the province. The provision of funds to support initiatives, specifically community partnerships, is having a positive impact.

Not all educators embrace the need to expand their knowledge and understanding but overall there is evidence of progress in teachers' knowledge and understanding of FNMI experiences and perspectives and hopefulness in the growing awareness of the need to learn.

3.3 Relationships with Parents and Community Members

The presence of community members makes school more comfortable, it makes you feel like you're not the only one. Elders are, someone we can talk to, they bring in the traditional stuff that we need.
(FN Student, PI Notes, p.9)

We're coming together to find different ways to make a difference for our children using traditional knowledge. (Elder, RA AS Notes, p.2)

During year one of the FNMI CI, collaboration with community members contributed to the success of the project. Building on successful connections in year two, CI teams continued to cultivate these relationships in service of meeting the needs of students and expanding their own knowledge and awareness.

3.3A What did Community Members bring to the FNMI CI, what do they actually do?

- a) Community Members participated in the planning process providing the DSB staff with knowledge and understanding of the community's perspectives, needs and priorities.
- b) Community Members offered a unique perspective on the work teachers were doing, they observed things that others do not necessarily see in the activities of the classroom. In response to the use of Anishinaabemowin in the math lesson an Elder observed, "It is almost as if you are reawakening something in the students" (RA JH, Notes p.1).
- c) Native language and culture teachers were invited to work in collaboration with classroom teachers integrating Indigenous language and culture across the curriculum. This collaboration legitimates and validates the language for non-Indigenous educators and students. It shifts Indigenous languages to a place of value for all members of the school community. Teachers who had never previously engaged were working together. The classroom teacher reported, "I did not realize the wealth of knowledge that she (language teacher) carried, I had no idea until this project, of the importance of their cultural knowledge" (RA JH, p.2).
- d) Elders made regular classroom visits sharing traditional teachings with students and teachers.
- e) Aboriginal artists visited schools to talk about their art practices and to lead art activities with students.
- f) In some DSBs Elders and Traditional Knowledge and Wisdom Keepers led students on fishing and hunting excursions, they introduced students to traditional teaching taught through ceremony.

3.3B What do teachers and students have to say about Community Member contributions?

- a) Their very presence challenges stereotypes, and make schools less alienating for students.
- b) The knowledge and perspectives they share “shift staff attitudes” (RA TG, Notes, p.1).
- c) Teachers express appreciation for the knowledge and understanding community members bring to their schools and classrooms.
- d) Their presence supports engagement with parents.
- e) Their knowledge sharing has a positive impact on teachers’ understanding of students and consequently improves teacher–student relationships.

3.3C How did CI Teams Cultivate Positive Community Member Participation?

School teams took a number of steps in support of establishing positive community member participation including:

- a) Working with key community contacts, sometimes relying on DSB staff including language and culture teachers, SWSTs, and or the Board Lead in Aboriginal education to make connections with members of the community interested in working with the school community;
- b) Doing outreach to local Band schools and education counsellors in First Nations communities to establish partnerships;
- c) Inviting students to take leadership roles in planning a Community Feast, and providing ideas for engaging community members;
- d) Holding an Indigenous Fair, modelled on the Science Fair, which featured students’ learning and understanding of Indigenous knowledge.

Some DSBs are working on the premise that community engagement is a process; they may need to start small and patiently let it grow. They are working with the idea that there can be different kinds/levels of engagement. For example, one school began with a social media project posting news, events and pictures on a Facebook page. For some families, following the school events and posting messages is a first step toward engagement.

3.4 Reviewing Year One Next Steps and Articulating Next Steps For Year Three

Looking back to the Next Steps DSBs outlined during the April 2014 face-to-face gatherings it is clear that progress has been accomplished.

Boards Addressed the Following Year One 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 meetings with Elders and access to teachings that advance students understanding of themselves as Indigenous people.
- In support of FNMI students, some CI teams are investigating 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 have identified this as a focus for their ongoing work.
- 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.

Next Steps for the 2015-2016 School Year

- Continue community outreach and invite participation from communities not yet involved.
- CI teams acknowledge that the inquiry has had a positive impact on their understanding of FNMI people but they need to know more.
- 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.
- Bring Elders and DSB staff together to talk about curriculum and ways of integrating content across the curriculum. Address concerns raised by teachers about their fears and discomfort teaching this material.
- Continue to develop strategies for supporting students in making transitions, this includes very young children moving from a culture-based early childhood education program to middle- and high-school-aged students moving from reserve schools to provincially funded schools.
- Continue to work with social media as a tool for connecting students and families with what is happening at school.
- Discuss how this focus on Indigenous education is impacting non-Indigenous students. Identify the benefits and challenges they experience.

4. LEARNING FROM PARTICIPANT INTERVIEWS

Between May 8, 2015 and June 29, 2015, the research team conducted individual phone interviews with 40 CI participants including 18 principals (P), 7 community members (CM), 7 teachers (T), 7 board leads (BL) and 1 student achievement officer (SAO). In the first section of this chapter I report significant year two findings. In section 4.2 to show progress made I include next steps identified by year one participants with next steps identified by year two participants. In DSBs participating for a second year the inquiry is going deeper – more schools are involved and change is being accomplished.

4.1 Significant Year Two Learning, Accomplishments and Concerns

4.1A Hearing and Responding to the Voices of FNMI Students

As far as using the circles, students love it. Having other people listen to what they have to say: you could see the older students rooting for the younger ones. (CM5, p.1)

In year two of the CI, interview participants reported on what they learned from hearing and responding to the voices of FNMI students. Principals relied on student surveys and talking circles for accessing the voices of FNMI students. Other strategies included lunch and learn and tea and bannock sessions. Participants expressed surprise at the clarity with which FNMI students are able to describe the issues that contribute to their discomfort at school. They also note that improved dialogue between FNMI students and school staff resulted in improved student – teacher relationships. Principals shared stories of teachers getting to know their FNMI students through the surveys and talking circles and noted how this contributed to improved FNMI student well-being. Principals asked themselves why they had never done this before. “We had not ever taken the time to learn, its’ brought a lot of learning opportunities” (P1, p.4).

Participants noted that attending to transitions was a key concern for many CI teams. This included transitions that youth experienced when moving from home communities to larger urban centers to attend high school as well as transitions that very young students experienced when moving from a culture based kindergarten program to attend elementary school.

4.1B Shifting From Cultural Events to Integrating Content Across the Curriculum

We got greater depth this year, it was interesting seeing it play out in different schools, people were free to innovate on process, yet goals were the same. We found more ways to authentically embed Aboriginal content through regular social studies curriculum. (BL4, p.1)

In year two of the CI, schools continued with an events approach, while working to integrate cultural content across the curriculum so that it will become a part of their day-to-day practice. Participants reported an increasing awareness of the need to make a shift in their approach to Aboriginal education. They supported the inclusion of cultural events recognizing the positive impact on FNMI students and the whole of the school community. They also recognized the need for and expressed a desire to work toward integrating content. “We have to find a way to have it embedded as part of the curriculum and not just added on” (P12, p.2).

4.1C Addressing Gaps in Teachers' Knowledge

I am very worried about teaching Native culture. It is different than teaching math. This is someone's culture. This is the hardest. I don't know enough and do not feel comfortable enough. ... I do not have enough knowledge I do not want to offend somebody. This is my biggest stumbling block. (T4, p.1)

There is increasing attention to the significance of the knowledge gap. In particular principals describe the depth of their own learning and express concerns for the learning needs of teachers in their schools. In their role as leaders within the school community, principals have opportunities to learn from their interactions with community members, parents and students. Principals acknowledge the more they learn the more they come to understand the distance that often exists between teachers and FNMI students. Assumptions and misunderstandings on the part of teachers due to their lack of knowledge and expertise, contributes to teachers' stress as well as the stress that FNMI students experience in schools. In response to findings in the *Listening Stone* 2014 report some DSBs launched a focused Professional Development program for staff.

While significant progress is being made, 80% of participants interviewed observed teachers' ongoing need for Professional Development.

4.1D Language

We have surveyed our families and having language teachers in the schools is their number one priority. (CM2, p.2)

Working with language and culture teachers or language speakers from the local community, some schools have been able to integrate language teaching across the school community. For example one school team reported using anishinaabwmowin in the morning announcements. Some schools have added anishinaabwmowin language throughout the school. Others have greetings in different Indigenous languages posted in the school foyer. Some participants observed increasing numbers of students, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participating in language classes.

4.2 In Response to the Research Questions

In service of maintaining confidentiality I am presenting aggregate data; participants are not identified by their DSB. 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.

As in year one 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 / Signs	Beginning Stage, getting programs started, observing initial signs of change
Consistent Markers	Establishing programs, observed consistent changes in behaviour
Significant Improvement	Observing significant change, building and/or expanding on already existing programs

4.2A Research Question One:

To what extent did the FNMI Collaborative Inquiry Initiative achieve the three Collaborative Inquiry goals?

a) Increase student achievement and well-being

Participants	Initial Signs	Consistent Markers	Significant Improvement	Total
Board Leads	1	5	1	7
Community Members	1	6		7
Principals		13	5	18
Teachers	6	1		7
Student Achievement Officer	1			1
Totals	9	25	6	40

Key Quotes

I have never seen students move as far as they did in a very compressed amount of time. (P12, p.1)

In one school self-Id has increased from 18% to 25%. They are working very hard at that school. They have created a culture of inclusivity. (BL1, p.2)

It is really making a difference – we are getting graduates going to post-secondary. Having more culture content in the school [and] having community members in the school is making a difference to our kids being comfortable in the school. (CM1, p.2)

The difference in how children are being taught in the school – they take part and take more of a leadership role. They have a say in what they want to learn. It is not just from a textbook on the shelf. Kids are learning about the historical context to the current reality and are asking more questions. (CM4, p.1).

Strategies Included

- Inviting FNMI guest speakers into the classroom to share their teachings,
- Hosting special events as a way of including FNMI experiences and perspectives in classrooms,
- Regularly using of FNMI authored resources,
- Use of surveys and talking circles to initiate communication between staff and students, and
- School staff visiting reserve communities and participating in community events to learn more about their students.

Significant Impacts Included Initial Evidence of

- Increased FNMI student attendance,
- Increased FNMI student participation in classroom and school events,
- Increased positive interactions between FNMI students and their teachers and peers,
- Increase in FNMI Voluntary Self-Identification, and
- Decrease in office visits by FNMI students for disciplinary reasons.

Discussion and Next Steps

Participants continued to report a positive impact on student achievement and wellbeing. Students are talking more in class and sharing knowledge about their families, communities and culture. They are also asking more questions. Most interview participants reported anecdotal evidence of improvement and identified the need for assistance with documenting student achievement. Moving from an events approach to integrating content across the curriculum is an identified next step for many DSBs.

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

Participants	Initial Steps	Consistent Markers	Excellent Progress	Total
Board Leads	4	3		7
Community Members	4	3		7
Principals	3	14	1	18
Teachers	4	3		7
SAO	1			1
Totals	16	23	1	40

Key Quotes

[The CI] has made me more sensitive. [It] encouraged me to find resources and support staff; to help provide a non-threatening environment for parents. (P10, p.1).

Of course there needs to be more professional learning, teachers can't teach what they don't know. (P6, p.2)

I am becoming more comfortable; my lessons are more successful than last year. (T4, p.1)

This has opened the door for students and teachers – deepened my understanding. It is so important to know our students – to meet their interests and talk to them about the things that matter in their lives. (T3, p.1)

I do believe that this work is making a difference. Even First Nations administrators [and] the public are gaining knowledge to make FNMI students stronger and have voice. (CM5, p.1)

Strategies Included

- Organizing workshops by elders, traditional knowledge keepers, and other community members,
- Inviting Aboriginal artists to visit classrooms and share their knowledge and perspectives,
- Inviting Native Language teachers into classrooms to share their knowledge and experiences with all students,
- DSB staff visiting reserve communities, and
- Consistently reaching out to local FNMI service agencies (for example local Friendship Centres).

Significant Impacts

- Participating principals acknowledged that the CI has a profound impact on their own learning,
- Principals observed a change in some teachers' attitudes toward FNMI students,
- Some teachers acknowledged the impact that increased knowledge, understanding and awareness has had on their relationships with students and on their capacity to teach FNMI content, and
- Teachers described being more comfortable approaching community members, parents and extended family members.

Discussion and Next Steps

Participation in the CI provides teachers, students and the broader community with opportunities to learn traditional teachings, the significance of ceremony, the history of local Indigenous communities and current circumstances. Interview participants acknowledged the significance of learning in relationship with community members. Participants unanimously identified the need for ongoing opportunities to continue learning.

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

Participants	Initial Steps	Steady Progress	Excellent Progress	Total
Board Leads	3	3	1	7
Community Members	2	4	1	7
Principals	5	10	3	18
Teachers	2	4	1	7
SAO	1			1
Total	13	21	6	40

Key Quotes

The strength for us is we have an Elder who participates at every event and gives us advice and opens and closes all our events. (P7, p.1)

Definitely, yes, there is a big difference – parents are more engaged with their children, kids take their learning home to share with their parents and parents are learning more about what their kids are learning. I live with my son's family and my grandchildren are coming home to talk about what they learned. (CM 4, p.1)

What really made me happy was seeing children happy, hearing their excitement about learning – learning the culture through the artwork and being thoughtful learners. Seeing their generosity and respectfulness. (CM3, p.3)

Strategies Included

- DSB staff making visits to local First Nation communities – for example, to conduct parent-teacher interviews, to participate in the celebration of feasts, to attend a pow wow,
- Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers presenting workshops for teachers,
- Inviting community members to participate in school events,
- FNMI Secondary School students taking on leadership roles to share their knowledge and experiences with both younger students and classroom teachers,
- Inviting parents and grandparents to speak with teachers and students, and
- FNMI staff members, including SWSTs, Language and Culture Teachers and Aboriginal Education Board Leads, assist with outreach to local FNMI Aboriginal communities and community organizations.

Significant Impacts included

- Increasing trust between FNMI community members and DSBs,
- Positive impacts on student well-being, and
- Community members express emerging confidence in the school system's willingness to recognize and value Aboriginal people's knowledge, perspectives and experiences.

Discussion and Next Steps

Working in collaboration with community members is critical to the success of the CI. Community members bring Indigenous presence and Indigenous knowledge into schools and classrooms. They are a source of knowledge for both staff and students and can often serve as a bridge to establishing positive relationships with students and parents. Some DSBs have established a resident Elders program. This allows relationships to grow over a period of time. Investing in long-term relationships demonstrates respect for the Elders' time and contribution to the learning environment.

4.2B Research Question Two:

What were the most significant learning experiences for FNMI Students, DSB staff and for FNMI community members?

The CI provided a variety of learning experiences for participants who occupied different roles. Reviewing the key learning accomplished in year one along side the key learning identified in year two provides evidence of emerging growth and consolidation.

Key Learning By FNMI Students

Students learned (as reported by CI participants), that:

Year One

- 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.

Year Two

- They have a place in the school, and can impact positive change in the school community,
- As a result of participating in cultural activities they are happier at school, and
- The school is a safer place to be a FNMI student now.

Key Quotes

I have two grandchildren at [the] school and to have their culture acknowledged gives them a sense of pride and of belonging. (CM6, p.2)

Both our students and our artists said "I didn't know that people cared about it in that way." (BL5, p.1)

There needs to be more teaching about how much the drum means, they need those teachings. It's a powerful experience and to witness what it meant to the FNMI kids. (CM5, p.2)

Discussion

During year one observations of impact on FNMI students focused on evidence of their improved attitudes toward school and their desire to know and teach others about FNMI history and culture. This work is significant and continues to have a positive effect on students. Comments from interview participants suggest that during the second year of the inquiry students are taking on more leadership roles and responsibilities. For example in one case FNMI students successfully advocated for the right to play lacrosse during recess and in another school students organized and co-hosted a community feast.

Key Learning By DSB Staff

DSB staff reported learning about:

Year One

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

Year Two

- The positive impact of working in collaboration with the community,
- Observing the Indigenous artists work with the students staff gained an understanding of Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous pedagogy,
- FNMI Students' capacities, concerns and commitments,
- The impact of their own learning on their FNMI students, the need to learn more, and
- Appreciation for the knowledge and understanding of the Language and Culture Teachers.

Key Quotes

I didn't think they (FN Students) were capable of this depth of understanding. The clarity with which they spoke impressed me. (P1, p.1)

We learned about the power of relationships with students, family and community. ... We also learned that it's so important to communicate with parents [through the use of] social media, when they drop off lunches, when ever possible. We have to try to take advantage where we can to engage them. (BL4, p.2)

I found it really challenging, it took me out of my comfort zone, it's challenging to bring the world of school and community together and develop a common understanding, but it's worth it. I don't feel certain of knowing all of the answers and I'm ok with that. (BL7, p.2)

Discussion

The FNMI CI continues to provide DSB staff with opportunities to learn from and with Indigenous colleagues, community members and students. Ongoing attention to Aboriginal education is providing staff with time to develop an understanding of the complexity of issues confronting students, families and communities. They are also demonstrating an emerging understanding of and appreciation for Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous pedagogy.

Key Learning By Community Members

Community members reported learning that:

Year One

- The DSB staff, including teachers were serious about learning from Elders and community members, and
- 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.

Year Two

- Gathering with the broader Indigenous community allowed them to have a more detailed understanding of what the community was doing to support students and families in the schools.
- Students respond to their cultural teachings and want more teachings, and
- DSB staff are beginning to demonstrate appreciation for the knowledge FNMI artists, Elders and traditional teachers bring to their classrooms.

Key Quotes

I thought it was wonderful going into the classrooms. I never had that opportunity [to share my knowledge of beading] before. It was great to pass on what I have learned. (CM3, p.3)

An interesting outcome for us was getting to collaborate with other Aboriginal partners, to see what others are doing and how others are involved. (CM1, p.1)

It strengthened all relationships in the student body as a whole, between teachers and students and students themselves. They are learning about each other and each other's cultures. (CM4, p.1)

Discussion

Participation in the CI provided community members with unique learning opportunities. Participants recognize that their presence can have a positive impact on transforming school experiences for students and teachers. Community members see that their ways of teaching can have a positive impact on teachers understanding of Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous pedagogy and consequently it can change their own faith in the school system. Community members are learning that schools can be a community hub providing positive space and opportunities for the community to gather in support of Aboriginal student achievement and well-being. In some instances community members are beginning to trust individuals within the school systems.

4.2C Research Question Three: What contributed to the success of the project?

Factors Contributing to Success

Year One

- Support from the OME gave the project legitimacy,
- Financial support allowed the DSBs to pay Elders, Traditional Teachers, and Aboriginal Artists,
- 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.

Year Two

- Meetings with and support from the DSBs Aboriginal Community Advisory Committee,
- Collaborative work with DSB Indigenous staff,
- Improved skills at working with FNMI community partners,
- Cultivating relationships with families – taking time to talk with parents, grandparents, siblings and cousins whenever possible,
- Recognizing that families are coping the best they can with often difficult circumstances,
- Visits to the community and attending important community events,
- Building relationships and developing understanding of local communities,
- Observing the positive impact on students, and
- Accessing FNMI students' voices, through the use of surveys, talking circles and meetings over lunch and or tea and bannock with the school principal.

Key Quotes

I really like that this (CI) is happening at our school because the teachers are so passionate and excited, and they like this CI, you can see it and feel it when you walk into the school. (CM4, p.2)

We need to do more in the FNMI communities ... Going into the school can be very intimidating for some people, the more we go into the community, the more the community will come into the school. (T5, p.1)

Teachers are making an effort at listening to students' voices (CM1, p.3)

Discussion

Hard work, open mindedness, commitment and working in collaboration continue to be the key factors contributing to the success of the FNMI CI. In the second year of the inquiry taking time to cultivate relationships emerged as an important goal. Taking time to listen to the voices of students was the single most significant accomplishment during year two of the inquiry.

4.2D Research Question Four:

What challenges and barriers were encountered and how did the team work through them?

Challenges and Barriers Confronted

Year One

- 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,
- Ongoing discomfort from non-participating teachers to the inclusion of FNMI content; and at times this created tension for participating teachers,
- Racism was identified as a 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.

Year Two

- Eighty percent of participants interviewed identified teachers' lack of knowledge; and consequent fear of teaching FNMI content as the most significant need/barrier,
- Need for increased support and involvement from principals – to attend the CI meetings and identify Aboriginal education as a priority,
- Additional central staff, materials and release time needed to assist teachers in acquiring knowledge and confidence in teaching FNMI content,
- Support from broader school community – some non-participating teachers object to the inclusion of culture specific activities, specifically drumming and smudging,
- Accessing appropriate teaching resources specifically for teaching math and science grounded in Indigenous Knowledge,
- Assistance with knowing how to establish good community relationships, understanding the CI process and with developing strategies for documenting FNMI student progress.

Key Quotes

I'm so afraid of saying the wrong thing, of what I don't know. (Teacher to BL 1, p.1)

We need to support language teachers. (CM 1 p.2)

Discussion

Accomplishing the goals of the FNMI CI continues to be challenging work. Participating DSB staff, community members and FNMI students are positive and encouraged by what they are experiencing, they are simultaneously overwhelmed by the work.

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APPENDIX A

To: Directors of Education

Date: April 27, 2015

From: Dr. Susan D. Dion
Educator/Researcher
SD Dion Consulting – Indigenous Research and Education

Subject: First Nations, Métis and Inuit– Focused Collaborative Inquiry Initiative
The Listening Stone Project Year Two: Learning From the FNMI Collaborative Inquiry Initiative

As you are aware, the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) has commissioned a study regarding the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Collaborative Inquiry initiative. As the Principal Investigator (PI) for the study, it is my pleasure to provide some additional details regarding the information being gathered in April and May 2015.

During the 2014-2015 school year your board, along with 21 other boards, participated in the FNMI Collaborative Inquiry Initiative. The purpose of this initiative has been to Increase student achievement and well-being, support positive relationships with FNMI communities, and increase knowledge, understanding and awareness of First Nations, Métis and Inuit histories, cultures and perspectives for all staff and students.

As an Indigenous researcher/educator, with more than 25 years of experience, I am pleased to be leading the team capturing the stories generated by the FNMI Collaborative Inquiry Initiative. 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 & Wilett, 2004).

My work will involve gathering information from both FNMI community members and board participants in the FNMI Collaborative Inquiry. The focus of the work is to gather stories that reflect what has been accomplished through this initiative relative to the following goals:

Primary Goal:

- ☑ Increased student achievement and well-being

Supporting Goals:

- ☑ Increased knowledge, understanding and awareness of First Nations, Métis and Inuit histories, cultures and perspectives for all staff and students
- ☑ Increased community engagement of First Nations, Métis and Inuit partners

Provincial findings will be captured in a final report entitled: ***The Listening Stone Project Year Two: Learning From the FNMI– Focused Collaborative Inquiry Initiative 2014-2015.***

In May participants will be invited to complete a survey and, if interested, take part in individual phone interviews. All identifying markers will be removed from the data. Participants will be asked to provide

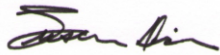
informed consent verbally and/or electronically. Anonymity of the participants and confidentiality of the data will be ensured. Findings will be reported in summary format, individual boards will not be identified.

Assisting me will be the following: Angela Salamanca, MEd, Faculty of Education, York University; John Hupfield MEd Candidate, Faculty of Education, York University; Tasha Smith, MEd Candidate, Faculty of Education, York University; Michael Dion, First Nations Researcher/Writer.

Highlights of the findings will be shared with the Council of Directors of Education (CODE) who will share this information with the Ministry of Education and participating school boards. Most importantly, the project will contribute to our knowledge and understanding of how to respond to the needs of FNMI students.

I would be most pleased to answer any questions or concerns that you may have about this project. Thank you for your leadership and support in this important initiative.

Sincerely,



Susan Dion Ph.D.
Lead Investigator
sdion@edu.yorku.ca.
Phone: 416 435-8930

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)

For Second Year Participants

- 1) Describe your involvement in the FNMI CI – explain any differences between your involvement last year and your involvement this year.
- 2) How has being a part of this CI, for a second year, impacted your learning and your work?
- 3) How has the CI continued to affect school-FNMI community relationships during the second year of the inquiry?
- 4) What would you do next to further cultivate positive relationships between local FNMI communities and the school communities?
- 5) Do you think participating in the CI for a third year continue to have a positive impact on these relationships
- 6) What strategies did your FNMI CI team use to gather evidence of impact on students?
- 7) Did and if so how did FNMI students benefit from participating in this initiative for a second year?
- 8) Did, and if so how did participating in this initiative for a second year have a positive impact on relationships between FNMI students and the school community? For example between students and their peers, their teachers?
- 9) How did students respond to participating in the initiative for a second year? What stories do they tell about their learning?
- 10) What would you say is the most significant need in your school/DSB with regard to FNMI student success and wellbeing?
- 11) What are the most significant challenges teachers confront in teaching FNMI content?
- 12) Is there anything else you want to share about the FNMI CI?

Interview Questions FNMI Community Members Participating in Collaborative Inquiry

For Second Year Participants

- 1) Describe your involvement in the FNMI CI, how was it different than what you did last year?
- 2) What was the most significant learning moment/event for you?
- 3) Has the CI affected school- FNMI community relationships? How would you describe the impacts?
- 4) If the DSB you work with was going to participate for a third year what would you suggest they do to further cultivate positive relationships between local FNMI communities and the school communities?
- 5) Did this project have a positive impact on the relationship between FNMI students and the whole of the school community including their peers, teachers, and principals?
- 6) How did FNMI students benefit from this project continuing for a second year?
- 7) What would you say is the most significant need with regard to FNMI student success and wellbeing?
- 8) How did students respond to the initiative, what stories do they tell about their learning?
- 9) Is there anything else you want to share about the FNMI CI?

Interview Questions Teachers and other DSB Educators

(Note some questions are specific to classroom teachers)

First Year Participants

- 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

First Year Participants

- 1) Describe your involvement in the FNMI CI.
- 2) What was the most significant learning moment/event for you?
- 3) How has the CI affected school- FNMI community relationships?
- 4) What would you do next to further cultivate positive relationships between local FNMI communities and the school communities?
- 5) Did this project have a positive impact on the relationship between FNMI students and the whole of the school community?
- 6) How did FNMI students benefit from this project?
- 7) What would you say is the most significant need with regard to FNMI student success and wellbeing?
- 8) How did students respond to the initiative, what stories do they tell about their learning?
- 9) 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) Lambton Kent
- p) Ottawa-Carleton
- q) Kenora Catholic
- r) Superior North Catholic
- s) Huron Superior Catholic
- t) Algoma
- u) Moose Factory Island
- v) Kawartha Pine Ridge
- w) 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

4. This was my

- a) First Year Participating in the CI Project
- b) Second Year Participating in the CI Project

If you are a teacher/educator employed by the DSB proceed to Question #5.

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:

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

If this was your second year participating in the FNMI CI please respond to these additional questions.

Participating in the FNMI CI for a second year:

22. Provided me the opportunity to build on the learning I started in year One.
23. Had a significant impact on what the school team was able to accomplish.
24. Had a significant impact on what I was able to accomplish.
25. Had a positive impact on students.
26. It will be beneficial for me to participate in the CI again next year.

APPENDIX C

In response to specific needs identified in the research I have included four briefing notes. These notes are intended to provide information useful when addressing specific and common challenges experienced by collaborative inquiry teams.

Briefing Notes One, Two and Four were prepared by Indigenous graduates from the Master of Education Urban Aboriginal Cohort. Drawing on their Major Research Projects these Indigenous Educators are pleased to share their knowledge and understanding. Angela Salamanca prepared briefing Note Two. Salamanca is a non-Indigenous ally and also a recent graduate from the Urban Aboriginal Education Cohort. She has been a research assistant with the *Listening Stone Project* for two years and has a lot of experience working in collaboration with Indigenous communities.

Briefing Note One: The Concept of Voicing and Indigenous Students: Ideas for Classroom Teachers

By: Jessica Medeiros, M.Ed. (Urban Aboriginal Education, Faculty of Education York University)

In classrooms where there is an absence of content that addresses Indigenous people's experiences, perspectives, and histories, there is little space for Indigenous students to have a voice. As a new Indigenous teacher, this reality caused me to question my role and responsibilities in the education system. I did not want to perpetuate conditions that silence Aboriginal students. Motivated by a commitment to teach differently, I designed a research project that would allow me to learn from Indigenous educators. Reflecting on my experiences in three classes taught by Indigenous teachers I identified three critical components of Indigenous pedagogy that supports Indigenous student voice. These are not the only components of Indigenous pedagogy, nor are they necessarily the most important. They are components that I found to be significant in creating classrooms that cultivate Indigenous student voice and are achievable within a public school classroom. These three components are:

- Inclusion of Indigenous perspectives/histories and content,
- Demonstrating and making space for an articulated self, and
- Using artistic expression as a way to explore Indigenous identity.

My goal is to establish a classroom where Indigenous content is fully integrated, where Indigenous students are able to develop their own voices while engaging with the voices of others.

The centering of Indigenous perspectives, histories, and content in the classroom must include an authentic discussion about race and how it matters in the lives of all Canadians. Logos, particularly those of sports teams, are a concrete example of racism in contemporary culture. Coping with stereotypical representations is a reality for Indigenous people—from art, fashion, media, advertisements, and even the curriculum—Indigenous youth construct their identities in the shadow of these representations.

During the 2013 academic year I was volunteering in a high school Native Studies class and observed a discussion about logos and the dehumanization of Indigenous peoples through the use of stereotypical images. In this particular class the discussion focused on the Washington Redskins. The teacher showed a video called "Proud to Be" (2014). Created by the National Congress of Indians, this video is intended to speak back to the use of images of Indigenous peoples in sport team logos. The video includes beautiful and diverse photos of Indigenous women, children, and men in vibrant regalia, at home, at work, celebrating, and living their day-to-day lives. Naming Indigenous peoples is a key theme in this video, and the narrator describes Native Americans by their nations including, for example: Navajo, Chippewa, and Mohawk. Powerful statements comment on the current and historical Indigenous experience, such as: "proud, forgotten, resilient, and suffering" (Proud to Be, 2014). In response to the issue of stereotyping, the video ends with the following statement: "Native Americans call themselves many things. The one thing they don't... [Zoom in on a Washington Redskins helmet and football on the field]" (Proud to Be, 2014). In this short video depiction of beauty, and within the hardships of the Indigenous experience in North America, humanity is palpable. Watching the video and listening to the discussion between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and their teacher I was impressed by the students' engagements with the content and the way in which the teacher allowed students to voice their thoughts and feelings about representation and Indigenous people. This lesson elicited a strong response from students.

Incorporating novels and other literature by Indigenous authors, including, for example: Sylvia Maracle, Beth Brant, Sherman Alexie, and Thomas King introduces potentially relevant content for Indigenous

students, and creates space for students to talk about their own experiences. In *The Truth about Stories: A Native Narrative* (2003), Thomas King examines misconceptions about Indigenous peoples in North America showing how these conceptions are normalized and entrenched in mainstream understandings of Indigenous identity. Drawing on the work of Edward Curtis and his story of the 'Vanishing Indian' King challenges readers to interrogate how dominant narratives and dominant representations contribute to contemporary chasms in the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. Providing a counter narrative to this and other stories, King's book introduces content that supports students in their efforts to make sense of their own lives.

In my understanding of Indigenous pedagogy, an articulated self requires that teachers acknowledge the position they occupy within Indigenous-Settler relationships in Canada, being open and honest with their students in the process. As teachers, both Indigenous and Settler, this means that we must think of ourselves in an ongoing colonial relationship in Canada—colonialism is not in the past. In my experience, teachers are often nervous about questions of implication in the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. As a teacher, I had to ask myself whether it is possible to authentically incorporate Aboriginal content without a discussion of the ways we are all implicated in the history of colonialism. Although engaging in such a process can be uncomfortable and unsettling, it is a necessary step in the process of understanding the Indigenous-Settler relationship. In a *Teaching Native Studies* AQ (advanced qualification) class I experienced this kind of discussion in the context of a lesson on Residential School history. Understanding the role that institutions of formal schooling have played in the lives of Indigenous students, their families, and communities provides an opportunity for teachers and students to learn and discuss the role of education in our lives and in the history of Canada. The discussion in this particular class provided space for the class to investigate the ways in which racism in the past continues to impact us in the present. The lessons were sad and at times there was discomfort but we learned our history, we learned about each other, and we learned how important it is to position ourselves in relationship with the history of colonialism.

Indigenous artistic expression can be a powerful resource providing opportunities for (re)claiming stories that have been misrepresented and or absent in Canadian classrooms. As a graduate student I attended a class led by Indigenous artist Keesic Douglas. In his four series photo/story *Lifestyles* (2007) Douglas re-appropriated the camera and returns the voyeuristic (?) gaze to depict the commodification and misrepresentation of urban Indigenous people. His photographs portray a couple in their apartment, surrounded by stereotypical Indigenous artifacts and crafts, including furs, dream catchers, and totems. In this series, Douglas comments on the degree to which dominant understandings of Indigenous peoples comes from objects, consequently objectifying Indigenous cultures and people. Through the artist/viewer relationship, Indigenous students are invited to interpret and share their own experiences of being stereotyped and objectified, making a personal connection to the artwork through a reciprocal exchange of story. *Lifestyles* (2007) reflects a story of resistance, renewal, and resurgence by Indigenous people simultaneously inviting viewers to voice their own stories.

Through my research, I am coming to understand Indigenous pedagogy and learning how to enact it in my classroom. I am at an early stage in my development as a teacher and this research provides me with ideas for transforming classrooms and providing students with learning experiences that support the expression of Indigenous voices.

Briefing Note Two: Coming to Know Indigenous Pedagogy: The Importance of Relationship

By: John Waaseyaabin Hupfield, M.Ed. (Urban Aboriginal Education, Faculty of Education York University)

Writing from my position as an Anishinaabe, powwow dancer, and Indigenous educator, I have spent most of my life experiencing, and my Masters program reflecting on, how I've come to know Indigenous pedagogy. I am immediately compelled to warn that when it comes to Indigenous education, there are no quick fixes, magic elixirs, or summary points that make Indigenous pedagogy happen in a classroom. My Elders and mentors teach me that coming to understand any form of Indigenous knowledge – be it philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, stories, dance, or even pedagogy - is a process that takes commitment, an openness to self-reflection, self awareness, and perhaps most importantly, time.

Elders say that learning is a lifelong journey. For several years I taught college level courses to FNMI community workers across Ontario and it was within this context that I began to be concerned with not only what was being taught, but how I was teaching. I worked for an Indigenous community organization teaching Indigenous content to mostly Indigenous adults, and still the method of teaching was not unlike your mainstream classroom setting: teacher in the front, lecturing, notes taken, hands raised, questions asked, testing of knowledge, and then everyone goes home with a grade. When I thought about learning from Elders and my Anishinaabe mentors, I came to see that something felt different. By the end of each course I had gotten to know students, some more than others, yet I couldn't tell you much about them aside from names and maybe where they called home. It seemed as though just when we were getting somewhere with our learning, when a rapport was being built, it was already time to end.

Similar to my experiences learning with Elders, you might be wondering where I am going with this story and when do you learn about Indigenous pedagogy? All I can say is 'wondering' is good and one thing I've learned about Indigenous pedagogy it is that we are often asked to wonder and reflect. We are asked to set aside our expectations and to be open to the unexpected. If you know the Anishinaabe 7 Grandfather teachings, they do play a pivotal role in Indigenous pedagogy, especially *humility*. You should know that I tell this story because I already know something about you; that most likely you work with or within the educational system, that you have a vested interest in FNMI education and FNMI student success. This is the reason I told the story of my own experience, in the hope that you will relate to what it is I'm writing about and come to know me a little more. Hidden in plain sight is a foundational tenet of Indigenous pedagogy: to *relate* to one another, to forge **relationship**.

What my Elders and mentors taught me to think about as an educator, a writer, a knowledge carrier, is that I have responsibilities to understand 'who you are', 'where you come from', 'where you are going' and 'what your responsibilities are' as a learner. If I cannot answer these questions about you then how am I to know what knowledge you do, or don't, carry? How am I to know what to teach and how to teach it? As you can see, there is already a great deal of responsibility thrust onto me as the educator, yet the learner also carries responsibilities within the relationship. It is expected that the learner makes and spends time with the educator, in Anishinaabe territory this could mean visiting, having tea, beading, or any other number of activities where relationship building may occur. In my own personal experience, relationship is a foundational tenet of Indigenous pedagogy and it lays the groundwork for trust, respect, storytelling, and even humour to unfold within the pedagogical process. The importance of relationship is why many Indigenous communities carry particular cultural protocols of introduction, of approaching one another, of knowing when and where to ask questions. Indigenous pedagogy asks us to be open to the formation of these relationships, which is something that may seem arduous within the context of the formal education system, but when looking towards the continued success of FNMI students it is a necessary step.

Briefing Note Three:

Suggestions for Approaching Indigenous Community Members, Communities and Organizations

By: Angela Salamanca, M.Ed. (Urban Aboriginal Education, Faculty of Education York University)

Knowing how and where to start the process of building partnerships with the Aboriginal community can be confusing. There are no clearly defined steps to follow when approaching Aboriginal community members and organizations. It is important to remember that many community members are busy responding to the needs of their community, some are wary of requests from non-Indigenous people, and for some working with schools and teachers is outside their scope of work. However, over the past two years of the FNMI Collaborative Inquiry many positive partnerships have been cultivated. Drawing on what we've seen work across the province and on my own experience, I have prepared the following list of suggestions to assist you in reaching out to the Aboriginal community.

Do your research!

Who might be best positioned to handle or respond to your request? Does the community employ a youth worker, educational liaison, or Elder who generally communicates with your board or school? If there is already a connection between your board/school and this community, asking for an email introduction might be helpful in continuing this relationship and respecting the communication channels already in place.

If you are not already in contact with other people from the same community or organization or do not know who to contact directly, call the band office or front desk, introduce yourself, briefly outline the nature of the request and ask the person on the phone to refer you to the appropriate person.

[The Métis Nation of Ontario's](#) website offers contact information for citizen-led councils throughout the province. Contacting your local Métis Nation council for a referral is a great way to begin your search for a Métis artist, musician or speaker, as these councils often hold events in their communities.

Local colleges and universities are also a great resource to begin your search for resources or guest speakers. Contact the school's association for Aboriginal students or the faculty offering Aboriginal/Native studies for referrals.

The [Deepening Knowledge Project](#) is an initiative of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto. This project provides a comprehensive compilation of resources divided by subject area and topic to help teachers infuse First Nation, Métis, and Inuit knowledge, histories, and perspectives in the curriculum. The site also offers a [protocol guide for inviting Elders](#) into your school or classroom.

Are you unsure which First Nation community to contact? If you are in an urban community, contacting [your local Friendship Centre](#) is a great way to begin making connections to the Indigenous population in your area. These centres often employ local artists, Elders, speakers and catering companies for their own programming and services.

Contact the members of the [Aboriginal Institute Consortium](#) (in south and central Ontario) or [Seven Generation Education Institute](#) (in Northern Ontario), as these institutions often partner with school boards or offer programming and support to First Nation students directly.

Establish a connection before making a request Develop a brief (one or two sentences) summary of the request or project and use it during your phone calls/voicemails/emails. If the person is interested and able to follow up on this initial connection, make arrangements to speak in depth about the nature of the request or the person's potential involvement. Try not to overwhelm the person you are contacting with too much detail, files, or lengthy descriptions at first; this signals a respect for their time and resources when sorting through multiple requests and emails in their daily lives.

Keep in mind that people working for band councils or for their community already have a full plate! Be prepared for rejection or for a lack of follow up. If the person does not return your call or your email, follow up with them after a few days and offer to adjust communication methods; sometimes a phone call is more effective and personal, or an email allows them to think about the request and have time to respond.

Maintain clear and open communication

Making community members (parents, staff, Elders, youth) part of the brainstorming and planning process of any project or event is the best way to create an effective and respectful working relationship between your school/board and the community.

Be clear about expectations regarding time and resources community members will need to invest in your project. Be flexible and open to negotiating changing timelines and availability.

Prepare brief project updates for the community and the members involved. Consistent reminders of your progress are a great way to keep the community engaged and informed.

Reciprocate! Is the community looking for support for a project? Find out if there are projects, events or initiatives where you could lend a hand.

Briefing Note Four: Indigenous Leadership & Mentorship Programs

By: Jolene John, M.Ed. (Urban Aboriginal Education, Faculty of Education York University)

Introduction

In my role as Aboriginal Recruitment & Community Liaison at the Centre for Aboriginal Student Services (CASS) at York University I worked with students to develop a Mentorship Program specifically designed for their needs. The **Aboriginal Sharing Circle** (ASC) is offered by and for Indigenous learners and contributes to the creation of a student-driven leadership community. Indigenous learners are positioned at the center and participation in the program contributes to cultivating balance, healing, health, well-being, and self-determination.

Problem and Response

The ASC was developed in response to the need for an Indigenous centered program. The former peer-mentoring program was floundering. A non-Indigenous mentorship program was individualizing, exclusionary, hierarchical and students' Indigenous identities and world-views were invisible. The program did not meet the needs or desires of Indigenous learners who asked for a program that would cultivate community, provide opportunities for students to directly inform program decisions, and help influence change and transformation.

Indigenous learners identified four desired outcomes for the mentorship program:

Spirituality

- Affirmations of Indigenous Identity
- Community
- Student-driven

Through the ASC, Indigenous learners are enabled. They work together to support each other's growth and well-being. The **Circle** provides space and opportunity for students to voice their thoughts and ideas, to develop friendships and skills necessary to succeed in institutions of formal schooling. Participating students contribute to the York Community, enhancing their own health and well-being while contributing to the transformation of the broader university community.

How it Works

The Aboriginal Sharing Circle provides a space for Indigenous learners to connect and establish a greater sense of belonging. This student-driven leadership community respects difference and welcomes Indigenous learners from many different nations, territories, and geographical contexts. Some students are born and raised within a reserve community, some have close family and community connections, some are completely disconnected from their Indigenous identity and have had little access to traditional teachings. The wide-range of skills, knowledge, teachings, attitudes and distinct worldviews students bring to the circle creates a space where individual authenticity, agency, and Indigenous identity are embraced and celebrated. Each learner has gifts, wisdom, stories, and life experiences to share with the community. Principles of shared leadership and responsibility to the group fosters a community where mutual respect, trust, and accountability are established and safeguarded.

With the support of staff from Aboriginal Student Services, Indigenous learners are given the opportunity to co-create and co-develop a program by and for themselves. They also receive guidance, cultural, and spiritual knowledge from CASS Elders. At the start of the fall semester, ASC participants gather to

establish and or review program objectives, guiding principles, roles, responsibilities, and dimensions of the program. Objectives include, for example: developing meaningful relationships, establishing healthy boundaries, open communication, active participation, and confidentiality.

Indigenous learners gather to socialize, teach, learn, and cultivate community. The program includes student-led sharing circles, one-on-one sessions, on and off campus group sessions, and an optional community leadership certificate. Participants collectively develop the ASC community guiding principles, values, mission, and contractual agreements that set up the framework for their governance structure and operations. Indigenous learners also engage in shared leadership roles by taking ASC meeting minutes. This process allows Indigenous learners to practice leadership, develop individual agency, self-efficacy, and enact individual and collective ownership and accountability to the ASC community. By instilling principles of shared ownership and individual responsibility, participants work together to help shape and define the program.

Each participant has agency and is encouraged to exercise their power and to have their voice heard. Learners maintain the responsibility to articulate what they want in terms of cultural programs, services, and sharing circle topics that contribute to their academic success and their well-being. Sharing circle topics have included: transitioning; triggering material; stress and anxiety; storytelling; identity and belonging; roles and responsibilities; drugs and alcohol; healthy relationships/sexuality; dreams and visions; spirituality. These topics create space for learners to think critically about themselves as Indigenous peoples while exploring the ways that historical, political, social, and economic realities inform their own lives, their families, and their nations. The program operates on the understanding that people bring their own gifts, talents, and knowledge bundle to the circle. Each person has a role and responsibility to share their gifts and contribute to the greater ASC community knowledge bundle.

ASC members are directly entered into an incentive-based system, which supports their participation in ASC events (3 points), CASS events (2 points), and York University or Greater Toronto Area (GTA) events (1 point). This is meant to encourage and acknowledge their participation in community, cultural, and academic development events that will reinforce the value of continuing learning outside the classroom. By implementing this system, we have seen an increase in student participation, engagement, and an increase in the number of students participating in the Aboriginal community at York University.

Success of the Aboriginal Sharing Circle

Methods of evaluating the program include gathering anonymous participant feedback, meeting minutes, and an end of year sharing circle where students reflect on the successes and challenges of the ASC. The revitalization of the peer mentorship program has proven to be successful. Participating students identified and explained what the **Circle** means to them.

What the Students Had to Say

Key issues identified by students led to deep discussions. A short synopsis of the discussions along with quotes from students reflects the depth of their commitment to the **Aboriginal Sharing Circle**.

Spirituality as Survival

ASC learners share their stories of inter-generational trauma, internalized oppression, lateral violence, shame, learned helplessness, and share the desire to reconnect, or rather, re-root themselves in their Indigenous ways of knowing and being. The complexity of “Spirituality” was a prominent topic, as learners shared their understandings of spirituality.

Spirituality is a way of life, it is about waking up every morning and thanking Creator, putting down tobacco to seek guidance, going to ceremonies, and taking care of my knowledge bundle.

Affirmations of Indigenous Identity

Indigenous identity is fraught with complexities. The Indian Act, Residential Schools, and reserve politics impose definitions and practices of judging who is, and who is not, an Indian. For a long time, policies and practices have disparaged Indigenous identity. Indigenous learners emphasize the importance of making space within the ASC to discuss and negotiate the complexities of Indigenous identity, and to gain an understanding of who they are and their community responsibilities.

The diversity of Native culture in Canada is something I am still learning. The more people are involved in doing this work, the richer our experiences will be. Having a rich cultural base is reassuring and enlightening.

Community

Indigenous learners identified the need to have a place where they can acquire a greater sense of belonging, to be recognized, respected and valued for their individuality and authenticity. Indigenous learners have expressed that ASC has enabled them to find, develop, and connect with a community of people with a shared history and common concerns, which ultimately strengthened their learning experience at York.

ASC has made my transition to university so much more enjoyable because I have been able to bond with my peers on a deeper level than I can with my program peers.

ASC/CASS has given me a place to belong here on campus. I'm not sure if I would feel as good about coming to University without it. I've met a lot of amazing people who have helped me along the way.

Student-driven Leadership Community

The leadership program honours and celebrates Indigenous conceptions of knowledge, spirituality, individual and collective agency, ownership, and accountability. Indigenous learners express how they felt empowered to be a part of a student-driven leadership circle that encourages self-efficacy and individual and communal ownership, accountabilities and responsibilities for cultivating a safe, healthy space that honours their ideas, gifts, and contributions to the ASC community.

I really appreciate the agency and the level of trust that the ASC program promotes and enables students to directly govern the program and speak to their needs.