

The Listening Stone Project Year Four

Investing in Teaching, Learning and Students

Lessons From The Indigenous Education-Focused Collaborative Inquiry 2016-2017



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Message from the Principal Investigator

On October 21, 2017 as I was working on the final draft of this report I took a break from writing to attend the *Walking With Our Sisters* memorial exhibition. Traversing the ceremonial path, I was overwhelmed with sadness, feeling the loss experienced by Indigenous girls and women, their families, communities and nations. Not surprisingly, I turned to my work as an Indigenous educator to make sense of the emotional turmoil. As an educator I'm daunted by feelings of responsibility to create educational experiences that will teach ways of knowing that honour the knowledge, strength, and creative capacities of Indigenous girls and women. I strive to understand how educators can create trauma-informed classrooms that will provide safer spaces for Indigenous girls, youth and women to make sense of their lives and to experience well-being. I know the effort required to engage all educators in learning how to teach about the ongoing violence of settler colonialism in the lives of Indigenous people. When I returned to the writing, I felt a deep sense of appreciation for all that is being accomplished through the Indigenous Education-Focused Collaborative Inquiry. While I am conscious of the depth and breadth of the work we need to do, I know that this initiative is having a positive impact in classrooms and schools across the province and it is contributing to our understanding of how to support further change.

I want to express my appreciation to educators, community members and students who took part in the *Listening Stone Project Year Four*. This research report is possible because of your participation. Your voices are critical to understanding both the depth and breadth of the work that is being done and that needs to be done. During May and June of 2017, I was able to participate in talking circles with students, community members and educators across the province. These opportunities often included visits to schools, allowing me a deeper appreciation for the investment of time, energy, and care that educators are committing to accomplishing the goals of the collaborative inquiry. I also heard expressions of concern from educators, community members and students about the ongoing challenges that exist in schools and classrooms. Your voices inform this report I appreciate your trust and have worked to represent both your accomplishments and your concerns.

Kwatanushiik



Susan Dion

March 31, 2018

Toronto, Ontario

Executive Summary

The *Listening Stone Project Year Four: Investing in Teaching Learning and Students* reports on the Indigenous Education Focused Collaborative Inquiry (CI). It documents what was accomplished, examines strategies to support Indigenous student well-being and achievement, and identifies challenges educators continue to work through in accomplishing change. This report is based on the findings of *The Listening Stone Project Year Four*, a research and evaluation project funded by the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE).

Now in its fourth year, the Indigenous Education-Focused Collaborative Inquiry includes 44 participating District School Boards (DSBs). The primary goal of Year Four is to increase student well-being and achievement. This is supported by two additional interconnected goals of increasing the knowledge, understanding and awareness of Indigenous histories, cultures and perspectives for all staff and students, and increasing engagement with First Nation, Métis and Inuit community partners. The CI is supported and directed by the Student Achievement Division and the Indigenous Education Office, of the Ontario Ministry of Education. Individual boards facilitate the formation of CI Teams within schools with high numbers of self-identified First Nation, Métis and Inuit students. Each DSB designates a Board Lead who works to facilitate the involvement of school communities and Indigenous community partners. The CI design and inquiry questions are grounded in local contexts and are directed by school-based CI teams in collaboration with local First Nation, Métis and Inuit community partners.

Informed by the voices of participating community members, students and educators, the *Listening Stone Project Year Four* report documents the initiative's impact on Indigenous Education. Data gathered in May and June 2017 shows positive impacts at the classroom, school and board levels. It also draws attention to areas of concern. Most significantly this year's report shows a connection between the need for ongoing gains in educators' knowledge to address Indigenous students' need for access to Indigenous content. It also reflects students' appreciation for opportunities to learn from the Indigenous people's experiences and perspectives.

Significant additions to the Year Four research are the inclusion of data from four community member-talking circles as well as talking circles with senior secondary school students. Community members continue to express support for the CI. They would like to see increased focus on Indigenous language instruction, increased integration of Indigenous content across the curriculum, ongoing support of Elders and Knowledge Keepers in the classrooms and an increase in Indigenous educators in schools, particularly in positions of leadership. The voices of Indigenous students draw attention to how their teachers' and classmates' lack of knowledge, understanding and awareness of Indigenous histories, cultures and perspectives are impacting their day-to-day school experiences. They attend school to learn and are increasingly frustrated by the lack of Indigenous content in their classes and the experiences of racism and discrimination they encounter in their school community. Students appreciate the presence of Indigenous student support workers, Indigenous specific spaces and teachers who are making an effort to include Indigenous content in their classes. Participating educators describe changes in their relationships with Indigenous students, families and communities, and the ways in which this change is affecting not only Indigenous students but all students' understanding of Indigenous perspectives, histories and cultures. Year Four of the *Listening Stone Project* focuses on understanding how educators who invest time, energy and commitment are accomplishing change in themselves, in their teaching and in their relationships with Indigenous students.

While challenges remain, the positive impacts of participation in the Indigenous Education- focused CI are clearly evident. As noted in reports from previous years, three specific areas require attention: support for parent and community involvement; support for teaching Indigenous languages and ongoing supports to deepen educators' knowledge. These findings demonstrate the importance of long-term commitments to Indigenous education and the perseverance required of staff, students and community members.

Research Findings

The research has generated eight key findings.

1. Educators participating in this project continue to report that being part of the Indigenous Education-Focused Collaborative Inquiry (CI) increases their knowledge, understanding and awareness of Indigenous histories, cultures and perspectives while simultaneously increasing their appreciation for their lack of knowledge and the implications of this gap in their knowledge.
2. Indigenous students are increasingly conscious of their lack of access to Indigenous histories, cultures and perspectives in their courses. They are increasingly aware of their need for this content.
3. The Indigenous Education-Focused CI is having a positive impact on school-community relationships and is contributing to an overall increase in Indigenous community member confidence in the public education system.
4. Support for Indigenous language instruction is a priority for community members, students and educators.
5. Educator – Community member collaborations continue to be the most significant site of learning for both the Educators and community members.
6. Support from school and District School Board leaders continues to be a significant component to successful CIs.
7. Talking circles with community members and students draw attention to the need for Professional Development for all staff that is grounded in a decolonizing approach.
8. Specific supports including Indigenous support workers, Indigenous student success teachers, graduation coaches, peer mentoring programs, and the creation of Indigenous-specific spaces are having a positive impact on Indigenous student well-being and achievement.

Recommendations

Nine key recommendations result from this research.

1. Building on the significant and positive impacts of the Indigenous Education-Focused Collaborative Inquiry (CI), it is recommended that the initiative be continued with an ongoing emphasis on genuine educator – community collaboration.
2. Community members and educators consistently point to the fundamental role that on-going engagement with Elders and Indigenous knowledge keepers play in supporting the well-being of Indigenous students and in deepening the learning of both educators and students. It is recommended that support for these engagements be continued.
3. Students, community members and educators reference the need to invest in Indigenous Language instruction. This requires a strong commitment to funding as well as continued support for collaboration between community members and educators.
4. Ongoing professional development continues to be reported as an essential component to success, along with opportunities to share information and experiences at face-to-face gatherings. Continued access to research expertise, professional development and quality resources for all educators is recommended.
5. Educators involved in the CI are increasingly aware of the need for connecting with Indigenous communities yet positive and consistent collaboration remains a central concern for many schools and District School Boards (DSBs). Ongoing direction to CI teams for fostering positive community relationships is recommended.
6. In previous reports, it has been recommended that peer support and student mentorship programs be supported at the school and DSB level, to support the relationships amongst Indigenous students, as well as to improve relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. It is recommended that peer support, student mentorship programs and leadership opportunities continue to be supported in schools, DSBs and provincially.
7. Graduation coaches, board leads, Indigenous student success teachers, language and culture teachers, Indigenous educators and administrators contribute significantly to fostering the well-being and achievement of Indigenous students, to building trusting relationships with Indigenous families and communities, and to supporting the overall success of the CI. It is recommended that high priority go to involving and concretely supporting the work of Indigenous administrators, educators, and staff.
8. Well-informed and supportive administrators at the school and board level play important roles in providing leadership to collaborative inquiry teams. It is thus recommended specific measures be taken to educate school administrators and board leadership regarding the need for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit-oriented collaborative inquiries and effective ways to support them.
9. While the Indigenous Education-Focused CI is having a positive impact, Indigenous students report far too many experiences of racism in their schools and classrooms. Anti-racism education has failed to address actions and interactions informed by a colonial mindset. A comprehensive decolonizing education program that introduces knowledge and understanding of the history of colonialism and its impacts on all people in Canada, along with a program that cultivates knowledge and appreciation for Indigenous people and Indigenous cultures, is recommended.

Reconciliation requires sustained public education and dialogue, including youth engagement, about the history and legacy of residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal rights, as well as the historical and contemporary contributions of Aboriginal peoples to Canadian society. (TRC, 2015, p. 4)

1. Chapter One: Introduction

Initiated in 2013, the *Indigenous Education Focused Collaborative Inquiry Initiative* (CI) is contributing to education and dialogue about Indigenous histories, cultures and perspectives, as well as addressing Indigenous student well-being and achievement. Informed by the voices of participating community members, students and educators, the *Year Four Listening Stone Project Report* focuses on the work being accomplished in District School Boards (DSBs) across the province of Ontario. Now in its fourth year, with 44 participating boards, the initiative is contributing to positive impacts at the classroom, school and board levels. Teachers, principals, support staff and superintendents describe the changes in their relationships with Indigenous students, families and communities and the ways the Inquiry is affecting not only Indigenous students, but all students' understandings of Indigenous perspectives, histories and cultures.

Year Four of the *Listening Stone Project: Investing in Teaching and Learning* focuses on the investments by community members, students and educators to accomplish the goals of the CI, as well as their recommendations for continuing and amplifying this important work. This year brought a greater focus on engaging with community members and students through talking circles that provided important insights and feedback on the CI in participating boards. One of the most significant impacts of this CI is the way it engages educators in the work. From an Indigenous perspective, observing educators' willingness to turn toward the issues and challenges that concern *First Nation, Métis and Inuit* students, families and communities is a significant marker of change. In stark contrast to the historical relationship when teachers turned away from this learning, the research documented in this report demonstrates that many educators continue to turn toward Indigenous people, hearing our voices and learning from our perspectives. Educators have expressed a commitment to continue to work towards creating and maintaining connections and relationships with community members, families and parents.

1.1 Background, Overview and Current Context

Since 2007, school boards in Ontario have made progress in establishing First Nation, Métis and Inuit student self-identification policies, advisory groups and Indigenous Education system leads. However, the 2013 Ontario Ministry of Education Progress Report baseline data shows that gaps exist for many Indigenous students. Through a series of discussions about how to respond to student needs, Ministry of Education Student Achievement Officers came to realize how little they know and understand, how much they have to learn, and that they really have to work alongside members of the First Nation, Métis and Inuit community members in the regions to do the learning (Grady, 2013, p.3). The aim of this Collaborative Inquiry Initiative is to engage with communities, increase knowledge and understanding of Indigenous histories, cultures and perspectives, and ultimately have a positive impact on the well-being and achievement of Indigenous students and all students.

This Collaborative Inquiry initiative 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 Indigenous issues into public discourse. During the 2016-2017-school year challenges experienced by the *Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry* have been the focus of media attention. In particular, Indigenous leaders have demanded that, for it to be effective and successful in its mandate the Inquiry must be accountable to Indigenous families, organizations and community members. The Inquiry must include and take seriously those who can offer their unique perspective. Impacted by the increasing awareness of the need to include the voices of Indigenous people and in direct response to the request of community members for increased involvement, Year Four of the *Listening Stone Project* includes a much stronger representation of Indigenous community members as well as the voices of Indigenous senior secondary school students. Accomplishing the Indigenous Education-Focused CI goals is not easy, and it takes time but attending to the experiences and voices of Indigenous families and community members are an important step in making progress and accomplishing successful and meaningful research.

1.2 About the Indigenous Education Focused Collaborative Inquiry Initiative

The *Indigenous Education-Focused Collaborative Inquiry Initiative* is engaging educators, students and community members in a sustained investigation. Aimed at addressing the academic well-being and achievement of Indigenous students; goals include increasing the knowledge and understanding of Indigenous people's experiences and perspectives for all staff and students and increased participation of Indigenous community members in schools within a provincially funded public-school system. In the 2013-14 school year, this initiative began with 15 District School Boards (DSBs), expanded in its second year to include 22 Boards, and in 2016-17, it involved 44 participating DSBs from across the province. Each participating Board received funding, and working in collaboration with community partners created a project unique to their context. During the 2016-2017 school year, members of the Collaborative Inquiry Teams participated in web conferences and received support from the Student Achievement Division.

During the Year Four Spring Gatherings, CI teams participated in round-table discussions sharing their inquiry projects with each other. These Round Table sessions provided opportunities for relationship building across DSBs in support of collective learning. Cultivating cross-board sharing was further supported by the creation of a Learning Stories Collection. Each participating school level CI team created a one-page description of their Inquiry highlighting goals, practices and accomplishments. Each DSB received one hard copy of the Learning Stories Collection. The stories are also available electronically at the following link bit.ly/IndigenousCI.

1.2A The Indigenous Education-Focused Collaborative Inquiry Participating District School Boards

Year Four: District School Boards Participating in the Indigenous Education-Focused Collaborative Inquiry Initiative				
Northwest Boards	Northeast Boards	Southeast Boards	Southwest Boards	French Boards
Lakehead	Algoma	Hastings Prince Edward	Thames Valley	CSC Catholique Franco-Nord
Thunder Bay Catholic	DSB North East	Algonquin & Lakeshore Catholic	Grand Erie	
Keewatin Patricia	Near North	Limestone	Simcoe County	Nouvel-Ontario
Rainy River	Moose Factory Island	Ottawa Catholic	Toronto	
Superior North Catholic	Rainbow	Ottawa-Carleton	Lambton Kent	
Northwest Catholic	Sudbury Catholic	Upper Canada	Bluewater	
Superior-Greenstone	Northeast Catholic	Durham	Greater Essex County	
Kenora Catholic	Huron Superior Catholic	Durham Catholic	DSB Niagar	
	Nipissing-Parry Sound CDSB	Trillium Lakelands	Kawartha Pine Ridge	
		York Region	Hamilton-Wentworth	
		CDSB Eastern Ontario	Waterloo Catholic	
		Renfrew County	Niagara Catholic	
			Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic	

Table 1A Participating District School Boards

District School Boards are invited to participate in the Indigenous Education-Focused Collaborative Inquiry based on their First Nations, Métis and Inuit self-identified student population. In Year Four of this CI, there were no Boards new to the initiative. Thus all Boards were in at least their second year of the CI.

1.3 The Listening Stone Project

The Listening Stone Project Year Four: Investing in Teaching and Learning is focused on research and evaluation. The purpose is to document, evaluate and learn from the Indigenous Education-Focused CI. The Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) commissioned the project with the intention of learning about and from the initiative. The aim is to expand understanding of what supports Indigenous student well-being and achievement, what supports educators' learning and what supports engagement with community partners. As Principal Researcher, I work closely with the Internal Team Lead: Leadership and Implementation Branch of the Student Achievement Division, Ministry of Education on the design and implementation of this minor research and evaluation project. I identify and work in collaboration with an experienced research team, and am responsible for the interpretations and findings that inform this report.

1.3A Overview and Research Context For Year Four

Year Four of the *Listening Stone Project* presented a unique opportunity. Ministry and board staff facilitated talking circles with community members and students. The community member talking circles took place during the face-to-face spring gatherings. CI teams were invited to contact the Principal Investigator if they were interested in organizing a student-talking circle in their DSB. In the end nine student talking circles took place organized by the CI DSB Team Lead, the Principal Investigator or community members.

Research Goals

In year four of the Indigenous Education-Focused CI the stated goals include a primary goal with two supporting goals.

Primary Goal

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

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 with First Nation, Métis and Inuit partners.

Research Purpose

The purpose of the *Listening Stone Project Year Four* is to learn from participants' experiences and perspectives. Documenting the achievements and challenges provides knowledge and understanding of the work accomplished and is useful in determining how to provide ongoing and effective support in DSBs across the province.

Research Rationale

This research and evaluation project will:

1. Provide knowledge and understanding of participants' questions and concerns as they begin their inquiry projects.
2. Document participants' reflections on progress accomplished during the first three years of the CI.
3. Identify supports required to assist CI teams as they move into the 2017–18 school year.

Research Questions

1. To what extent did the First Nation, Métis and Inuit CI Project **make progress** in achieving these three Collaborative Inquiry goals:
 - Increase student well-being and achievement
 - Increase community engagement of First Nation, Métis and Inuit partners
 - Increase knowledge, understanding and awareness of First Nation, Métis and Inuit histories, cultures and perspectives for all staff and students
2. What questions and concerns do Year One, Two, Three and Four participants bring to the Collaborative Inquiry?
3. Reflecting on their accomplishments during their years participating in the CI, what are Year One, Two, Three and Four participants planning and working to accomplish now and in the next year of the inquiry?
4. What would Year One, Two, Three and Four participants find most helpful in accomplishing their goals?

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 and Wilett, 2004).

Specifically, this Minor Research Project made use of a variety of research methods for gathering data including:

- Phone interviews with Collaborative Inquiry participants, including educators, school leaders, system, leaders, and Ministry of Education participating staff,
- An online survey open to all CI participants,
- Talking circles with community partners, students and educators, and
- Observation notes taken during Round Table discussions at the Spring Face-to-Face gatherings

Working in close collaboration with the Internal Team Lead and Research Team Lead in the Student Achievement Division, the Lead Investigator developed a comprehensive plan for data collection. The Data collection phases of the project were from May–June 2017. Data Analysis was completed in July–September 2017, preliminary findings were shared with Ministry staff at the end of June, in late August and in mid October 2017. The report will be shared with board teams attending regional sessions in December 2017 and January 2018.

Research Data is stored in a locked file cabinet in Dr. Dion's York University office and on password protected computers. On completion of the final report, data will be submitted to the Ministry of Education in a manner that maintains the confidentiality of all participants and remains the property of Ontario Ministry of Education.

Ethical Review Process

In April, Director, Leadership and Implementation Branch Student Achievement Division communicated with each of the DSB Directors introducing the Evaluation and Research Project. Additionally, the Principal Investigator sent a letter of introduction to each of the participating DSB Directors (see Appendix A). CI participants at spring gatherings were invited to submit their contact information if willing to be contacted. Survey links were sent to participants through board leads and invited them to voluntarily take part in the research project. The Indigenous Student Support workers in their schools invited senior secondary students to talking circles. The majority of students were old enough to sign their own consent forms. If students had not reached the age of consent parent consent forms were signed. Prior to the start of each talking circle and phone interview participants were asked for their consent. Each participant was informed that they could choose not to answer 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 occupy, not by their DSB. See Appendix B for copies of the statement of consent. Copies of the interview schedules can be found in Appendix C. Additionally, the project was reviewed and approved by the York University Research Ethics Board, and by School Board Ethics Committees where the Student Talking Circles took place.

Limitations

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

- 1) Time and geography are constraining factors. The data collection phase is short, lasting only four to six weeks and distances are vast. Conflicting schedules meant that it was not always possible to meet with the participating community members, students and educators who expressed interest in having face-to-face contact with the RA team. Limited time meant it was not possible to acquire ethics approval from some DSBs. This had a specific impact on accessing students' voices.
- 2) Relationships between participants and the Principal Investigator have little time to develop. Although steps are taken to establish a positive relationship, limited time together means that in most instances the relationship is new.
- 3) Although one of the goals of the inquiry is to positively impact Indigenous Student well-being and achievement, most CI teams have not yet developed strategies for documenting impact on student achievement. Evidence in support of this goal is limited to anecdotal observations.
- 4) Data collection is limited to participants' observations and interpretations. There is limited opportunity for on-site observations by the research team.
- 5) Attending to Indigenous Education and understanding its complexities is new for many District School Boards. School and school board staff members are understandably concerned with research that focuses attention on their efforts to accomplish this work. While the purpose of the *Listening Stone* Project is to support educators in accomplishing the work, people may experience research as judgement and act in self-protective ways, thus limiting their participation in the research.

1.3B The Research Team

Principal Investigator

Dr. Susan D. Dion is a Potawatomi/Lenape scholar who has been working in the field of education for over 30 years. Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at York University in Toronto, she is Director of the Master of Education Cohort in Urban Indigenous 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 Indigenous communities. Dr. Dion is widely consulted by diverse community groups, workplaces and institutions on developing methods for building more equitable, respectful relationships between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous people. This is Dr. Dion's fourth year as principal investigator on the *Listening Stone* Project.

Project Managers and Research Assistants

Angela Salamanca is a mixed-race woman from Colombia who has been an uninvited guest in Canada for 17 years. She is the project coordinator for *Walking The Prevention Circle* that researches capacity-building and community mobilization with Indigenous communities. Salamanca completed her Masters in Urban Aboriginal Education at York University in 2015. Her interests are centred on creating policies that work towards decolonizing curricula and spaces of schooling for all. This is her fourth year working on the *Listening Stone* Project.

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. This is M. Dion's fourth year working on the *Listening Stone Project*.

Krista Johnston has recently relocated to Mi'kma'ki to take up a position as Assistant Professor in Women's and Gender Studies and Canadian Studies at Mount Allison University. Her research focuses on gender, whiteness, and responsibilities for decolonization. This is the second year of her involvement in the *Listening Stone Project* and she served as Project Manager during the proposal writing and data collection phases.

Chris Hiller lives and works as an anti-colonial researcher and educator in the territories of the Attawandaron, Anishinaabe (Mississauga), and Haudenosaunee peoples (Guelph, Ontario). Her research focuses on educational and activist strategies for shifting settler consciousness. She served as one of two Project Managers for this year's *Listening Stone Project*. With guidance from the PI, Hiller was primarily responsible for Chapter Four: Learning From The Voices of educators.

Shane H. Camastro, is an Anishinaabe Two-Spirit educator and artist from Tkaronto, Dish with One Spoon territory who recently completed their Bachelor of Education at York University. Their work focuses on issues of decolonization, Indigenous sovereignty, community activism, teaching relationship through treaty, peer support, Two-Spirit resurgence, collaborative art making and skill sharing, as well as Anishinaabe land-based pedagogies. They have been teaching and facilitating dialogues around space building and anti-oppression for over 10 years.

Lee Iskander is an OCT certified Educator and a Masters of Education candidate at York University. Lee works with marginalized youth in various capacities and delivers talks and workshops on topics including youth activism, intersectionality, and supporting trans youth. Lee is the recipient of the John Damien Award for Outstanding Activism and the Inspire Awards' LGBTQ Youth of the Year, and they were the Youth Grand Marshal for Pride Toronto in 2011. Their current research explores the workplace experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming teachers. This is Iskander's first year working on the *Listening Stone Project*.

Ama Richardson is a first generation settler-Canadian and recent graduate of the Master of Education-Urban Indigenous Education cohort. She has been an Elementary teacher with the Toronto District School Board for 10 years and was a Lead Teacher in her school when it joined the CI in 2016. Richardson's research interests focus on understanding how educators become available to new learning in support of contributing to decolonizing education.

1.4 Data Collection

Data collection was completed in May–June 2017. Data Analysis was completed in July–September and the final report was written in the fall of 2017. In response to a request from the Ministry of Education additional student voice data was collected during the Winter of 2018. Six Student Voice Templates were collected from participating educators.

Data Sources	Total Number of Participants
Talking Circles with Community Members	4 Circles Approximately 90 Participants
Talking Circles with Students	9 Circles Approximately 86 Participants
Talking Circles with CI Teams	6 Circles Approximately 30 Participants
Round Table Discussions at the Spring Gatherings	12 Discussions Approximately 72 Participants
Interviews with District School Board Participants	46 Individual Interviews With Educators
Student Voice Templates	6 Templates were completed and returned
Total	Approximately 312 Participants

Table 1E Data Collected

Community Member Data Collection

Talking circles with community members were scheduled during the spring face-to-face gatherings. Setting this time aside when CMs were present provided an excellent opportunity for increased participation. When CI teams gathered to talk about their learning from the morning Round Table discussions, community members gathered with the Principal Investigator (PI) to share their perspectives on the Collaborative Inquiry. Information from the community member talking circles informs chapter two of this report.

Student Data Collection

During the spring face-to-face gatherings, the *Listening Stone Project* was introduced to CI teams. An offer was made to visit boards and hold talking circles with senior secondary school students. This was followed up with email invitations to boards with secondary CIs teams and those who expressed an interest in having me speak with students in their DSBs.

The short data-gathering period meant that getting ethics approval through DSB ethics review processes could not always be expedited within the limited time frame.¹ Talking circles with students were held where educators and community members facilitated the process, and this was not always in schools with CI teams. Chapter Three of this report reflects what was learned from the students' voices. Rather than focusing exclusively on the positive impact of the CI, the students' voices reflect needs, identify supports that are having positive results and provide guidance for next steps.

Educator Data Collection

Data collection with educators occurred in four ways. First, during the spring face-to-face gatherings, members of the ministry's CI support team, with permission of participants, recorded the Round Table Discussions. Secondly, the PI offered and responded to CI teams who requested site visits, and in these cases the PI was able to facilitate Educator talking circles. Next, confidential phone interviews were conducted with participants who provided their contact information during the

¹ Based on the Learning Stories provided by the DSB CI teams 68 Elementary Schools and 15 Secondary Schools were involved in the CI.

Face-to-Face gatherings. Lastly, the survey link was provided to all CI Board Leads to be distributed to participants.

Survey Data

Similar to years one through three, an online survey was developed and posted. The link was distributed to DSB CI team leads across the province. Unlike years one through three, response to the survey was extremely low and consequently survey results are not included in this report. Reasons for the low response are unknown. It may be that increased opportunities to contribute through Educator Talking Circles and during the Round Table discussions may have contributed to the low response rate. It might also be the case that having completed surveys in previous years participants may have felt participating again would be redundant.

1.5 Final Report: Chapter Descriptions

The Report is organized around the three groups participating in the research: community members, students and educators. The following is an overview of each chapter.

Chapter One: *Introduction* provides an overview of the research project as well as a detailed description of the research team, project goals, objectives and research questions. The research methodology and data collection processes are also included here.

Chapter Two: *Learning From The Voices of Community Members*, focuses on what community members identify as key challenges and key accomplishments. Community members were asked to describe their impressions of the CI including positive impacts and their concerns and priorities within/for the initiative.

Chapter Three: *Learning From The Voices of Indigenous Students* outlines how Indigenous students feel about the experience of going to school, including what they want and need from school systems and their teachers. Talking circles consistently reveal students' awareness of their rights as well as their understanding of the impacts of colonialism and racism on their education. Student discussions highlight concerns from previous years regarding the fact that teachers' lack of knowledge and understanding is having an impact on Indigenous students. Students also identify sources of strength, positive school experiences and ideas for next steps for accomplishing positive change.

Chapter Four: *Learning From The Voices of Educators* draws on the stories educators tell about their learning, describing the ways in which their individual journeys intersect with, are informed by, and shape the more collective learning journey of the CIs. This section explores the processes of learning that Educators and Principals describe, the consistent challenges, dilemmas, and questions that Educators face, and the factors that Educators cite as either hindering or supporting the growth and success of CIs. It concludes with a discussion of Educators' perspectives on the overall impact of CIs upon Indigenous students, families, and communities.

2. Chapter Two: Learning from Community Member Talking Circles

Community members (CM) involved in the CI bring critical perspectives to the *Listening Stone Project*. While they are invested in the CI, they are equally invested in their communities and the well-being of Indigenous students. Their attention to what is working and what is not working provides direction moving forward. In some ways, analysis of the talking circles was incredibly challenging. It was as if community members had so much to say their comments were weaving in and out acknowledging progress and highlighting ongoing challenges in the same sentence. During the talking circles, CMs addressed key areas including student well-being and achievement, language, Indigenous knowledge and leadership. They also described overall accomplishments, ongoing concerns and considerations for next steps.

2.1 Students First

Community members recognize that the CI is providing positive experiences for students. They report that while students are feeling more comfortable in school a lot of work remains to be done.

Increased Interest In Learning History

Our kids are talking about it. How colonialism, assimilation, genocide, all that stuff, has contributed and embedded itself in a thinking and survival mode. Because our young people are asking for more understanding, more—they want to re-learn the culture. They want to re-learn the language. Like, it's there. (CM, p.14)

Anyway, it is so good to see finally we're talking about this with the kids, and actually it validates the First Nations kids. They feel proud, and then the Indigenous kids are even more—they're just thirsty for more. (CM, p. 54)

Community members spend time paying close attention to the voices of Indigenous students. During the talking circles they reported what they consider to be a shift in students' understanding and interest. Indigenous students are beginning to understand connections between the history of colonialism and current circumstances within their families and communities. These students want opportunities to learn more about how history impacts their day-to-day lives. Additionally, community members are witnessing an increased interest from all students in learning Indigenous histories, cultures and perspectives.

Recognition, Respect and Relationships

I think the students ... that I see every day are more comfortable in their surroundings. But we've put a lot of effort into making that happen. We, as part of our collaborative inquiry, we were looking at building relationships with kids, because we've noticed that one of the big keys to the growth of our Indigenous Studies program has been relationship building and consistency and role modelling and giving kids an opportunity to be part of something bigger than themselves. (CM, p. 21)

When I talk to students about their school experience, safety isn't necessarily a concern because they all feel safe, but they don't necessarily feel that their voice is being heard. So if we continue to work on student voice, giving them opportunities to express themselves and take ownership in their school so that—when they walk in the school, they can say, 'This is my

school. This is the school I go to.' If we can do that better, then maybe that would be more comforting. (CM, p. 21)

Attuned to Indigenous students' day-to-day experiences in schools CMs observe and report on changes they see happening. The CI provides structures and space for developing positive relationships between educators and students, improving students overall experience of school. CMs recognize this as an important shift. Seeing educators take an active interest in how Indigenous students experience school increases CMs confidence in the public education system. They support these efforts and would like to see them continue.

Being Indigenous, and Being Well

What we're trying to do now to move forward, to re-identify [and], regain those teachings. Maybe teach those to the high school students so they'll have that sense of identity. And whatever they're going through, the suffering, they'll understand what they are going through as intergenerational trauma. And they'll see themselves as a good person. I was put on earth as Anishinaabe man or girl or whatever, and that self, of that identity and maybe that self of being proud of who they are. (CM, p. 34)

[W]e were all in a close space and everybody had a role in the community, and everybody had kind of a job and we worked together and people worked together, right? And that's how things got done and stories were told because there was no device to distract you. You're spending time with each other building relationships, and we didn't struggle with the same types of mental health issues and problems that we have because people were connected to each other. Right? We all looked out for each other, and that was important, and I'd like to see that kind of come back. So I don't know how, but—miigwetch. (CM, p.33).

CMs express a deep desire to pass on to students an understanding of what it means to be Anishinaabe with the hope that these teachings will be a source of well-being. They see a close connection between learning, culture and wellness. For students, developing a positive understanding of themselves as Indigenous people, and being well are intimately connected. While educators spend a lot of time talking about belonging, CMs describe what belonging looks like and what it includes; describing relationships within a group that are premised on appreciating each person's capacity to contribute to the group. From an Indigenous perspective, well-being includes being supported by the group but also knowing that the group wants and needs you to participate. The focus is on recognizing the need to be seen as a contributing member of the group.

Investing Time and Cultivating Hope

Because they would go home and talk with their families about all this cool stuff that we were doing in school, and then bring it back, and it just made the whole process that much richer. (CM, p. 59)

He (my grandson) made me so proud. Yeah. And if it could keep going strong, it would—it would do wonders, like, even for the non-Natives, you know? As he was saying, they would know where we're coming from. Miigwetch. (CM, p. 30)

Another thing that I really like about working in the schools is that we're able to just have fun with (the students}, and that it's strength-based. I like the difference I see from the beginning of

the year to the end of the year. There's a lot of goals and sharing and caring with relationships that are built, that—those are some of the things that I see. (CM, p. 27)

CMs see and appreciate the positive impact of the CI. They identify the strength-based approach and a commitment to building positive caring relationships as factors contributing to the success of the initiative. They recognize the collaborative work of the team, and express concern about continuity of the project. When students take knowledge home and are able to share stories that connect to family stories it has a positive impact on home-school relationships. Ultimately CMs observe the ways in which investments of time, energy and effort had a positive impact on Indigenous education and subsequently a positive impact on Indigenous students, as well as home-community-school relationships.

2.2 Prioritizing Language

During the talking circles community members spoke about the significance of language instruction. A sense of urgency surrounds these discussions. While CMs are hopeful based on their observations of an increased interest expressed by students they also see the challenges Native language teachers encounter in schools. Some of the participating CMs are themselves language instructors.

Investing in Indigenous Language Instruction

But if we want the language to come into our schools, we have to get our speakers, our Elders—but we have to support them. We can't just stick Jan (pseudonym) in there with 30 kids and expect her to—for the kids to learn the language without any support. (CM, p. 40)

I've noticed in my classes, they treat the Native language class like any other class where there's 30 kids in there, right? That's the cap, and it's too many. It's just too many. Lots of my students are uncomfortable coming in because there are 30 other people in the room. (CM, p. 23)

I really—I just really appreciate what our Elder was saying, and I really appreciate that it would be nice to see a Native language immersion program like people can put their kids in French immersion. (CM, p. 24)

So what I would love to see would be the opportunity to have an elder in the class, you know what I mean, where the elder is a fluent speaker (CM, p. 25)

Community members are deeply committed to the inclusion of language instruction in schools. They take seriously their responsibility to support it and they want to have a more active role in the teaching of Indigenous languages. Those members of the community who are already participating as language instructors in schools have ideas for expanding the programs. These ideas include having an Elder in the classroom with the teacher to support language use, teaching language from junior kindergarten through to high school and having smaller class sizes so that students have a sense of being supported in the language class. Elders in the classroom would provide opportunities for language teachers to increase their fluency and would provide opportunities for students to hear the language in use. CMs also expressed concern about non-Indigenous language instructors. There is a deep sense of sadness and disappointment when non-Indigenous people are teaching the language. Many community members are aware that language recovery is going to take time and both

educators and community members need to be patient and committed to the project. A strong commitment to funding language instruction is required if school systems are going to take seriously their responsibility to support language recovery. It also requires policies that support local solutions to the challenges that exist within communities and a willingness on the part of educators and community members to collaborate.

2.3 Increase Knowledge, Understanding and Awareness for All Staff and Students

While community members are conscious of the progress being made through the collaborative inquiry initiative they are also aware of the immense challenge confronting boards. CMs share concerns expressed by educators, that although progress is being made there is an overwhelming sense of concern for the amount of work that needs to be done.

Supporting the Integration of Indigenous Knowledge

The one thing that I see and experience is incorporating part of our teachings and our language into the curriculum. And one of the things that I like about it is that the district school board is very open to some of the techniques that we use—that they're able to support that. I really appreciate that. (CM, p. 27)

-- we've gone from that to having Indigenous content built into our literacy, our math, science, places where you wouldn't necessarily think that we're talking about Anishinaabe ways of thinking in math and science. (CM, p. 60)

Some of the positives that I see that are happening is the awareness. People are talking about it. (CM, p. 45)

Community members are observing an increase in the integration of Indigenous knowledge. Many talk about the link between appreciation of cultural practices and the capacity to recognize the legitimacy of Indigenous knowledge. They also observe how the lack of understanding can perpetuate racism and stereotypes. Community members do see Indigenous content being brought into the classroom. While some boards are providing professional development for teachers so that they can learn how to integrate Indigenous content, community members also recognize that we are at a starting place: they would like to see more inclusion of Indigenous content. Community members recognize that teachers need a lot of support. They suggest that having more Indigenous knowledge keepers invited into the classroom would help teachers and they would like this to be a priority.

Positive Impacts of Integrating Indigenous Knowledge

The Collaborative Inquiry process at our school has been super phenomenal. And I can't explain really how neat it really has been to see these young kids really just exploring their questions and finding answers ... [our CI is] anchored in the local community knowledge. (CM, p. 59)

Community members are observing the positive impacts that the integration of Indigenous knowledge is having on Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. CMs also see that there is a connection to the impact it has on educators.

2.4 Leadership

During the talking circles CMs spoke about the role of principals and expressed an interest in having more Principals, Superintendents and School Board Directors involved in the CI. Specifically, they want to see school leadership teams getting involved in learning from and with Indigenous people. Equally important was their call for more Indigenous people taking leadership positions.

Principals, Superintendents and School Board Directors

I'm struggling with getting them (principals) on board, [not in terms of support because they are supportive]. But, like, getting them on board, that this is important and it's not just your teachers that need to do this. You are the leadership in your school, and I need you to be a part of the process and the learning process. (CM, p. 7)

The issue of active participation by leadership teams is a concern raised by both community members and educators. Community members recognize that a project or initiative is taken more seriously when it is supported by the leadership. While verbal and financial support are critical, if an initiative is a priority then it must be actively supported by school and District School Board leaders.

Some CIs involve a substantive professional development component that has a positive. Community members agree that knowledge and awareness of Indigenous people's experiences and perspectives by staff is increasing. However; they would like to see more principals and senior staff participating in the professional development. CMs recognize that if the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge is going to be recognized as significant, more senior staff must get involved in learning and they should follow up by supporting teachers in their efforts to integrated Indigenous content in the curriculum. CMs and teachers talk about the significance of investing in the CI process. They observe that, when senior staff members get invested, it has a positive impact on staff involvement. Principals need to cultivate investment: CMs want to see more professional development opportunities for principals in order to achieve this.

Indigenous People in Leadership Positions

So I thought, one thing that really bugs me and would go a long way to making change is if there was a superintendent that's actually First Nation. I think our board; the board has four I think. Zero First Nation superintendents. ... And I think that that would be a big change because then there would be a flow down, and it would become a priority, like, within the board for more teachers. (CM, p. 43)

And I'd like to see a form of— system of governance within a system of public education and public schooling. So yeah, so I'd like to see more Indigenous people in positions of leadership, the superintendents, directors, trustees, etc. (CM, p.1)

So as I said before, that I'd like to see more Indigenous peoples in systems of public school across Ontario in all areas, including leadership areas. I'd like to see that we're working to create safe places of belonging for Indigenous students, so that they feel safe to be who they are and that Indigenous knowledge is centred and is positioned as thinking forward in terms of innovation and creativity as we imagine or re-imagine ourselves in the future. (CM, p.4)

While the question of Indigenous people and leadership positions is not a specific objective of the CI initiative, it is reflective of the learning accomplished through the CI. Increased involvement results in increased awareness. The more Indigenous CMs learn, the more they realize that to change the system they need Indigenous people in positions of leadership.

2.5 Overall Accomplishments

In their discussion of overall accomplishments CMs identify three key areas of growth.

School-Community Collaboration

It's going slowly. But I think we're also going in the same—in the right direction. (CM, p. 42)

I think that the biggest success has been that Indigenous people have been invited to the table, and it's a more true consultation with us. (CM, p. 55)

I think the Collaborative Inquiry has helped the school that we've been partnering with to understand that a relationship isn't a phone call or one email that a relationship is something that develops over time. (CM, p. 62)

The collaborative inquiry has had many positive impacts and school-community collaboration is perhaps the most significant. Keeping in mind the distance between schools and Indigenous communities that have existed historically, achieving genuine collaboration is a significant accomplishment.

Educator Perceptions of Indigenous Students

So I think it's brought in a lot of good things, and I think too, just for the kids, like, they were so proud, and I think too, for the teachers in our building, it's really good because one of the main learnings, I think, that they took away, that they noted, was that they, the students, always showed them more than the teachers expected. (CM, p. 57)

Research shows that teacher's expectations of students have a profound impact on student achievement. Shifting teachers' perceptions of Indigenous students, improving teacher-student and student-teacher relationships is an important outcome of the collaborative inquiry initiative.

Community members Access to Knowledge of School Systems

I just wanted to say that one of our—effects of our Collaborative Inquiry that I've noticed, a beneficial effect, is that it's providing community members a chance to build capacity and sustainability, and like you mentioned, [Name] is going back into the school and she's going to other schools where we have partnerships. And also, I think in the community themselves, of the—giving—empowering them to say what do they want educators to know. And I think they've been doing PD workshops [in the community for educators], and you're choosing who you want to speak for the community and who's going to be there. I think that's really empowering. And I was just making those connections as we're talking and thinking wow, that's the stuff that maybe we didn't plan on with our Collaborative Inquiry, but we're seeing, which is really nice. (CM, p. 62)

The alienation and marginalization of Indigenous students from systems of formal schooling is well documented. Perhaps less acknowledged is the degree to which parents, families and communities have felt the same alienation from schools. An unexpected outcome of the collaborative inquiry is the increase in community members access to knowledge of how school systems work. It is in a sense access to the cultural capital of schooling. This knowledge provides community members with the capacity to successfully advocate on behalf of Indigenous students and for the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in the system.

2.6 Additional Ongoing Concerns Identified By community members

While community members express appreciation for the accomplishments of the collaborative inquiry, they readily identify issues of ongoing concern.

Consistency in School Leadership

There'll be an administrator in this building for X number of years. You just get into a groove and the carpet is pulled out from under you and you're moved, which is what I felt like. I was at a school and we were making great progress. Two and a half years in, it's time to move her. (CM, p. 10)

Helping to keep that in perspective, that we need consistent leadership within buildings as well. We do need the Indigenous leadership in our systems. (CM, p. 10)

Knowing that it takes time to develop trust and positive relationships, community members expressed frustration with frequent changes in school leadership teams. Community members describe situations where they have just started to develop positive relationships with an individual only to find the principal is moved to another school. While this is not strictly an issue of the collaborative inquiry, community members did express concern, asserting that positive relationships with the school leadership team will have a positive impact on what can be accomplished through the work of the CI.

Isolation and Exhaustion

Some schools are going deep with their learning - it can be isolating. Learning partnership. The biggest thing that I find is that I feel all of that, everything and I'm one person. And I have one person at the board level and me, that's it. And we have over 100 schools, and I feel—I teach Indigenous education, I teach Indigenous students. And I'm the only person—the only Indigenous teacher they've ever had and the [only Indigenous focused] program they have ever had. (CM, p. 18)

The CI provides opportunities for learning but still some community members and Board Leads (who are themselves members of the Indigenous community) are overwhelmed by experiences of working in isolation. At times, being overwhelmed is due to the amount of work that needs to be done and sometimes it comes from the feeling of being the only one advocating for Indigenous education.

Time

I felt I needed to share that part because change is happening, but it's going to take time. As you said, you know, it's 150 years we have to make up for, so thank you. (CM, p.35)

The question of time is an ongoing concern. While there is a lot of excitement and positivity associated with the collaborative inquiry participants increasingly understand and express their realization that this initiative requires time. Time is required to develop relationships and time for teachers to accomplish the work of learning.

Valuing the Contributions of Indigenous Educators

[T]hey often have an Aboriginal support worker. But it's always contractual year to year. Always the least paid person in the board. But they do a lot of work because you're—I wrote it down, you're a social worker, truancy officer, a tutor. And then if they actually know you're a teacher, the teachers come to you [and ask that you] come and do all their teaching for them when it's anything to do with anything Indigenous. (CM, p. 43)

But you're paid 22 bucks an hour while they're paid very well. So that just goes to illustrate that they still feel and send the message anyways, that First Nation people are devalued because they show that through not paying you and not valuing your work. (CM, p. 43)

In many schools across the province there are no Indigenous people occupying paid positions. And, when there are Indigenous people in the schools, they are often in the least paid positions. For example, during the talking circles, a number of community members describe situations in which Indigenous Student Support Workers have been hired as part of the CI initiative. While these individuals often work in close collaboration with educators and do the critical work of supporting students they are not well paid, and consequently, some situations they are less respected by the teaching staff.

Indigenous Education for all Staff and Students

[O]ne of the things that I feel needs more focus on is system wide—, I don't know if you want to call it mandatory training for non-Indigenous educators, (CM, p. 4-5)

So we need to—we need to teach our non-Native brothers and sisters too, and we need to make a PD day, just a cultural awareness or cultural sensitivity, make it mandatory for them to [attend]—because we got it coming. Listen to us for a change. (CM, p.35)

The lack of knowledge and understanding of Indigenous peoples' experiences and perspectives continues to be an ongoing challenge. Many community members talked about the need for basic instruction so that all educators would have at the very least an introduction to Indigenous histories and cultures. Community members are particularly concerned when they observe teachers' expectations of students that are in conflict with Indigenous values and worldviews. For example, at times teachers expect students to be verbal, competitive, or submissive. Depending on the context, the expected behaviour may conflict with Indigenous values, beliefs and world-views.

Cultural Appropriation

So anyway, I still haven't given an answer to that, but I feel like cultural appropriation is something that lots of people are struggling with right now. (CM, p. 56)

Educators continue to struggle with understanding the concept of cultural appropriation. More discussion is needed about the content they are responsible for, as well as how to teach it and cultural practices that they might teach their students about but not necessarily engage in with their students. For example, a non-Indigenous teacher could teach students about smudging but not engage in a smudge with students without an Elder or community partner present.

2.7 Next Steps

Community members are in a unique position to identify next steps; they know what strengths exist within their communities. They are also aware of community needs and in many cases they are the experts when it comes to Indigenous students.

Continue the Collaborative Inquiry

I see a lot of good things happening, you know? But the kids that are here and you know, everybody's working hard out of what we have and what, you know, we have going, but there is more we can do. We can—we can't stop at just where we are. It's not good enough yet. We want what's best for our future and children because we have been down here for so long, and we are building ourselves up with our children. (CM, p. 24)

And so I've seen lots of initiatives come and go, as I'm sure we all have, so one of my messages would be, continue. Don't just let this stop here. It's spread pretty wide. ... And I think that one message I could give would be don't stop. Continue. (CM, p. 64)

Recognizing the significant work that needs to be done to transform schools, the majority of CMs approve of the work being accomplished through the CI and express a strong message of support to continue the initiative. CMs are aware of deeply engrained values and beliefs that need to change. They know that teachers lack knowledge and understanding and they are seeing positive impacts from the CI and want it to continue.

More Indigenous Educators

And the last thing I wanted to add was just that it would be nice to see more Indigenous teachers, not just teaching an Indigenous language and Indigenous studies but everywhere. (CM, p. 33)

Why can't we hire more knowledge keepers etc. to teach alongside teachers to share the knowledge? As a source of well-being. (CM, p. 34)

As CMs spend time in schools and come to understand the culture of schooling, they appreciate the need for more Indigenous educators in the role of classroom teacher, as well as in roles working alongside teachers to support the inclusion of Indigenous content.

Increased Opportunities for Community Participation

But one of the things that I would really like to see is that our grandmothers and our grandfathers and our uncles and our aunties are in the school more, to make it more visible, to be able to support our kids even if they're seeing, like, an auntie or an uncle in the school, you know, it brings family into school, right? So if they could strengthen that, it would be really great. (CM, p. 27)

CMs observe a difference with teachers participating in the CI. They demonstrate a willingness to collaborate and invest in relationships. Community members articulate both observations of what they are seeing and what they would like to see, identifying their priorities and concerns.

2.8 Chapter Conclusion

Dialogue during the talking circles reflects the complex challenges confronting community members, educators, schools and communities. In many ways the CI initiative surfaces the depth of ignorance that exists among the educator population and the challenges that exist within school systems working to make space for Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous pedagogy.

As much as community members are pleased and appreciative of the efforts made by educators they absolutely want to be involved in the ongoing work. While on the one hand community members can be excited about what they see happening in particular classrooms and particular school communities, their own children and grandchildren may be attending schools where almost nothing is happening. In the end this points to the need for continuing the work and spreading the work being accomplished through the CI.

3. Chapter Three: Learning From Indigenous Students' Voices

While understanding the impact of the *Indigenous Education-Focused Collaborative Inquiry* was the starting point for my conversations with students, during the talking circles students' spoke with honesty and good humour about what school means to them, what they experience at school and what they want and need from education. These conversations were simultaneously hopeful and devastating. Indigenous youth are increasingly aware of their right to an education that includes Indigenous content delivered by Indigenous educators. Most of the students I spoke with presented as strong and articulate individuals. The talking circles left me with an overwhelming sense of camaraderie among the students. They rely on each other, find strength and understanding in their shared experiences, and have an emerging sense of their rights. Many of them are aware of the disadvantaged positions Indigenous people occupy as a result of colonialism and they are beginning to question the ways colonialism and racism are impacting their education.

3.1 Data Collection and Citation Practices

In this chapter I draw from 7 of the 9 Student talking circles² and have included two styles of quotes. When quoting dialogue between students I assign in-text pseudonyms to reflect the exchange between students. When quoting stand-alone statements, I identify students only by school. School names are also pseudonyms. While each talking circle had its own focus, there is overall consistency in students' responses to the questions.

Name of School	Approximate Number of Students Participating
Blue Stone	5
Copper Stone	25
Key Stone	6
Field Stone	4
Silver Stone	4
Sand Stone	5
Yellow Stone	6
Red Stone	25
Grey Stone	6
Total	86

Table 3A Student Talking Circles

Transcripts from the talking circles with students have gaps. At times the transcriber had difficulty capturing the dialogue as students spoke over each other agreeing with, adding to, and expanding on each other's ideas. At other times they spoke in hushed tones and the microphone was unable to capture their words.

While it was my intention to speak with students in schools where the CI was taking place this was not always the case. The short data collection phase and lengthy ethics review process created limitations. In the end I completed talking circles with students in DSBs that approved my request and expedited the ethics review process. In response to this limitation during the 2017-2018 school year I created a second opportunity to collect student voice data by inviting classroom teachers to

² Transcripts from two of the talking circles were incomplete and I did not include quotes from them. I did participate in these circles and have detailed notes from each of these circles.

complete and submit a Learning Experience Report. My analysis of these reports is provided in Section 3.7.

3.2 School

I began the circles by asking, “Why do you come to school?” Students were surprised by this question and generally responded “*Well why not?*” Similar with other youth, Indigenous students attend school to see their friends, participate in sports, to learn, to have fun and to be engaged. They want to get their credits and graduate. Many want to continue with post-secondary education; they want jobs that will allow them to support their communities and build a good life for themselves and their families.

Why Attend / Why Not Attend

Cam from Key Stone School likes Native Studies. He wants to be a police officer in his community (p.37). Joseph also from Key Stone is headed to university next year; he wants to be a lawyer (p.37). Audrey from Sand Stone said, “I just like getting all my credits done so I can go further” (p.74). And Jim from Field Stone who is just finishing grade ten, said he likes shop because he can make something and take it home to show his dad (p.96).

Students identified classes they like including gym, outdoor education, music, parenting, biology, and chemistry – they explained that classes where they can be actively involved in learning are the best. Students know the importance of school in relationship to their aspirations and they have hopes for the future. They find classes including History, Geography, and English difficult. They like Native Studies and echoing community members’ statements, students asked for more Indigenous language classes.

Good Teachers and Learning

I like going to science because my teacher’s really understanding and everything and supportive. But I guess I like going to school to learn honestly with the majority of my classes. (Field Stone School, p.97)

But the other teachers are cool too, but she’s, like, really nice. (Silver Stone School, p.107)

Students described teachers who had a positive impact on their experience of school. Most of these discussions focused on their Native Language and Native Studies teachers but some described teachers from other classes as well. Students describe good teachers as those that take an interest in them, those that are patient, those that help when they make mistakes, those that have a sense of humour and those who will take the time to provide extra details when students have trouble understanding course content. (Silver Stone School 2, p. 106 and Copper Stone School, p. 81)

3.3 Challenges: Lack of Inclusion, Disrespect, Racism, Mental Health and Being Poor

I also asked students to tell me what they didn’t like about school. In some circles this question elicited silence. Students did not necessarily feel comfortable talking about their issues and concerns. On two occasions teachers who were in the circle left at this time allowing students to speak more freely. There were also situations when students wanted to talk in small groups prior to sharing their comments with the whole group. Once they got started the discussions became serious. I’ve

organized their concerns into six key themes; lack of inclusion, disrespect, every day racism, being poor and mental health.

Lack of Inclusion: Miss, they just scoot around it.

Lily: They never really bring up the fact about, like, the residential schools and the history about that, and that's really important too.

Ely: Same with the White Paper, that's never touched.

Joe: Not in my history class.

Ken: Not much. [cross talk] Even if there is, it's a lot of one sided—it's a lot of from the white perspective. Like, there's a lot missing. In our history classes they never talk about issues with Aboriginals. (Copper Stone School, p. 82)

But I feel most of the students don't even know this happened in their country, and we identify Canada as, like this great all being country and yet it still has a dark past. Indigenous culture is still kind of here, but no one really knows it exists really. (Field Stone School, p.97)

And we don't – there's like. Little to no – nothing about, like, Indigenous people. (Silver Stone School, p.103)

They don't teach us stuff in history class. (Key Stone School, p.39)

The lack of Indigenous content in their classes is one of the primary concerns identified by students. They are aware of their teachers' lack of knowledge and understanding of Indigenous experiences, perspectives, history and culture. Students describe the different ways teachers respond to Indigenous content.

Teachers respond to their request for the inclusion of Indigenous content stating:

- It happened a long time ago and is not important,
- It is irrelevant to the majority of students,
- Indigenous students themselves can take responsibility for learning and teaching the class, and
- Penalizing students who advocate for the inclusion of this content.

The comment by a High School student who told me, *"they'd scoot past the residential schools like really quick"* (Key Stone School, p.24) reflects the ease with which teachers avoid addressing Indigenous topics in their classes. While it is encouraging to hear students' advocating for the inclusion of Indigenous peoples' history, experiences and perspectives, the ongoing lack of content is disconcerting.

Disrespect: "Some disrespect toward certain students"

Ross: Yeah. Well, a thing I like about my school is the—that there's no bullying in there, so that's a good thing. No bullying for me actually.

Tom: There's no bullying in our school, but there's, like, some disrespect towards, like, a few students.

Lynn: And sometimes the teachers, like, they only, like, support when certain students get bullied, but when other students get bullied, some teachers won't do anything about it. (Red Stone School, p.57)

This exchange took place during a talking circle with a fairly large group of approximately 25 students. After a long period of silence in response to my first question I asked students to begin by talking with the person beside them. After 10 minutes of lively small group talk, I brought the discussion back to the whole group. When I asked the question again "What do you like about school?" there was a brief pause. Ross started the discussion with a positive statement about no bullying in his school. He quickly qualifies the statement with "no bullying for me actually." The conversation takes an unexpected turn as students start to open up and explain that although this particular student was not experiencing bullying from his peers the group did want to talk about teacher-student relationships. Students were concerned on two counts: first, teachers react differently depending on which student is being bullied and, second, teachers are actively supportive of the non-Indigenous students. Students describe this active support as teachers having more time to assist, having more patience with and applying rules differently to non-Indigenous students.

Everyday Racism

Like, to me there's racism everywhere, but just a lot of it I find is like, really targeted here too. Like, just basically around Indigenous people and the cultures, that's what I find. Like, when we have gatherings, like, you can't control it, like, it's obviously always going to be there no matter who it is or where it is. It's just, like, it's really—you can really see it and feel it from people. (Copper Stone School, p.82)

One day in history, we had to do this, like, thing about residential schools, and this is going to sound really offensive, but all the white kids had a problem with it. They hated it, that we had to learn about it. A bunch of kids refused to do it because they said that it was dumb and it happened forever ago. (Red Stone School, p. 61)

Discussions of racism surfaced during each of the talking circles. In many ways these discussions were simultaneously honest and yet full of protective acts. Even in the sequestered space of the talking circle students are aware that to accuse fellow students or teachers of racism is a serious accusation and it was not something they took lightly. It is equally difficult to tell stories in which you are required to position yourself as a victim of racism. These students don't want to be victims, yet in their day-to-day lives they experience racism. The students know that their classmates' behaviour is 'offensive'. They were both embarrassed by the behaviour and were inclined to protect me with a warning. "This is going to sound really offensive".

PI: You guys, what you're talking about is racism, right? You guys know that? So you're nodding, so you do know it. But it's hard to talk about?

Tom: Well, when the teachers are around, yeah.

Jan: Yeah.

PI: Do you talk about it amongst yourselves?

Jan: Yeah.

PI: All the time? Did you just say all the time? (Red Stone School, p.72)

Ben: I feel like teachers should be stepping up more when they hear racist comments from students.

Sam: I agree on that one.

Ely: Like, even now—like, there was this one class where I answered a question and one of the students made this remark. Oh, that's your [seven] grandfathers' talking to you in your head. (Copper Stone School, p.98)

PI: So what are some of the things you rant about?

Ann: Racism

PI: People think that it doesn't exist anymore

Ann: It does honestly ... It can be very stereotypical toward us. (Key Stone School, p.26)

Yeah, okay. Well, we were walking back from Timmy's and there was, like, this smoker's spot just outside the school. And this one kid, he was, like, I don't know if he was joking around or what he was doing. But he was, like, "White is right." Okay, so, like, really—or to Amanda, she was, like, really mad. And she didn't say anything, so we just walked by and we came back and we told Miss [Indigenous Student Support Worker] right away. So it was very aggravating and— (Key Stone School, p. 27)

In the current context Indigenous students are confronting a particular challenge. On the one hand they are aware of their right to be proud of being Indigenous. They know that they have the right to knowledge and understanding of Indigenous peoples' languages, histories and cultures. They want access to Indigenous knowledge and they are proud. Yet at the same time they are confronted with day-to-day experiences of racism that reproduces a hierarchy in which they are positioned as *less than* their non-Indigenous classmates.

Being Poor

Although students did not actually define themselves as poor they did talk about the impact of poverty on their lives. They describe situations in which they were not able to come to school because they didn't have clean clothes to wear, they talked about coming to school hungry and they talked about not being able to participate in some school events because their families couldn't afford the cost of gas to get them to and from events. During some conversations the lack of financial security was spoken about in a matter-of-fact kind of way. At other times the discussions were a source of embarrassment. Students would laugh and tease each other about whose family was in the worst financial situation. The joking and teasing were coping strategies students relied on to protect themselves from embarrassment.

Mental Health and Well-being

Just show them you know what they're going through, and you know—you understand where they're coming from too, right? Like, some people, some kids, they—like, they get inside their heads so much where they feel like nobody's felt that before, you know? Nobody's felt, you know, like they can't. You know? Like, so broken almost. But when you tell them, 'No, I've been there, I've seen what you've seen. I understand. Like, I've seen that. Like, I've been exactly where you are, that stress, you know, that anxiety, that depression you're going through,' when you tell them you've been there before and you could overcome that obstacle, it really

helps them, right? It really—oh, you can go further. You know, this isn't the final destination. Because that's how it feels, right? In your head, it feels like, what can I do? This is the end. You know, this is all gone and your brain's going crazy. But then you know, once you calm yourself down and you realize that everybody's felt that, everybody's been there before, you're like, 'Oh, this isn't too bad,' and you start going more and more and more, right? So I think that really helps with the kids, you know, connecting with them, you know, connecting, helping them out with that. (Blue Stone Student, p. 15)

I included this extended quote with intention. After repeated readings of this student's words I recognize in the repetition and stumbling the depth of this student's concern and the depth of his knowledge. He draws attention to feelings of loneliness, stress, anxiety and depression. These he identifies as indicators that a student is in trouble. He also suggests ways of responding explaining that when students feel "so broken almost" what helps is "knowing that you're not alone", that other people have felt that way as well, it is possible to "calm yourself down". Explaining that students need to feel connection, care and appreciation for the legitimacy of their experience. Ultimately, he tells us that students need trust, recognition and relationship.

3.4 Places of Comfort and Dis/comfort in the School

Wanting to initiate conversation about how students experience school, I asked them to go on a tour of the school and take pictures of places that they like and don't like. Sometimes students had their own phones to take pictures and when necessary I gave them my phone. Students enjoyed this assignment. They went out in pairs or small groups and came back eager to share their photos. They told animated stories about places and spaces where they find comfort and discomfort. In some respects, the stories reflect experiences that many of us who have been through high school would find familiar, but in other instances the students' stories reflect the singularity of their experiences in time and place.

Places of Discomfort

Ken: And that's kind of what makes it so uncomfortable going into the classroom, is that teachers don't enforce structure for Aboriginal students. They kind of just let other people walk all over us like we're—

Tess: Like, we're not as important. (Copper Stone School, p. 90)

I really agree with that because I did a presentation in the Native studies class and, like, yeah, like, we're there to learn, like, what it's all about, right. And—someone asked me, like, when I was presenting the regalia and everything, they kind of asked me, like, saying, do you do this for attention and money? And I said, no. Like, it's not for attention and money. Yeah there are powwows for competition you get money from that. But it's not just for that reason. It's because I ... its part of the culture. (Copper Stone School, p. 91)

And then my one class is history. I hate it because I don't like my teacher and it's really negative in there. Not a lot of positiveness about the Indigenous culture. And it's history and why shouldn't there be knowledge about the Indigenous people in the curriculum? Anyways. And then a picture of a kid because he's one of the most racist kids in our school, that makes fun of Indigenous people. (Copper Stone School, p.95)

Pl: Tell me about this photo.

Ann: We don't like it.

Zoe: It's the athletic hallway.

Ann: There's an L for all the athletic kids.

Zoe: Yeah, there was a second picture, but—

Pl: Okay, can you say more? Like, why don't you like it? What is it—

Ann: A ton of—they're just—I don't know [cross talk]—

Zoe: Intimidating. Yeah, they're—

Ann: Yeah, they're, like—to me, I feel like they're more cherished than other kids. (Key Stone School, p. 38)

As previously stated, some of the students' discussions of discomfort in school are common experiences that many of us who have attended high school would find familiar. For example students are not necessarily comfortable in the cafeteria or in the hallways where the athletic students hang out together. What is specific for Indigenous students is the discomfort they feel when they recognize that their exclusion is based on their Indigenous identity. The students at Key Stone School talked about how they were treated when they did try to join sports teams *"It's like they looked at me and they were, like, 'What are you-' they just looked at me-"* (p.22).

Asking students to talk about 'places of discomfort' in school was asking them to expose their vulnerabilities. Although these conversations were not easy, in the context of the photograph activity students opened up and talked about what was happening in their schools. They know that discrimination is wrong they also know their own experiences of discrimination. During these discussions students wanted to tell and they wanted to be heard. In the process of speaking and being heard they were making sense of their experiences and relieving themselves of a burden.

Indigenous Students Navigating the Settler Schooling Double Bind

Students are particularly uncomfortable in classes where they rightfully expect the inclusion of Indigenous content and the topics are absent. They also talked about experiences of discomfort when Indigenous topics are introduced and their classroom teachers turn to the students themselves to act as experts and teach the class about Indigenous issues.

"Oh, wait okay, Liz, you come and teach it then because you're Native." I was, like, oh, but I don't actually know that much either, which just shows—but yeah. I don't know it just bothers me because we're hearing so much about other histories. And it's just, like, okay, but what about Canada's—a big part of Canada's history is First Nations people, but yet we don't hear anything about it. (Field Stone School, p.99)

Amy: —like, Orange Shirt Day, they were like, 'Oh, why do we have to wear orange shirts?'

And then, like, I heard other kids in the class and they're like, 'Oh, it's just for, like, the Native people,' and I got, like, so triggered.

Dee: Oh, yeah, I know. Some are like—

Amy: Yeah, some kids were, like, complaining. They were like, 'Why do we have to stand for the treaty acknowledgement?' and then like, I wanted to say something, but I just kind of can't.

Dee: Oh, yeah. I'm too, like, shy for that. Like, so I just, like, sit there and get, like, all mad and I'm, like, grilling them in my head, but like—. (Silver Stone School, p.111)

In these situations students feel trapped. On the one hand they want the content to be taught but they do not want to be made responsible for teaching the material themselves. Classrooms can be uncomfortable places for Indigenous students to be when teachers ignore the content or when teachers expect the students to do the teaching.

Students emphasize the impact their teachers' lack of knowledge and understanding of Indigenous peoples histories, experiences and perspectives is having on them and their experience of schooling.

Dee: Because, like, I don't know, so like, why are you asking me? Just—I don't know. You're the teacher. Like—

RA: Because they kind of put you on the spot?

Dee: Yeah.

Sara: They put all this, like, weight on your shoulders.

Dee: And then the whole class looks at you and you're just like—

Sara: Oh, I know. Yeah. No, they put, like, a lot of weight on your shoulders to, like, know the entirety of, like, Native history, and it's just like, "you're supposed to be the one teaching me about this". (Silver Stone School 2, p.116)

In these discussions students describe their confrontation with what I have come to understand as the *Double Bind of Settler Schooling*. When students assert their Indigenous identity and ask that their histories be included, they open themselves up to scrutiny and expectation. They run the risk of having their identities challenged with questions such as; "How Indigenous are you?", they risk being made responsible for representing all Indigenous people, and they risk being asked to take up the position of teacher expected to know and to teach. Or they stay silent and become implicated in their own erasure. The history of colonialism and policies of forced assimilation have created conditions resulting in a situation in which many Indigenous students having limited knowledge of their history and culture. As these students explain, teachers are supposed to be the ones doing the teaching. When students are unable to cover the content, they are made to feel like failures – failures as students and failures in their Indigenous identities.

The students' experiences initiate important questions including "Why don't our teachers know? Why is their lack of knowledge acceptable? "Whose interests do their not knowing serve?" Indigenous students have an emerging understanding that their rights are not being served and they are beginning to ask why is this acceptable?

Places of Comfort

Just, like, as a quiet—yeah, you can [indiscernible] as a grade 12 we kind of—made our own little spot in the corner of the library that’s kind of, like, our own little thing and that’s where we all hang out, like, whoever has a spare. So that’s our comfort spot. (Copper Stone School, p.98)

Well, in one of my photos is up at the library, because I’m a very big reader, I like being by myself or I like being surrounded by other native kids. (Key Stone School, p.26)

Dee: It was like—it was a Native club.

Amy: It didn’t really have a name.

Dee: No. She hosted it with another person, and basically, we all just went in and we talked about everything. We beaded, and that was really fun. (Silver Stone School 2, p.113)

I was surprised by the number of students who identified the library as a favourite spot. Students talked about finding safety in the quiet space of the library. They also took pictures of classrooms where they did have positive teacher-student relationships. Teachers who made an effort to include Indigenous content were rare but in every school students could identify those who made an effort to reflect Indigenous presence. The outdoor education classroom, the drama and music rooms were identified, as spaces where teachers made an effort. Students consider these spaces to be places of comfort. Students also talked about the guidance office *“They have couches and stuff in there, so it’s a fairly calming kind of safe place”* (Silver Stone School, p.105). Students took pictures of gathering spaces where they were able to be with their friends and talk, laugh and socialize as places of comfort in their school.

3.5 Sources of Support

In spite of the challenges and frustrations students confront, they also talked about sources of support, including Aboriginal Student Support Workers, Native Studies rooms, and specific events and activities that provide access to culture and have the added benefit of providing space for social interaction. These events and activities nurture students’ knowledge and understanding of themselves and provide important spaces for cultivating friendship.

Indigenous Student Support Workers

Ken: That’s another thing, if she wasn’t here, I wouldn’t be going to as many classes as I do. She kind of like pushes me to go to school.

Ely: And it’s nice to come in here during lunch because I—the days that she’s not here and she is at the conferences, I’m honestly just sitting at the bench by the office there. I don’t really have a lot of friends.

Ann: I think we all become, like, lost when she’s not here. [laughter]

Lily: We’re kind of just all wandering around [cross talk]—

Ann: We just all kind of wander the hallways. Like, what is there to do now that the native

room's closed?

Joe: She really makes sure that we're, well— just that everything's taken care of. If we need something, she'll be there trying to help us as much as she can. Like, she's a really great supporter to all of us. (Copper Stone, pp.85-86)

Students describe the critical role Indigenous Support Workers play in their experience of school. This person provides a touchstone, and a reason to be at school. She knows their day-to-day lived reality and supports them. While there does seem to be a little bit of an “us and them” in the ways students talk about their support people and the rest of the staff, most of the workers themselves describe a positive relationship with teachers. Some have weekly progress meetings and conferences with teachers to discuss how the students are doing, they talk about specifics such as which students need support completing assignments and which students need extra support due to their out-of-school situations. At times the support workers will go into classes with students to try and figure out how to support the students especially if they are having difficulty completing required courses.

Some Indigenous Student Support Workers described the steps they are taking to build positive relationships with parents. This includes:

- Communicating with parents letting them know the active interest they have in the students,
- Bringing community members into the school,
- Providing food for students who need it, and
- On a regular basis sharing good news about students' accomplishments on a regular basis.

Knowing and being respectful of family and community challenges that impact students' capacities to attend school while working to mediate those challenges, Indigenous Student Support Workers are having a positive impact on Indigenous students experience of school.

The student support positions are not necessarily specifically tied to CI funding but in many of the participating boards these individuals are involved in the CI. These educators were extremely helpful in organizing the talking circles. Their positive and trusting relationships with Indigenous students were evident. Indigenous Student Support Workers talked positively about the ways in which the CI has provided opportunities for Indigenous students, which include bringing CMs into the school and doing more in terms of establishing a link between students and the school. They support students on a day-to-day basis and organize events for them. These events are based on what they observe and determine to be useful to students. For example, one Indigenous Student Support Worker organized a civic engagement/career day and had community organizations and individuals come in and talk with students. Following up on students' interests, she included a police officer, a veterinarian and members of the local band council. This worker creates opportunities for students to gather and participate in loosely organized events at school. These events engage students and cultivate positive relationships between students who come from different reserve communities creating networks of peer support. In other schools, guest speakers, culture days, and community powwows were organized. These events bring the Indigenous community into the school in service of creating stronger relationships.

The Native Studies Room

It gives me a very safe and quiet environment where I feel secure and feel okay with being Aboriginal. Whereas in the classroom with a bunch of people, it's, like, well, I don't really talk to

any of these people. (Copper Stone, p.85)

They are coming in here to sort of just get grounded for a second before they go off to their second period class, just to say hi to some folks, maybe they're going to get a snack, maybe they're just going to come in here and just hang out for a minute and then boom, they're gone. Lunchtime, it's full, between classes, it's full, and then during the class time, there's students constantly in and out, getting help with their schoolwork. And I was tired after four days. I could—like, it was amazing, how busy and how, like, in the last three years, how much students need this space. And so really happy to have it, for sure. (Blue Stone School, T, p.10)³

Many schools have created Indigenous-focused spaces, sometimes referred to as the *Native Room*. These rooms provide Indigenous students with a space that is familiar and comfortable. The rooms are meant to create an Indigenous space where all students can go to have access to teachings from visiting Elders and knowledge keepers. They are furnished with comfortable chairs and couches. In some schools this is a place where students are able to smudge. The rooms are decorated with Indigenous art and posters, announcements about Indigenous-focused activities in the broader school community are posted and information about Indigenous student services is readily available.

Specific Events

Okay, I'm not going to lie, I didn't want to go at first, right? I was, like, kind of, oh, I don't want to do this, but you know what? I'm just going to go, I went there and then by the end of the weekend I wanted to stay. You know, I wanted to stay there because, like, I was having so much fun. (Blue Stone School, p.3)

I taught some people about the drumming, what it means, ... and I explained to them how the songs' meaning—what the songs' meaning is. Overall, it was a great experience. Everybody was open to learn new things. (Blue Stone School, p. 7)

These students are talking about an opportunity they had to participate in a project that brought youth from three different regions of the world together. Discussion about the impact of this experience demonstrates the positive impacts of a retreat for Indigenous youth.

Some schools have organized retreats for Indigenous students to meet and get to know each other prior to the start of the school year. This is especially important in regions of the province where students are coming from far away and in schools where students are coming from different reserve communities. Providing opportunities for students to get to know each other away from the school where the focus is on 'getting to know' each other reduces some of the stress involved. These retreats can also lay a positive foundation for the school year by creating positive school associations for students who may have not had prior positive experiences in school.

3.6 What Indigenous Students Need and Want From Education

When I asked students what educators could do to make attending school a better experience for them there was often silence as they struggled to express what they don't know.

³ This comment was made by a teacher. I've included the observation as it is an important contribution to the discussion.

Ken: We have such a lack of understanding that we don't even know what we're missing. We don't know what we need. We don't know what we don't need. And that's the—a really big issue with all this.

Joe: Like, we don't know what it feels like maybe, like, in school to talk about stuff. So it's, like, we've never had that. So we don't know what we need.

Lily: I feel we're afraid because we feel like a minority compared to all of the other people. I feel like a lot of us are afraid to speak up of what we're saying because we feel like we're going to be criticized by the people we hang around with. (Copper Stone, p.103)

When I asked this question it created space for students to talk about what they don't know. They are aware that something is missing but are not able to identify what it is exactly. Their lack of knowledge and understanding is similar to their teachers' lack of knowledge and understanding and similar to educators, these students identify the role of fear in their not knowing. Students are aware that not knowing is an issue and wonder about how their relationships and their position in the school would be impacted.

These comments hint at an initial understanding of the complexities of learning. Although students want access to Indigenous perspectives of history and the inclusion of Indigenous content they are rightfully wary of how this content will impact their understanding of themselves, and their relationships with their peers. While there is an emerging body of literature that explores the impact of this content on teachers there is a lack of awareness of what it means for students to engage in this learning.

Positive Representations of Indigenous Presence

Mike: I feel like we should have more welcoming towards Aboriginal things. Like, we have a flagpole. Why don't we have an Aboriginal flag hung?

Ness: Why don't we have paintings of the local First Nation logo in the school? Why don't we have the Anishinaabe logo painted up in the school somewhere? Why don't we have things like that to show that we're—that the school is proud to welcome Aboriginal students?

Dan: And that, it is our school too and we should be welcome and we should feel comfortable in here. Why don't we have things like that in here?

Ness: Well, there's artwork in the grade 9/10 hallway, but—you know, it's the medicine wheel, but it's not really explained or anything. It's kind of just there. (Sand Stone School, p.85)

Students would like to see more positive representations of Indigenous people in their schools but they also want to see those representations recognized and for their significance to be acknowledged by their teachers. They are frustrated when art or posters are displayed without an explanation. For example, students talked about the land acknowledgment announcements some DSBs are now making. When announcements are made students have to decide to either explain the content or listen to the often rude and dismissive comments from their classmates in silence.

Language, Culture and Indigenous Perspectives

May: Yeah, more Indigenous hands on activities too.

Ted: Well, we do have, like, a Native Studies course where just, like, you talk about the past and you study the Native culture and stuff. But it's—like, personally, I want more of, like, the language.

May: Yeah, [indiscernible].

Ted: Throughout elementary school you are, learning the Native language and then you come here and it is, Native Studies. So you drop the language (Sand Stone School, p.79)

That is a big thing here, where people say that they—I've been hearing that a lot, like, a lot of us in the same situation trying to aim for Ojibwa, but we always get stuck with French because one of these things that I got was, there's not enough people trying to take Ojibwa. Meanwhile in our school, it kind of looks like we're a minority compared to them. Like, there's not going to be enough ever. (Copper Stone, p.83)

I don't think—like, Miss Smith (pseudonym) is a good teacher, but there's just—she doesn't have enough knowledge and there's not enough people around to actually know how to teach us the language. So we're just trying our best and we just sit around and look at stuff on the Internet. (Copper Stone School, p.87)

In each talking circle students express their concerns with the lack of Indigenous content. They agree that more support for teachers to learn how to teach Indigenous content is needed. Students express a mix of concern, longing, and disappointment at their limited access to Ojibwa language. They ask each other why is the language and other signs of Indigenous presence are only available in the Ojibwa language class. They think it would be nice to see it throughout the school.

Indigenous Teachers for Native Studies Courses

Lily: I really think it would be appropriate or it would be good to actually have someone who's Indigenous to be teaching the Native class.

Ken: That's what we said last year, but then I got in trouble for saying that. (Copper Stone, p.97)

Students identified the lack of Indigenous educators as an issue of concern. They are particularly troubled when their Native Language and or Native Studies teachers are not Indigenous. Learning about their culture from someone outside of their culture is a stark reminder of the depth of loss their communities and nations have experienced. It reinforces messages of Indigenous people being incapable of occupying the position of teacher. And, it initiates questions about what the teachers know and don't know and where their knowledge derives from. Students rightfully question what does this person really know about what it means to be Anishinaabe, Cree, or Haudenosaunee?

3.7 Learning Experiences and Student Voices

In response to the need for the inclusion of a broader range of student voices I developed a *Learning Experience Template* (Appendix D). During the 2017-2018 school year I distributed the template to a small group of classroom teachers who, during individual interviews, had expressed interest and willingness to participate and contribute more to the *Listening Stone Project*. The *Learning Experience Template* provided classroom teachers with the opportunity to report on specific learning experiences they had completed with students and included space to record students' comments on what they were learning. I received six completed templates and I have identified four key outcomes.

- 1) Students appreciate the opportunities to learn and want to continue their learning about Indigenous issues.

- *In this class we have learnt and discovered things that were unknown to us before [this class] (SVT6 Q1)⁴.*
- *After learning about residential schools, I was horrified and shocked (SVT4 Q3).*
- *I looked at myself [and] I realized that most of my ideas about the Indigenous peoples stemmed from the most unlikely source – advertising and consumerism (SVT6 Q2).*

Overall students recognize and appreciate the opportunity to learn about Indigenous people's experiences and perspectives. They are aware that this content has been missing from their curriculum and identify it as important.

- 2) Students feel sad and sorry for Indigenous people, they also make key connections between the lack of knowledge and attitudes toward Indigenous people.

- *My heart goes out to the victims and survivors (SVT4 Q3).*
- *I feel extremely sad for the children in the schools (SVT4 Q5).*
- *Our Country's overall knowledge of the causes and effects in Canadian history that made aboriginal lives what they are right now is very lacking (SVT6 Q3).*

Students expressed a strong emotional response to what they were learning about the Residential School System, they appreciated the opportunities to learn, to hear survivor's testimony and to take action in response to what they were learning.

- 3) Indigenous students' express appreciation for the inclusion of Indigenous education

- *Having Jake come was so lit. He looks like my uncles so that felt good and the food was like going to my auntie's house, so I loved that...like wild rice and elk...that rocked. (SVT1 Q4)*
- *When all those people were in the circle and we talked about water walkers and a couple of songs were sung. I felt good about that, I felt good that my people were being highlighted like that. That was a good feeling (SVT1 Q3).*

Similar with their non-Indigenous peers Indigenous students are aware of what their teachers know and don't know about their history, culture and current circumstances. These students expressed appreciation for the work their teachers were doing to learn more about Indigenous people.

⁴ Student Voice Template Number Quote Number.

4) Indigenous students appreciate that their teachers are learning

- *My history teacher kinda said she didn't know very much but that she was learning and was trying to learn more. I was okay that she didn't know anything. I just liked that she was trying to know more about us (SVT2 Q1).*
- *Seeing all the staff in the orange was great, like, I mean, I didn't really think they knew or cared. Now I see they do kinda' (SVT2 Q4).*
- *I know it is just a painting, but it totally changes the feel of the library. When I sit there to do my work I feel more chill, more, I don't know, just more 'there' (SVT3 Q2).*

Indigenous students are aware of what their teachers know and don't know about their history, culture and current circumstances. These students expressed appreciation for the work their teachers were doing to learn more about Indigenous people.

3.8 Chapter Conclusion

Participants in the student talking circles shared their knowledge and understanding of being Indigenous and being in school. Their responses reflect a growing awareness of their right to an education that includes content that addresses Indigenous histories, cultures and perspectives. While students are reluctant to identify specific individuals or actions as racist they do recognize racism in their school experiences. Students want their teachers and classmates to learn more about Indigenous people's histories, cultures and perspectives. They recognize the degree to which the lack of knowledge and understanding is impacting their own opportunities to learn. These students clearly articulate feeling welcome, cared for, and valued in school is critical to their success and well-being.

Teachers who completed the Learning Experiences Templates provided valuable access to students' perspectives. Although these voices were recorded by the teachers I recognize and accept these as accurate and authentic student voices. As these are the voices of students whose teachers were participating in the CI they provide valuable insights with regard to the significant impact the CI is having on both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

4. Chapter Four: Learning From Educators

The first thing to note about educators' stories of learning is that there are as many different stories as there are educators. Each story begins from a unique starting point, depending upon a number of personal factors: the specific identities of educators; their contexts of growing up; previous exposure to and relationships with Indigenous peoples and issues; and pre-existing commitments to social justice. There are also a number of contextual factors that affect the pace, depth of, scope of their learning processes: if their school is located close or far from local Indigenous communities, whether they are in a rural or urban setting, the number of Indigenous students in their school and whether or not they typically self-identify, previous efforts on the part of their school or board to address Indigenous Education, whether they are joining well-established CIs in their school and board with systems of support already in place, or whether the school or board itself is also new to the CI. Despite these variations, the stories educators tell tend to follow similar pathways of gaining information and awareness, working through fears and discomfort, addressing misconceptions or prejudice, and coming to engage more deeply with Indigenous histories, cultures, communities, perspectives, and students.

4.1 Educators Participating in the Indigenous Education-Focused Collaborative Inquiry

Educators had a variety of opportunities to participate in the data collection process including round table discussions at the spring face-to-face gatherings, talking circles when the PI met with CI teams in their schools and individual phone interviews.

DSB Participants	Phone Interviews
Teachers	10
Principals	12
Board Leads	5
Language Teachers	1
Centrally Assigned Support Staff	16
Superintendents	0
Total	44

Table 4A District School Board Interview Participants

Educator Data Collection

Research assistants (RA) completed individual confidential phone interviews with educators. Interview questions are included in Appendix C. Direct quotes from educators are included in this chapter in which educators are identified only by the position they occupy. Individuals are not identified by DSB. The following abbreviations are used in the citations.

Citation Key

Teachers	T
Principals/Vice Principals	P
Centrally Assigned Support Staff	CASS
Board Lead (In Indigenous Education)	BL
Round Table Discussion Notes	RT
Educator Talking Circle With DSB CI Teams	ETC

4.1A Educators Beginning The Learning Journey

It was like a whole new world that we were opened up to because of the Collaborative Inquiry, which I guarantee would not—we would not have benefited in the same way had it not had those interactions and the listening and the sharing that took place. (ETC, p. 3)

Whenever we have the opportunity to be engaging with Indigenous community partners and everything, I mean, the teachings, I always walk away and think, 'Oh my goodness, what an amazing teaching.' But it leaves me with such an impact that's different than anything I've ever experienced. So it's really always emotional for me because I just feel so lucky to be part of the learning and the teachings and want to know more because of it. (ETC, p. 12)

Before the teacher handed his journal to me, he said to me, this has been...a game changer for him. He's like, 'This has been one of the most enriching professional learning experiences that I've ever had.' (ETC, p. 105)

The more we build teachers background knowledge and build on experiences, the more excited they become, and understanding, and committed. (P2, p. 2)

Educators new to the CI often characterize their learning as a process of gathering information about and building awareness of histories of colonization and Indigenous peoples, issues, cultures, and perspectives, often for the first time. These initial experiences of *learning about* Indigenous peoples and Indigenous realities often provoke a range of emotional responses—from confusion, to discomfort, to sorrow and guilt, to excitement; they also spark for many a realization of just how much they do not know, and an initial commitment to learn more and to do better teaching Indigenous content for all students.

Learning About Colonialism and Residential Schools

What we've learned through the PD and with the Elders, the more we learned the more we really understood the premise behind the truth and reconciliation commission report, we are understanding more why some behaviours from our students or why parents have difficulty coming to school, and background knowledge to doing this work. (P2, p. 1)

These grade 4 students already had stereotypes. It blew me away. I wouldn't think a 4th grader would have those stereotypes already ingrained. (T2, p.2)

For myself, when you say that you are shocked that the 7s and 8s don't really know about residential schools, I was shocked that I didn't really know the reality of what they were as someone with an honours degree in history. That history has been rewritten. All of that comes into play for my own personal reason for wanting to get more involved in the CI. (RT, p. 58)

Another common experience cited amongst new educator participants in the CI describe learning about the history of colonization in Canada—again, sometimes for the first time—and 'becoming sensitive' to the issues faced by Indigenous students and communities. Their stories of learning include a common refrain: 'We just didn't know.' Many educators describe experiences of participating in popular education activities that convey the on-going history and impact of colonization, as being pivotal in their learning, by offering substantial information and engaging them on a deeply emotional level.

New learning about colonization—and in particular, learning about the history of residential schools and intergenerational trauma—challenges educators’ initial stereotypes and assumptions about poverty, as well as their easy judgments regarding Indigenous peoples, families and students. In particular, educators see opportunities to hear Elders and residential school survivors directly as key to this learning. Some also describe learning from Indigenous community members about current manifestations of colonial relations that impact Indigenous communities, including boil water advisories and violence against Indigenous women and girls.

Many educators describe experiencing an emotional process of learning, one that entails coming to feel differently and deeply about colonization and about Indigenous peoples. This emphasis on empathy and pathos can sometimes slide teachers into feeling sorry about and for Indigenous people. Most educators at this stage of the process also speak of colonization as something past and apart from themselves—that is, a ‘sad chapter’ to learn about so as never to repeat—rather than as something that is on-going, in which they are currently implicated or for which they are responsible to work with others to address.

Learning About Indigenous Peoples and Students

Participating educators describe learning about Indigenous peoples and communities, at times beginning with basic differences among First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, as well as the specific experiences and needs of Indigenous students. For some educators—especially for those working in schools located far from Indigenous communities, with few self-identifying Indigenous students—this process begins by simply becoming aware of the Indigenous students who are present in their classrooms, and of the need to engage them more effectively. Through their processes of learning, educators begin to question myths and challenge assumptions and stereotypes—their own, and those of others—regarding Indigenous students, parents, and families. In doing so, they at times draw on equality discourses (‘they’re all just kids’) that ignore important differences and the broader colonial context.

Many educators acknowledge the need to change their approach to teaching in order to support Indigenous students more effectively. Some speak of beginning to experiment with different ways to engage Indigenous students, such as utilizing more experiential and holistic methods, avoiding tests, or applying learning principles (such as fostering a growth perspective) that might help students needing support.

Learning to Take Steps Despite Fear and Discomfort

The have a fear of being wrong, of teaching something and not being correct, of not knowing all of the answers. We talked to them a lot about it, myself and the Ojibwa teacher. The same as the kids, they don’t like being wrong either. Sometimes you have to take that leap of faith, be wrong to learn how to be right. (P1, p. 3)

Some of the primary barriers that keep educators from becoming engaged in the work of the CI remain their discomfort when faced with the prospect of teaching the history of colonization, Indigenous content and perspectives, and their related fears of making mistakes, misappropriating knowledge, and causing offence to Indigenous students or communities. As non-Indigenous educators engage more seriously with Indigenous content and perspectives, many describe coming face to face with those fears and having to try to work through their discomfort, with varying levels of success. Many educators begin to ask critical questions about their own identities and how they

might shape or limit what they are able to bring into the classroom. As noted in previous reports, educators in early stages of engagement paradoxically report experiencing rising levels of these fears as they become aware of the challenges of negotiating boundaries, expectations, and responsibilities. Importantly, many also speak of coming to recognize the need to engage with Indigenous people—Indigenous staff, Elders, or community members—who have the knowledge and bring authentic voice to interactions in the classroom.

At the same time, educators speak of the significant learning that they experience in moving past fears and discomfort to take risks in engaging with Indigenous content and perspectives in the classroom, at times making mistakes and being ‘corrected’ by Indigenous staff and community members. Such experiences are particularly helpful to educators’ learning when educators feel supported to take such risks by a knowledgeable principal and administration. While many educators are careful and tentative in taking such risks at this early stage, others describe jumping in, without first consulting or taking into full account the possible impact of their actions upon Indigenous students and community members.

Learning to Engage with Indigenous Culture, Knowledge, and Pedagogy

We also then tried to understand what little we can understand of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit, and then tried to think if what we witnessed in the children reflected any of those principles. And that was a fascinating process as well and led to some really good discussions between staff members. (ETC, pp. 51-52)

A big ‘ah-ha’ that came with the learning, with one group in particular, was the idea of how, again, when we looked at an experiential learning opportunity (like quill work or beading) [we were] finding the math in it. (CASS2, p. 1)

And really quickly, we realized that that Indigenous learning model overlapped perfectly with the new kindergarten model for learning, right? So it was very—they wound up not being separate really. Essentially, as soon as you were embracing the natural world in a respectful and impactful way and talking about that with students, you were embracing the Indigenous learning model, and it was really easy to make those connections pretty fast. (EETC, p. 69)

Educators describe learning a great deal about Indigenous cultures, often beginning with basic understandings of cultural practices. This early learning—sometimes characterized as becoming ‘culturally competent’—focuses on learning cultural traditions, practices, and protocols. It often develops through participation through Indigenous-led events, cultural activities, and sharing circles, or by receiving teachings from Indigenous Elders and community members. Some educators describe a deeper process of coming to see cultural practices *as knowledge*.

Also frequently cited was the process of learning to make space within their classrooms for Indigenous cultural representations and understandings, often by incorporating Indigenous languages, cultural symbols, and literature. This process often involves inviting in community members and Elders to offer teachings and lead cultural activities.

In their reflections, educators describe beginning to recognize Indigenous knowledges and approaches to teaching and learning as *different* from mainstream knowledges and approaches. Many point to the training they receive regarding Indigenous pedagogies in face-to-face gatherings

or through professional development as pivotal in fostering this awareness. What's more, many describe being surprised by—and becoming *curious* about—what they see as the significantly positive impact that the inclusion of Indigenous content, perspectives, and pedagogies have on Indigenous students in their classrooms, particularly in heightening students' engagement and sense of connection.

Some educators further describe beginning to be able to identify and apply what they understand to be principles of Indigenous pedagogy, including:

- Taking up a listening stance instead of imposing or making assumptions about students' interests or experience;
- Learning to follow the lead of the students in the process of teaching and learning;
- Listening at the elbow of Indigenous students, particularly through experiments with pedagogical documentation.

How are Teachers Learning?

I felt that having that [Indigenous] person as a resource was absolutely critical in my own learning. I could ask anything, questions that were critical but also tough to ask, I can email her directly. I felt my relationship with her drove the learning. (T2, p. 1)

Hearing something come from community members, from people that have lived the experience, there's no comparison' (making it real with people that have lived the experience'). (P10, p.)

Also, my co-teacher, we are non-Indigenous, and having somebody else who was at a similar point in our learning, we could start asking the questions together too, and helped each other identify the things we didn't know, and also share what we were experiencing with our students. Having that teaching partner, she and I were on the same page—that was helpful. (T2, p. 1)

Actually engaging with Indigenous people is consistently cited as being fundamental to Educators learning. They describe gaining a great deal of confidence and comfort from being able to ask questions, get advice, and receive direct coaching from Indigenous staff, consultants, or community members, who offer knowledge and understandings and also offer an analysis of schools as colonial institutions. Educators also describe learning a great deal from listening to Elders and witnessing their way of being with students. At this stage, these interactions typically remain more one-sided than mutual, with educators inviting Elders and community members into classrooms and observing their interactions with students.

The significance of learning in relationships with other educators is also commonly referenced. Many cite the importance of face-to-face gatherings as opportunities to bring together people at different stages of the learning process, to dialogue about key issues and concerns, and to share ideas, resources, and inspiration. Some describe the value of being paired with other educators who are engaged in a similar process of learning, or of connecting with more experienced educators through peer mentoring relationships. Educators also describe learning a great deal from professional development opportunities, particularly face-to-face gatherings organized through the CI, and using the CI as a springboard to connect with other educator networks.

Overall, educators at this stage describe the CI as fostering a greater awareness of what they do not know, as well as a desire to learn even more. It keeps them focused and learning about Indigenous education, rather than having their commitment slip away or, losing momentum and commitment.

4.1B Educators: Deepening Investments in Learning

Educators who are participating in the Collaborative Inquiry for a second or third year continue to grapple with questions and assumptions, but also describe a deepening process of learning and investment.

Deepening Investments in Teaching About Colonization as Past and Present

So when I have people come up to me and say, 'Oh, residential schools, that was a long time ago. People should just get over it.' And it wasn't a long time ago. It's now. We got to hear from somebody who is present here with us today that went through that experience; and it's generational—how it affected her children and grandchildren. (ETC, p. 16)

I've had some extremely powerful experiences with non-First Nations students, and it's a bit devastating for some of those non-First Nations students to learn about the cultural genocide. It changes the dynamic in your classroom. I tell them it's not about collective guilt, it's about collective responsibility. We need to take some responsibility for how Indigenous people have been treated in this country, and have compassion and understanding. (T5, p. 3)

The most important part of our CI for the last four years has been our community partners. They came in and shattered our previous Eurocentric way of doing things. (RT notes, p. 4)

These educators describe a deepening engagement with and understanding of the history and impact of colonization and residential schools. Many continue to pursue learning opportunities, both within and outside of what is available through the Education system, to deepen their understanding and knowledge.

Many non-Indigenous educators—particularly those in the early stages of the Collaborative Inquiry—have a tendency to speak of colonization in the past tense, as something that happened to 'them,' Indigenous peoples, but that has little to do with 'us,' its non-Indigenous beneficiaries. Over time and through on-going learning in interactions with Indigenous Elders and partners, some of these educators describe coming to see colonization as an *on-going* set of relations that continues to impact Indigenous peoples and structure Indigenous-non-Indigenous relationships in the present. Some also describe working through initial responses of guilt and grief, and coming to focus instead on collective responsibilities—their own, as well as those of their students—to address colonization both past and present.

Through similar processes of listening and engaging with Indigenous staff and community members, some educators also describe gaining a new awareness of, and learning to challenge, the taken-for-granted Eurocentric assumptions and colonial practices that shape schools and schooling in ways that negatively impact Indigenous students.

Deepening Investments in Making Space for Indigenous Perspectives, Knowledge, and Worldviews

It has taught me, alerted me that I'm just scratching the surface with the knowledge that I have, and I still wanted to and need to know more. That's why bringing the culture into the classroom and having the people with the information share, I learn as much as the kids learn. It's on-going learning for professionals and for students. (T9, p. 2)

I used to think they were separate things, but I've learned that we can't separate culture from academic success'. (CASS2, p.1)

But now I see so much positive changes among colleagues; now they think maybe in a different mindset than Europeans do, and recognize the language and how it impacts. ... When you bring that into your curriculum, it has a huge impact. (T10, p. 2)

I think one of the positives of having this CI is that it brings Anishinaabe traditional people into the classroom. And before too long, there was this discovering of knowledge... Traditionally our teachers are the Elders; they carry the knowledge and pass it on to the younger generation. Being able to bring Elders and those traditional knowledge keepers into the classroom works toward healing that severing of the continuum of learning in Indigenous communities. It heals the mistrust of Indigenous communities in the education system. (LT1, p. 3)

Non-Indigenous educators in the 2nd and 3rd years of the CI report continuing to learn about Indigenous issues, content, cultures, and perspectives to the point of becoming more aware of the immensity of what they do not know, a realization that prompts an even deeper commitment to learn. Non-Indigenous educators also begin to move beyond simplistic understandings of Indigenous culture—as things confined to cultural activities like powwows or drumming—to a more nuanced understanding of cultural practices as reflections of Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing and being. Some also describe coming to see clearer connections between practicing culture, recognizing Indigenous knowledge, fostering literacy, and supporting academic success for Indigenous students. Educators report thinking more critically and concertedly about what is missing in the curriculum. They seek out Indigenous educators and community members, as well as ministry documents, to learn more about how to incorporate Indigenous content, perspectives, and pedagogies in their classrooms. Many also describe feeling more comfortable in doing so, and more excited about the positive impact that such inclusions have on students, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

Additionally, educators describe becoming more adept at identifying principles of Indigenous teaching and learning as they are enacted by community members and students, including: taking a holistic and experiential approach; respecting student self-determination; approaching learning as relational; trusting the lead of the students; and centering relationships to land. Some further describe beginning to experiment with incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing in their classrooms and coming to see Indigenous students and their experiences and behaviours differently, through a lens informed by history, identity, and culture.

Rare among interviews with non-Indigenous educators but cited often within interviews with Indigenous educators and staff, were deeper insights about the Collaborative Inquiry in creating more equitable space for Indigenous worldviews within schools, and how that contributes to the healing, well-being, and integrity of Indigenous students, cultures, and communities.

Deepening Investments in Relationships With Indigenous Students and Community Members

But I think too, in building our own understanding of culture, tradition, language, the more involved we were with community partners, the more that helped our own learning, which impacts what we do in the classroom. (CASS11, p. 3)

I learned a lot from my students who live directly on the reserve. Those are experiences that I don't have. They learned from me as much as I learned from them, and we learned that we can incorporate and honour their experience and learning. (T9, p. 2)

You can't learn about our people in one day and then bring it in. You've got to almost be immersed in it in order to make it happen. (BL3, p. 3)

Relationships with community members and Elders continue to be cited as an important source of learning for educators. Educators describe learning from being in the presence of Elders and community members, witnessing how they related to and build trust with students, and listening to teachings on colonization as well as Indigenous knowledge, cultural practices, ways of knowing and being, and principles of relationality. The difference between teachers just beginning their participation and those continuing for a second or third year is the nature and quality of those relationships.

Rather than relying solely on Indigenous staff to broker relationships, educators participating for a second or third year often begin to build their own connections with community members and Elders and to engage with them in more substantive and mutual ways. Some describe being in on-going dialogue with community members, receiving both support and guidance for engaging with Indigenous content and students in the classroom. Educators also begin to reflect more intentionally on the experience of community members in coming into the school and seek to address barriers and find ways to more effectively embody respect.

Educators describe learning a great deal through dialogue with Indigenous students: from learning about their experiences growing up in Indigenous communities, to learning about their experiences of schooling, to learning from their perspectives regarding the challenges, needs, and strengths they experience as learners. Educators at this stage also speak of learning *reciprocally* and *mutually* with students, as co-learners and co-teachers.

Many educators also describe expanding their relationships beyond the confines of the school building to meet and engage with Indigenous community members, parents, and students on reserves, in community centres and Indigenous organizations, even in homes. Many see these moves to Indigenous communities and spaces—often still facilitated by Indigenous staff and board leads—as valuable in deepening their relationships with community members and in fostering their own learning. Indigenous educators in particular offer important insights about the need for this learning to be immersive over time, with non-Indigenous educators returning again and again to Indigenous communities to listen and learn with youth, Elders, and everyone in between.

Shifting Their Practice as Educators

I don't want to be disrespectful, but I'm the white girl talking to the Native students about what has happened to them. I wish I could—I wish I knew more to share with them, and I wish I related to them on some level. (T9, p. 4)

I really think being part of this, every experience is such authentic learning. Whenever I can be in a circle with community members, it's such a different way of learning and being and that has been so influential for me as a person. It makes you think of a different way of being, how that translates into schools, relationships with other educators. (CASS11, p. 1)

Educators describe being increasingly conscious of the impact that their identity has in shaping and limiting not only their knowledge but their engagements with Indigenous students, families, and community members. This heightened awareness leads to further concerns about causing offense, overstepping boundaries, and being disrespectful. They continue to grapple with how to negotiate boundaries, expectations, and responsibilities, but with increasing experience educators are more likely to do so in the context of on-going and deepening relationships with community members.

These educators also describe being changed both as educators and as a people, as a result of their engagements with Indigenous people and Indigenous perspectives and ways of teaching and learning. Many describe experiences like participating in sharing circles over time as leading them to think differently about what it means to teach and learn and about themselves as educators. Most importantly, witnessing the impact of this learning on themselves and on their students cultivates a mounting passion for the work of supporting Indigenous education, as well as furthers investment in doing the difficult work of their own learning. Improving their capacities to integrate Indigenous content and to make use of Indigenous pedagogy makes them better teachers for all students.

4.1C Educators: Committing to Acting, Learning and Acknowledging Relationship

[The CI] has forced me to consider a different perspective by virtue of learning and becoming more knowledgeable; it has made me an ally. (BL2, p. 1)

But I'm learning all the time—every workshop I attend, collaborating with colleagues, reading literature myself. So it's a process for me. (ETC, p. 18)

Educators who have been engaged in this process of learning over many years, both before and during the CI, describe coming to their own position around these questions of how to engage with Indigenous content, perspectives, and pedagogies in the classroom, often through on-going discussions with community members and Elders. These educators tend to move away from hard and fast responses to questions of appropriation, describing their responses as being contingent upon both context and relationships

Rather than 'adding on' Indigenous content and perspectives, these educators describe on-going efforts to integrate content in a comprehensive way throughout all aspects of their teaching. Some offer a nuanced decolonial critique of the mainstream school curriculum and structures, and describe ongoing efforts to analyze the curriculum and look for opportunities to make space for Indigenous content and address the needs of Indigenous students; others describe becoming deeply attuned and

committed to Indigenous principles of teaching and learning and evaluating new Ministry curriculum and pedagogical approaches through that lens.

Educators in this later stage of learning express deep passion and personal investment in the work of decolonizing education in general and in the work of the CI in particular, framing that investment as a primary aspect of their identity as educators and as people. These educators commit themselves to on-going and often lifelong processes of learning, action, and reflection regarding how to become better teachers of and for Indigenous students, which they see as foundational to their work in education. Their commitment to continuing the work of the CI is evidenced by the fact that many are already actively planning activities and programs for next year.

In essence, these educators describe a *paradigm shift* in the ways that they engage the work of Indigenous education, seeing it no longer as optional or additive but as foundational to their work, mission, and identity as educators. Their commitment to becoming good teachers of and for Indigenous students—enacted always in relationship with Indigenous colleagues, community members, and Elders—becomes generative of many creative possibilities for realizing Indigenous education in schools.

4.2 Principals

4.2A What are Principals Learning and How are They Learning?

I've learned a lot, so much I don't even know where to begin to discuss what I learned. Considering my knowledge was somewhat limited when I came to the school, it has now grown so much. (P1, p. 1)

We are on the same kind of learning journey as the rest of our teachers, and it's really interesting because we started out with a very basic knowledge of the FNMI culture even though we live within a one-hour radius of a First Nations community. We thought we knew, but we didn't. (P2, p. 1)

It was eye opening for me, a lot less prejudice that I may have had 10 years back. So, I'm much more open-minded. (P4, p. 1)

Unless you ask the right questions and make the time to go, to build the relationships, you will not get the teaching. It's all about relationships. (P1, p.2)

Many principals speak of their own learning process through the CI as profound and as some of the most important learning that they have done in their entire careers. Many report processes of learning that are very similar to those described by teachers, but with the added responsibility of leading other educators by setting the tone for Indigenous-non-Indigenous relationships within the school. Some principals describe starting right at the beginning to address an extreme lack of knowledge and to unlearn well-established misconceptions and prejudice through their learning from Indigenous perspectives of history.

Similar to teachers, principals tend to describe their process of learning in emotional terms, and find themselves working through the same fears, discomfort, sadness, and guilt that many educators

describe. Principals also tend to focus on residential school history and intergenerational trauma as key to understanding the experience of Indigenous students, parents, and families, at times to the exclusion of engaging with broader histories of colonialism or on-going colonial realities and violence.

Principals speak as well of learning to foster respectful relationships with Indigenous communities, and at times needing to begin from scratch in doing so. Some describe experiences of going on community tours organized by board leads as the first time they had ever stepped foot on a reserve. Especially early on in the life of the CI and in their own learning journeys, principals often rely heavily on Indigenous staff for guidance as they learn to be mindful and respectful when building trust with Indigenous communities. By contrast, principals in schools with longstanding relationships with Indigenous communities sometimes use the CI as an opportunity to step back and encourage their teachers to foster their own relationships with community members and Elders.

Similar to other educators, principals report learning most by engaging directly with Indigenous community members, often by participating in sharing circles and cultural teachings with Elders. Some describe how being exposed to Indigenous cultures makes them more aware of how their own culturally reinforced ways of knowing and being and the assumptions that shape their work as educators; at times, they describe these processes of learning in stereotypical ways, as learning to ‘go with the flow’ or understanding that ‘all things happen for a reason.’

Perhaps due to their more nuanced understandings of pedagogy, principals also seem to come more quickly than teachers to deeper understandings of the significance of Indigenous ways of knowing, learning, and teaching, with many commenting early on regarding the interwoven nature of culture, identity, and academic learning and success. While some principals speak of their learning as perfunctory and procedural, many others describe coming to awareness of the critical value of the CI and the significance of their role in ensuring its viability and impact in their schools.

4.2B The Role of Principals

Its just life changing because when you get the learning, you can't pretend you don't know it anymore. And I feel a moral obligation as a leader to pass it on or to provide opportunities for my staff to learn, to go to the gathering, to be aware of the opportunities in the province to get the learning. (P10, p. 3)

[S]o many facets of the school life here include Indigenous ways and include a need to share all those pieces with the students and the staff. We do so much in terms of informing and teaching the staff. All the staff meetings start now with an Indigenous learning, or a discussion around the table of what an Indigenous learning or issue means. Some teachers have even started bringing that learning into their classroom. (P1, p. 1)

It starts with the staff; if they don't have interest or understanding the inquiry won't happen. I need to light that fire first. And then, the continued learning by everybody. It has to continue on because it is not engrained yet; it is surface. Without me pushing and continuing to offer it, I am not sure it would grow on its own. It's not ready to happen on its own; it needs a champion at the beginning of it. It takes time. (P1, p. 3)

Many educators and principals alike recognize the critical roles that principals play in providing leadership to the CIs, particularly in the initial development. One of the most significant roles that

principals play is modeling investment as a means of fostering and supporting the learning and commitment of educators. Principals also play a critical role in supporting the work of the CI administratively, by:

- Gathering and dispersing information on PD and other learning opportunities;
- Modelling a commitment to on-going learning and a willingness to go back and forth between school and Indigenous communities as means of building school-community relationships;
- Encouraging teachers to take risks and then backing them up when they do;
- Fostering energy, motivation, commitment, and a sense of things happening at a school;
- Communicating to educators the importance of the CI and Indigenous education more broadly; and
- Recognizing the work of educators and the CI team in meaningful ways.

Principals also play a key role in embedding the CI within the life and structures of the school, particularly by integrating the CI as well as Indigenous understandings of learning, teaching, and being within school planning processes such as school improvement plans. Significantly, some educators note that once principals are able to build momentum around the CI in the school, CIs are less likely to be derailed by changes of administration.

At the same time, some principals are less knowledgeable or remain tangentially involved in the CI over a number of years, reluctant to invest more extensively in personal or collective learning processes. This lack of investment is mirrored in a relative lack of momentum and the underdevelopment of CIs at their schools. By contrast, principals who are knowledgeable and committed to supporting Indigenous issues, cultures, and perspectives tend to be more effective in engaging even reluctant teachers. Thus several educators, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, cite a need for administrators to receive more education and training at the board level.

4.3 Indigenous Educators

For myself as an Indigenous teacher in the public school system where our voices are usually not heard, this has been a singular experience for me. At the heart, it is also anti-racist education, decolonial education, as best as it possible can be in the public school system. That happens when it is done well, when it is done with an authentic Indigenous voice co-leading it. It is a powerful, powerful experience as a teacher. To me that is why I became a teacher. (LT1, p. 2)

For Indigenous teachers, having an equal voice at the table is paramount. In this CI, I was co-teaching it; I was equal to the other teachers, and the students saw that as well. They know that our voices are authentic. And the knowledge, for Indigenous students, that they already had, became really valuable to in-class work. So their responses were not just valuable for the discussion, but were necessary for their classmates to learn. (LT1, p. 5).

[The weight of having to continually educate others about colonialism] for Indigenous teachers is very heavy. It's a lot of emotional investment and emotional work, and often times it leads to burn out. So for myself as an Indigenous teacher, when our ways of being are not being tokenized, it relieves the burden that has been building up over the years. (LT1, p. 4)

The processes of learning fostered by CIs look very different for Indigenous educators, many of whom have been engaged in realizing Indigenous education for many years before the CI and remain deeply committed to the work as a core part of their identity and commitment to community. Many describe being already steeped in their own cultural heritage and in processes of Indigenizing education, although a minority of Indigenous teachers also describe learning more deeply about their identity and cultural heritage as a result of participating in the CI.

Indigenous educators offer some of the most profound insights into how and under what conditions the CI is effective. For some, the CI represents an unprecedented experience of having their authentic voices, knowledge, insights, understandings, and contributions as professionals honoured and respected in a model of true partnership. This is highly significant, given that many Indigenous educators describe struggling in mainstream schooling with feeling tokenized, unrecognized, and exhausted by the need to continually educate about and address colonialism.

Unfortunately, others describe themselves as carrying much of the burden of the CI, with non-Indigenous teachers continuing to refuse to share the work, learning, and responsibility. This lack of engagement is seen as particularly prevalent in contexts where the CI has centered around hiring Indigenous resource people and staff. For some Indigenous educators, participating in the CI has brought into sharper focus the deep entrenchment of Eurocentric and colonial mindsets, behaviours, and structures within schools, and the distance that remains in realizing Indigenous education.

4.5 Supporting Success

Educators identify a number of factors that support the success of CIs including:

- Continuity of learning,
- Creating committed teams,
- Fostering board leadership,
- Hiring Indigenous Administrators, educators and Staff,
- Creating Indigenous-identified spaces within schools,
- Engaging student voice,
- Investing time,
- Investing funds,
- CI structure; and most importantly,
- Investing in relationships with Indigenous students, parents, families and communities.

Fostering a Continuity of Learning

I think most important is to keep the people who have been working on this very hard, who have developed that awareness, to keep those people on board. Bring in new people, but [do] not drop them when you bring in more people...Don't reinvent the wheel because it'll be a waste of time. Let us continue growing and bring new people on board. (T1, p. 2)

Several educators highlight the importance of continuing to build upon established CIs with experienced educators, rather than shifting emphasis to different schools or different sets of educators. Educators also suggest that experimenting over time on a common or consistent theme (such as peer mentoring among educators) is an effective strategy for CI teams to learn from and capitalize upon what works and what doesn't.

Creating Committed Teams

None of us can really go off by ourselves and do this because this whole team approach is really, really valuable. And I do think that's one of the secrets of our success, actually. I truly do. (ETC, p. 109)

A number of educators credit the success of their CI on the way in which it fosters the development of strong, committed teams, in which educators, administrators, and Indigenous staff invest in a common project tied to a shared passion for supporting the well-being and achievement of Indigenous students. This investment and passion is guided by the strong involvement of Indigenous community members and Elders. Stronger teams translate into stronger and more effective CIs.

Board Leadership

We added the Indigenous pillar to our planning last year; lots of things are nonnegotiable now. For example, there's a month that we do treaties, that we do Indigenous PD, that we attend Indigenous Day, visiting First Nations communities. The next step is how do we invite them to our events—to our school? (T8, p. 5)

Similar to principals, boards often play key roles in embedding the CI within schools by centring the CI within board-level planning processes, at times going so far as to make the CI a non-negotiable expectation for schools. Boards also support the creation of advisory or steering committees that bring together community members, parents, and board members and in turn, offer guidance regarding overall CI priorities and development. At the same time, leadership at the board level does not always filter down consistently to all of the schools.

Indigenous Administrators, Educators, and Staff

The FNM lead has helped us a lot with connections and resources. She has a great background in teaching different courses at the secondary level. These leads are key folks in leading us to the right people to come and support us. They are the key connectors so that we can move forward with all of the work we do here. (P2, p. 1)

It's not just academic help. It's help with connecting them with community resources, outside community members, members within the school. Building that relationship, helping build the relationship between the student and the teacher, the students and other students and just supporting the students in any way that we can. (ETC, p. 21)

Graduation coaches, Indigenous student success workers, language and culture teachers, and Indigenous educators and administrators—through their very presence and tireless work—contribute hugely to fostering the well-being and achievement of Indigenous students and to supporting the success of CIs. As many educators are quick to point out, these staff members play pivotal roles in building trust and respectful relationships between with Indigenous students, parents, and communities that are foundational to the success of the CI. Along with providing concrete cultural, emotional, academic, and spiritual support for Indigenous students, staff members contribute by:

- Ensuring a proper focus for the CI;

- Engaging community members in CI activities;
- Offering guidance regarding cultural protocol and taking the lead in teaching cultural practices and Indigenous pedagogies;
- Teaching both educators and students about colonization and its specific and on-going impact upon local Indigenous communities;
- Guiding and reassuring non-Indigenous educators in their efforts in the classroom, but also challenging their misconceptions, assumptions, and racism;
- Modeling and teaching non-Indigenous educators about responsibilities related to relationship building.

Many educators engaged in CIs cite the need to hire more Indigenous educators and resource staff; CIs at times go so far as to identify as a specific goal the hiring of dedicated Indigenous resource people to support the work Indigenous education and Indigenous students, often in relation to the staffing of Indigenous cultural rooms and spaces. There were many conversations in educator roundtables about the importance of students seeing themselves reflected in the staff, and many teams expressed frustration at the barriers preventing Indigenous educators from being hired. At the same time, these Indigenous educators and resource people face resistance from other non-Indigenous educators who are not always amenable to hearing feedback or sometimes perceiving a loss of control over their students.

As noted earlier, the heavy contribution expected of Indigenous educators and staff can be experienced as burdensome; in schools with few established relationships, for example, the continuity of the entire CI can sometimes rest upon the shoulders of Indigenous cultural workers who are trusted by the communities. Many describe feeling stretched thin in trying to meet the extent of the need. At the same time, some Indigenous educators credit CIs for lessening their sense of isolation in the work of supporting Indigenous students, and for creating spaces for Indigenous educators and administrators to have their voices, knowledge, and contributions as professionals more fully recognized and integrated within the life of schools.

Creating Indigenous-Identified Spaces Within Schools

When I was working in the school, parents would want to come in and be little bit more involved in terms of volunteering and sharing that safe space with their children, have a meeting in that room, smudging. In the buildings that are allowing smudging the parents are very happy about that. (BL4, p. 1)

We've created a culture room, a space where people feel comfortable, where Elders can come... We're encouraging teachers to use the room, to get in that space—to honour the knowledge and the teachings, whether they are reading a book, showing a film, etc. (P10, p. 2)

Many CIs aim to develop or augment physical and social spaces within schools where Indigenous students are expressly invited to learn, experience belonging, and get support. As spaces to highlight and express Indigenous cultural traditions, these spaces—often called cultural rooms and staffed by Indigenous resource people—are shaped by Indigenous ways of being, doing, and relating. They serve as alternative learning environments for Indigenous students, where they can:

- Have time to connect and build trust with Indigenous staff and peers;

- Enjoy a safe place to rest, hang out, and have fun, where they won't be bullied or get in trouble;
- Gain support in resolving tensions and conflicts with teachers and peers; and
- Receive academic, social, physical, or spiritual forms of support.

Many schools in regions that have these rooms found them highly effective, particularly in improving attendance among Indigenous students. At the same time, some educators' express frustration over the lack of specific funding for creating culture rooms.

These spaces are also utilized and appreciated by Indigenous parents and community members as safe places to meet with educators and students, offer teachings, and participate in activities. Again, while many see these spaces as a very successful component of their CIs, some Indigenous staff raise concerns about the ways in which non-Indigenous educators sometimes approach cultural rooms as panaceas for Indigenous education, sometimes at the expense of the classroom teacher's own responsibilities to their students.

Engaging Student Voice

We've noticed that, when we put in student voice, it really made a difference. There were students that rarely came to school, and when we started those projects the students were engaged, because it was their voice in the project. (RT, p. 59)

In roundtables and talking circles, many educators from across the regions attribute the success of CIs in part to the ways that they engage Indigenous student voice, by:

- Being responsive to student input and feedback;
- Taking direction from Indigenous students, and fostering student ownership of CI initiatives;
- Having students participate on CI teams;
- Encouraging students to shape and take ownership of cultural spaces in schools; and
- Engaging students in creative projects to communicate their learning to parents, communities, schools and school boards, and beyond.

Investing Time

Some people say, 'Let's do this and that with teachers and change will come,' but it is never fast. It has taken me twenty years! Besides, teachers don't even know most of the time what steps to take. We have to make time for teachers and students to process that info, to know what it means and apply it. (CASS1, p. 2)

I feel that [Indigenous students] could have benefited just because the school is investing their time into this work, so it is always forefront for the kids to see and participate in their culture. (BL4, p. 2)

But as we go on, if you just keep going, keep pushing and showing the students that you're not giving up, so that they don't give up, that's key. (ETC, p. 25)

Many educators see the success of CIs as being contingent upon substantial investments of time, which enable educators and CI teams to:

- Meet, share, and develop a sense of team and systems of support;
- Gain a deep understanding of colonization, both past and present, and its impact upon Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous students;
- Process and integrate difficult learning;
- Plan, reflect, and make needed changes to their approach; and
- Build the trust necessary to foster strong and respectful relationships Indigenous communities and community members, which in turn enable the work.

Investments in substantial time also make possible the kinds of continuity and persistence that are necessary for supporting Indigenous students and that demonstrate that both Indigenous education and Indigenous students are valued.

Investing Funds

Allowing school board funding to be allocated in this area impacts everyone: teachers, kids, grandparents, community members, parents, aunts. It gives us time to breathe, to plan, to talk together, to have fun—and that's when changes happen. (P11, p. 4)

Educators consistently point to the Ministry funding as essential to making the work of the CI possible. This funding supports and enables a number of critical dimensions of this work, including:

- Bringing educators together and bringing in resource people for PD;
- Making educator time available through release time for teachers;
- Allowing CI teams time to experiment, reflect, build on successes, and sometimes change or refine approaches; and
- Demonstrating long-term commitment to Indigenous education and to Indigenous students.

In particular, educators note the central importance of having sufficient funding to be able to bring in community members and to enable the travel to Indigenous communities that is essential for deepening the learning of educators, fostering school-community relationships, and affording students opportunities to spend time with Elders on the land. While boards and individual schools continue to find creative ways to draw on other funds to augment the CI, many educators and principals emphasize the critical role that funding plays.

Collaborative Inquiries Structure as Fostering Success

It was like a whole new world that we were opened up to because of the Collaborative Inquiry, which I guarantee would not—we would not have benefited in the same way had we not had those interactions and the listening and sharing that took place. (ETC, p. 3)

[W]ithout the pressure from these projects and support from the Ministry these things don't happen, and these are the kinds of things that need to keep going. (LT1, p. 5)

According to many educators and administrators, the CI—beyond simply serving as a source of funding—provides a unique and necessary structure that fosters its own success. Educators point in particular to the requirement to centre CIs around a guiding question, which they see as giving their initiatives focus, clarity, and momentum. Educators also name a number of key elements of the CI structure that support success, including:

- Face to face gatherings that begin with personal stories and share stories of successful initiatives;
- Visits to Indigenous communities, agencies, and Friendship Centres;
- Release time for teachers; and
- Requirements to document their progress, which initially pose challenges but that lead many CI teams to create new ways to capture and express students' experiences and voices.

Many educators also cite connecting with researchers and engaging in the broader process of research as being critical to the success of their CIs. Researchers play a key role in documenting, validating, and recognizing the learning that is happening within CIs. Indigenous academics in particular offer important insights about learning in support of decolonization and Indigenization that educators, administrators, and board members alike draw from in understanding their own processes of learning and in shaping and guiding the development of CIs. Many educators find the videos and newsletters on research insights helpful in taking their thinking and work to the next level.

Investing in Relationships

We already have a lot of community partnerships. The CI allowed teachers to build stronger relationships with community support people, such as local Elders and Indigenous academics. Previously, I had strong relationships with these people, but it was important to step back and let the teachers build their own relationships. (P11, p. 2)

[The community] continuing to welcome us back is something great! They see that we're trying to build this relationship, and it's being reciprocated because they're saying, 'Here's another opportunity for you to come, or for us to come there.' That means we're doing something good; something is being done right. (T9, p. 3)

Collaborative Inquiry often involves collective learning, from trial and error, about how to build relationships with community members. Many educators identify learning how to foster relationships as a central focus of the learning that they do.

As noted earlier, non-Indigenous educators and administrators often initially rely heavily on Indigenous staff members in building school-community relationships. These Indigenous staff also play a key role in teaching and modeling how to connect with community members in a respectful way, at times taking a more directive role in insisting that non-Indigenous educators accompany them in going to reserve communities and issuing invitations in person. In time, non-Indigenous educators develop a deeper understanding of what community members can contribute and begin to build and foster connections on their own, although in some CIs the bulk of responsibility for building and maintaining relationships continues to rest on the shoulders of Indigenous staff.

In the early stages of the CI, educators often focus on inviting community members into schools and classrooms to attend events, serve as guest speakers, or lead cultural activities. Over time, they describe a number of approaches and strategies for building upon those initial community connections, including:

- Engaging community members more deeply in planning and decision-making processes;
- Inviting Elders and community members to participate in or serve as a resource to CI teams and meetings;
- Learning when and how to consult with community members, without assuming that ‘just because they’re Indigenous they’ll have all the answers and can speak for all Indigenous people’;
- Being present in the community over time to slowly develop both visibility and trust;
- Using educators who are already trusted by the community to determine who should respond to families and students in need, and to represent the school;
- ‘Drilling down on protocol’ as a foundation of building trust and respectful relationships with communities;
- Addressing relationship building at the systemic level by eliminating barriers to relationship, such as making administrative changes to allow community members to be paid on the spot; and
- Practicing reciprocity in relationships with communities by serving on each other’s boards and committees.

The relationship-building processes that educators describe are evolving and imperfect. Many report that more and more community members and Elders are becoming involved in the CIs, recognizing the efforts of schools and educators, and showing a greater willingness to partner. As with most important processes, time is essential.

Engaging with Indigenous People in Indigenous Spaces and Communities

We as Native people need to gain the trust for the school, so the more the CIs happen, sometimes they’re kind of flowery but if you don’t go to the reserve and meet the kids there and their parents, it won’t work. Every day we sing O Canada and acknowledge Indigenous relationships to land, but we need to do this relationship building in the communities and in the schools, and keep going back and forth. (BL3, pp. 2-3)

[Students are] excited, they get to go on a field trip. That’s great, but now we need to go deeper and understand that we are building relationships and that they are building it too, we’re all working together. That’s the next part for me—we need to prepare them every time we go and do these trips, they need to know why we’re going...so this CI is helping us do that. (T9, p. 2)

Many non-Indigenous educators speak of the significance of engaging with parents, community members, and especially Elders and knowledge keepers directly on reserve and in other Indigenous spaces as being critical, not only to their own learning and to that of their students but to the overall process of building school-community relationships.

Educators describe a wide array of examples of engaging with Indigenous people in Indigenous communities and spaces, with principals often leading by example, including:

- Receiving trainings and teachings at local Indigenous organizations; for teaching
- Going on tours of local reserve communities;
- Moving parent-teacher interviews to reserves, to on-reserve community centres, or in homes;
- Organizing community-school lunches on reserve;
- Receiving training through local Indigenous organizations;
- Participating in community events held on reserve;
- Visiting the sites of former residential schools;
- Connecting with local Friendship Centres;
- Meeting as CI teams with reserve schools; and
- Bringing students to learning with Elders on the land.

Indigenous educators in particular highlight that moving back and forth between the community and the school, repeatedly and consistently, is key to building solid school-community relationships in the long-term.

Investing in Relationships With Parents and Families

And as a staff, we've had to [make sure we stop] judging some of the actions of families as meaning they don't care for, because those are entirely different things. What families are doing and what they actually think about their children are two different things. (ETC, p.35)

We also learned that more parents came in when events were less threatening, such as the pop-ins for reading where kids made invitations and almost 80% of the parents came in the school. Being less institutional and more human also leads to more parents coming in. (P11, p. 3)

We've been trying to work on different ways, as a school, to change reasons people come to the school. Like at student-led conferences, trying to get our kids talking more about their learning with their caregivers as opposed to us talking about their child's learning. What we've seen this week is tons and tons of caregivers in the building talking with their kids—in the hall, in the library. And we've been trying to grow that in our school over recent years. (P9, p. 2)

Educators speak of a number of approaches and initiatives that have fostered greater engagement with parents, including:

- Participating in afterschool programs on reserve to build trust, connect with parents, and
- Having students invite their parents to feasts, performances, and celebrations where students can demonstrate their learning;

- Inviting students to bring home books and stories to share their learning;
- Including food at all school events;
- Organizing less formal events for parents to engage with their children in schools;
- Contacting parents directly, often through phone calls;
- Communicating with parents about student successes and positive observations, rather than only about problems;
- Enlisting parents and grandparents in figuring out what is happening for students and determining solutions; and
- Inviting parents to share their knowledge and skills in classrooms, or participate in CI team meetings and organizing committees.

Importantly, educators in the CI also speak of coming to recognize—and beginning to take responsibility to *address*—the social, economic, cultural, and historical barriers that keep Indigenous parents from participating more fully in schools.

Investing In Relationships: Educator to Student, Student to Educator

Educators, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, speak of learning about the importance of investing substantial time in really getting to know Indigenous students and learning firsthand about their experiences, strengths, and needs. Indigenous students generally seek out Indigenous educators and administrators to talk, ask questions, or seek support, but according to some Indigenous educators, students also begin to feel more trusting of non-Indigenous educators who have been engaged in the CI over time.

Some CIs also focus on creating activities that allow educators and Indigenous students to get to know one another in deeper and more personal ways, such as through creating ‘strength walls.’ Some non-Indigenous educators speak of the ways that coming to know Indigenous students in this way works to dispel their misperceptions and faulty assumptions; these educators also describe coming to recognize on a more profound level how essential and valuable those relationships are to their ability to be good educators of and for Indigenous students.

Investing In Peer-To-Peer Relationships Among Students

They might not use words like reconciliation and stuff, but unknowingly they’re trying to bring together different factions in the school, the different cultural groups. (CASS7, p. 2)

Some CIs centre on building relationships *among* Indigenous students as a means of building their support systems and helping them through significant school-related transitions. Educators describe experimenting with a number of creative initiatives that involve building safe, inviting, and welcoming spaces Indigenous students to come together to:

- Have fun;
- Get to know one another and be able to connect across groups;
- Share food, especially traditional foods; and
- Participate in creative activities that take them out of their comfort zones or challenge or expand their self-perceptions.

In particular, some CIs focus with great success upon building peer relationships through peer mentoring activities and programs where Indigenous students in transition, especially those coming from distant communities, are matched with Indigenous students currently in the school to build friendships, gain support, and develop a sense of comfort and familiarity. Examples include:

- Peer mentoring for incoming grade 8s and grade 9 students;
- Grade 8 transition camps; and
- Buddy systems for kids transitioning to new schools.

Educators also note that these initiatives are very effective in fostering leadership skills among more senior Indigenous students by creating supportive environments in which students can move in and out of leadership roles and come to identify, express, and build upon their own leadership capacities over time.

Some CIs also prioritize efforts to bring together Indigenous students and their non-Indigenous peers, sometimes framing their efforts as building or ‘mending’ bridges and opening up lines of communication. Educators see these efforts, which often centre around creative pursuits and less frequently on activism related to social issues, as dispelling stereotypes and allaying Indigenous students’ fears and anxieties. At times, these approaches are premised on the idea of helping students to see and focus on their commonalities and to connect as human beings, an approach which tends to disregard or downplay the impact of on-going realities of colonization and deep racism within schools.

Collaborative Inquiries as Deepening Educators’ Understandings of Relationship

Authenticity—not an additive approach. Not just checking off a box or covering Indigenous education in a lesson plan or unit. We did it in an authentic way, and we really brought that out in having our partners being collaborative partners. There wasn’t an ‘us vs. them’ approach; it was very collaborative on both parts. (CASS5, p. 2)

In the very beginning, it felt still separate in terms of relationships and involvement with community members, mostly for special events. Whereas now it is working to deepen those relationships, to go beyond planning for a powwow or another special event. Now there’s more conversation about what does the everyday look like, and are there ways we can do this daily, rather than related to a specific celebration. (CASS11, p. 2)

Over time, many non-Indigenous educators speak of ‘getting it’ in terms of coming to an awareness of the central importance of relationships with Indigenous peoples and communities and to the work of shifting the ground of Indigenous-non-Indigenous relations both in and outside of schools. At times underlying this new awareness is the difficult recognition of the ways in which they have contributed to the ‘othering’ of Indigenous families and students in schools by not showing interest in or working to connect with them in the past.

Many educators also describe coming to see the building of authentic, collaborative, and respectful relationships with Indigenous communities, community members, knowledge keepers, families, parents, and students—based upon an honouring of Indigenous protocol and criteria for relationships—as *core* to the work of supporting the well-being and achievement of Indigenous students. Significantly, non-Indigenous educators and administrators also describe learning through

the CI to take responsibility for building trust and fostering connections, and to commit to doing so in persistent and ongoing ways.

4.6 Challenges That Affect CI Success

There is a great deal of variability among CIs, and educators identify a number of key challenges that hamper their success and development, including:

- Need for greater continuity and cohesion;
- Desire for greater spread; and
- Ongoing challenges in building relationships with Indigenous communities.

Lack of Continuity or Cohesion

You need to do this over several years. If you do it for one year only and stop, there will always be people waiting to tell you that it wasn't worth getting involved. That is why you have to do it multiple years. (CASS1, p.2)

As some educators note, CI teams face challenges when boards decide to switch the schools that are involved in the CI from year to year, requiring educators to start again in developing the CI, often from square one. Challenges also arise when there are internal disagreements and tensions regarding the intent and the focus of the CI, leading to teachers or schools going in different directions.

Lack of Spread as a Continuing Challenge

For us with the CI, we're still thinking about how to grow this within our school. We have a strong Indigenous language program in the school, but I feel like we're piece-mealing the work. The work is happening here and there. (P9, p. 2)

Until you have that moment of 'I didn't know that I didn't know – and now I want to know,' you can have the best intentions, but you won't be all-in. There are people here who are passionate. Our job is to keep bringing that to the people who are a bit more resistant or closed-off, and eventually they will have more of those moments when they become available [to think differently]. (RT notes, p. 17)

While educators describe many of the CIs as working very well, only a minority cite significant uptake of the CI across the entire school. Most CIs continue to operate in only a small pocket of the school, involving only a small minority of teachers while the vast majority continues to be unwilling to make a commitment to Indigenous education. Educators involved in these contexts often express concern, frustration, and even guilt about the fact their CI is addressing the needs of only a small proportion of Indigenous students in the school or board.

Many CIs focus initially on primary and early elementary grades as contexts that seem more amenable to Indigenous pedagogy and inquiry-based learning. A common concern among educators pertains to spreading the CI to upper grades, especially in light of a general resistance among upper grade educators to incorporating inquiry-based or Indigenous pedagogies, which are sometimes viewed as less rigorous and less suitable for preparing students for curriculum in later years.

Indigenous educators in particular cite the importance of ensuring that knowledge about Indigenous histories, cultures, and perspectives become commonplace among high school teachers, rather than remaining an ‘anomaly’.

Educators identify a number of practices that they see as effectively contributing to the spread of CI within the school, including:

- Involving the principal and incorporating the CI into overall school or board structure;
- Connecting the CI with other pre-existing initiatives;
- Engaging students in contributing to the spread of CI through word of mouth, by issuing personal invitations, and by sharing their experiences and learning with other students, parents, teachers, community members, and event board members;
- Holding face-to-face gatherings and creating other opportunities at the school- and board-level for educators to gather to talk with one another, share experiences, discuss pressing concerns, and offer inspiration and new ideas;
- Shaping everyday spaces of the school to reflect Indigenous cultures, Indigenous-settler history and treaties;
- Creating Indigenous cultural rooms and spaces in the schools where Indigenous students, parents, and community members can gather and feel a sense of ownership and belonging;
- Pairing experienced CI educators with teachers who are new to the CI, in peer mentoring relationships; and
- Growing the base of involved teachers.

A number of resources that are needed in order to foster further spread were also identified, including:

- More teacher education through PD and face-to-face gatherings;
- More involvement of community members in the schools, as teachers are more likely to get involved when community members are present and engaged in the school; and
- More funding to support teacher release time, travel to Indigenous communities, the creation of Indigenous cultural rooms and spaces, and general CI development.

Struggles to Build Relationships Between Schools and Indigenous Communities

I really don't know. And I think that's kind of a reflection that we're—how do we know. I don't know that we know. (P9, p. 2)

A lot of teachers are putting the cart before the horse by only focusing on bringing in community members. If you don't have the teacher buy-in, the things we do are very isolated— isolated events and speakers. We need to pull back and really focus on giving our teachers and admin thorough professional development about Indigenous culture and why we do this. (T6, p.2)

Despite a growing awareness among educators involved in the CI of importance of relationships, connecting with Indigenous communities remains a central concern of many schools, DSBs, and even regions. Indeed, some schools continue to struggle with basic aspects of relationship building (such as knowing how to invite community members to come into the school) despite their proximity to reserves, having a high percentage of Indigenous students, and having participated in the CI for a number of years. For some CIs, these challenges suggest a lack of investment and sustained effort in relationship building. For many more CIs, fostering community relationships is cited as an area to work on or an unrealized goal.

Educators describe a number of factors affecting schools that pose specific challenges to building relationships, including:

- Working in urban schools with students coming from multiple, dispersed, and distant communities; and
- Trying to manoeuvre in emerging political situations that affect context for relationship building.

Some educators also note that efforts to bring community members into schools without first ensuring the buy-in of educators and administrators lead to very shallow forms of engagement and relationship-building. In contexts where relationship building has posed a persistent challenge, some educators plan to connect with other CIs with more established relationships as a way to jumpstart the process.

4.7 Key Issues, Ongoing Questions and Concerns for educators

Related to but in some ways separate from the challenges that limit the success of overall Collaborative Inquiry projects and teams, educators outline a number of on-going issues, questions, and concerns that impact their work with colleagues and in schools, including:

- Anger and fear among non-Indigenous colleagues;
- Questions about cultural appropriation; and
- Racism and colonial attitudes.

Apathy and Fear Among Non-Indigenous Educators

The people who say 'so what', that's our biggest challenge. And that attitude has a big impact. But change is happening. (BL3, p. 5)

In my school that continues to be the biggest challenge: there are teachers who don't engage because they don't want to offend, make a mistake. (CASS11, p. 2)

I have Indigenous Elders on the committee, and they always ask, 'Why are they afraid? Don't they have to teach other subjects they don't know?' (P5, p. 6)

We need to have blunt conversations, for example, why you shouldn't make a dream catcher in your classroom. They think they know it, but at the end of the sharing, they realize they don't. We need to talk about what cultural appropriation is, and why do people get upset about it.
(CASS1, p.2)

As noted in previous reports, one of the central concerns identified in the interviews is that educators continue to resist becoming invested in the work of the CI. Some attribute this lack of engagement to educators' fears about making mistakes or causing offence. In part, these fears reflect a recognition of the potentially damaging impact that uninformed, inappropriate, or thoughtless engagements with Indigenous content can have for Indigenous students or communities; indeed, as noted earlier such fears rise among non-Indigenous educators as they gain initial knowledge of Indigenous perspectives and histories of colonization. The difficulty comes, of course, when such fears keep educators from engaging at all with Indigenous content, or when they are used as an excuse for educators not taking on the responsibility for learning how to teach such content, as they would with any other subject matters.

In interviews and talking circles, non-Indigenous educators describe their processes of learning to move past being immobilized by such fears. Many value opportunities to talk through fears and how to address them in the context of face-to-face gatherings and professional development events. Others find that their fears are greatly alleviated by connecting with teachers who have more experience in the CI, sometimes through formal peer mentorship relationships. Most importantly, many non-Indigenous educators say that they benefit greatly from connecting with Indigenous consultants, staff members, and community members, who acknowledge their learning process, offer support, and give guidance as to how to discern boundaries.

At the same time, the need to reassure and give validation to non-Indigenous educators can weigh quite heavily upon the shoulders of Indigenous staff members, who also take on of the burden of teaching about Indigenous perspectives; indeed, some feel that non-Indigenous educators should take more responsibility for their own education in this regard. On-Indigenous educators who are further along in the learning process, by contrast, describe remaining always alert to potential negative impacts for Indigenous students and then doing their utmost to mitigate those risks by consulting with and seeking guidance from community members and Elders, without seeking validation or handholding.

Apart from the basic fear of offending or doing things wrong, some interviews also gesture towards a deeper fear on the part of non-Indigenous educators of being perceived—by Indigenous students and community members, and perhaps by ourselves—as *beneficiaries* of colonialism, and thus as part of the problem of colonization. As some Indigenous educators note, this fear of implication can lead even those non-Indigenous educators who are justice-minded and seeking to be anti-oppressive to avoid becoming engaged in the work of the CI.

Questions About Cultural Appropriation

Another continuing concern among educators, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, is that of cultural appropriation. This issue is often taken up in face-to-face gatherings, and some educators describe it as gaining prominence due to recent debates about appropriation in the media. When asked their perspective on it, non-Indigenous educators offer a range of responses. Some highlight

questions of intentionality, based upon their understanding of Indigenous teachings: if they are well-intentioned and engaging with the content for a good purpose, then it's okay.

In more nuanced conversations, non-Indigenous educators express concerns over how to negotiate mixed messages they receive from school boards and different Indigenous presenters, staff, or community members. This mix of perspectives reflects the diversity of Indigenous understandings, teachings, and protocol regarding the sharing of Indigenous knowledge and cultural traditions, and constitutes a legitimate concern among educators seeking to respect the boundaries around such knowledge.

Other educators—and particularly Indigenous educators—express concerns about non-Indigenous educators failing to grasp the significance of questions of appropriation for Indigenous peoples and communities. These educators call for pushing past the question of intentions to focus on the *impact* that appropriation has upon Indigenous people and communities, arguing that even the most well-intentioned teachers can cause tremendous hurt and need to be educated about it.

Questions also arise about how to discern the appropriate limits regarding what non-Indigenous educators can and should do in the classroom. For example, some Indigenous staff and community members express concern over non-Indigenous educators serving as board leads or teaching Indigenous studies to Indigenous students, particularly when it comes to engaging with Indigenous cultural teachings. Some non-Indigenous educators echo this concern, sharing stories of facing resistance among Indigenous students and learning to have difficult but important conversations about questions of appropriation and identity. Some feel their role should be to facilitate rather than teach Indigenous content. At the same time, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators point to the problem of having too few Indigenous educators in the school system.

Going forward, the range and intensity of educator responses point to a need for 'blunt' and concerted conversations about cultural appropriation in the context of on-going professional development.

Racism and Colonial Attitudes

But teachers are still struggling with the impact of colonization, racism, with basic things like recognizing that First Nations people were here before their grandfathers built their farms. (CASS1, p. 1)

I had one issue where a student was told not to wear a medicine pouch in the school and we had to go through the whole process of that and explain—are you kidding me? Of course they can wear it! (CASS12, p. 3)

I can work with old tired content, but if you don't have teachers who fully understand the impact that they're having on a kid, that's unfortunate. In our region, a huge amount of racism and ignorance around Indigenous issues even from people who think they're A-Okay and anti-oppressive (CASS8, p.5)

In interviews and talking circles, non-Indigenous educators rarely address the question of racism directly; many express discomfort and dis-ease with the word itself, choosing instead to refer vaguely to 'not a great feeling' happening in the school. Whiteness is similarly occluded, with references to

schools that are ‘not very multicultural.’ More often than not, when the issue of race or racism is raised, there is a tendency among non-Indigenous educators to find a way to shift the conversation.

Some non-Indigenous teachers do make passing reference to racist language being used by students in classrooms or to bullying that happens in school hallways; most do not describe efforts to respond to this racism beyond wishful thinking and, on occasion, offering cultural sensitivity training. Some educators also refer to comments made by non-Indigenous parents and community members that reflect denial, a sense of entitlement, and resentments, such as derogatory or dismissive comments made about efforts to recognize Indigenous culture and territory within the school.

While noting how such comments can foster an environment in which Indigenous students are less likely to self-identify, non-Indigenous educators at times downplay such comments as reflections of a ‘lack of information’ and expressing a desire to ‘start with a clean slate’. Other educators note the existence of on-going racism among staff and students but express a belief that simply meeting Indigenous people will be enough to challenge and disrupt racist views, a belief that is not held up by social research.

Educators who are further along in the learning process tend to speak more directly and more often about racism and racial violence, and express a commitment to addressing it in and through the classroom; it is notable, though, that even among these educators there is little mention of racial or settler *privilege*.

Indigenous educators, by contrast, are unequivocal in naming racism and colonial denial as a pervasive backdrop in schools. Some describe students as bearing the brunt of the unthinking racism of non-Indigenous teachers, well-intentioned or not—a violation that can undo the positive impact of their efforts to engage Indigenous students in cultural learning. Some Indigenous educators also describe colonial attitudes and assumptions as being inherent in the dominant school system, and speak of the immense burden of having to continually address racism and educate non-Indigenous educators and students about the colonial past and present.

Overall, the contrast between these positions points to a broader need for educators to name and address colonial assumptions and racism more directly.

4.6 Overall Impact And Future Visions

[Students] talked about having a welcoming place where they could work every day. They talked about the change in the environment this year, from a place to more of a family place where they were part of a group of people who had a common purpose. (P6, p. 4)

With the CI we were able to fight to bring speakers and artists into the school, and then there was a significant change in the interest of other teachers as well. For me, as a teacher that felt isolated, that was a big deal. I was able to share resources but also conversations, presentations at staff meetings—not just working in a bubble, but having conversations with my colleagues. (T3, p.1)

A good report is how many teachers are coming back for more PD or more relationship-building activities. That might be more of an indicator of the effectiveness of the CI. (BL3, p. 4)

As these quotes from educators demonstrate, the Collaborative Inquiry process is having a number of significant, tangible, and sustained results, including:

- Changing the overall atmosphere and dynamics of schools;
- Improving bonds between teachers and between teachers and students;
- Enabling educators to come together to reflect, share, and find tangible ways to support Indigenous students;
- Breaking down the isolation that educators—and particularly, Indigenous educators—often experience in trying to carry out this work by fostering interest and conversation with other educators;
- Offering educators information regarding where their schools are truly at in addressing the needs and experiences of Indigenous students and communities, and enabling schools to create more consistent responses and more effective connections to local Indigenous communities;
- Fostering a sense that Indigenous students matter;
- Sustaining contexts in which educators are supported in taking thoughtful risks in addressing Indigenous content, perspectives, and pedagogies in the classroom; and
- Helping teachers leverage to do the work they want to do by fostering greater support from administration and building educator leadership.

The vast majority of participating educators concur that they would not be able to be as effective in supporting the achievement and well-being of Indigenous students without the CI. Even educators from schools with a number of pre-existing initiatives and established relationships saw the CI as supporting their success by offering critical questions, space and time for reflection, and opportunities to collect data and evaluate their practice.

Impact of the CI on Indigenous Students: Educators Perspectives

For my Indigenous students, their level of academic engagement across the board is more profound than it was without the CI. They are more interested in reading, in writing, in math, now school has become a site of interest, because they saw themselves reflected in something very important. (LT1, p. 3)

We didn't do behaviour management, and we have a class of pretty high flyers. On any day, there is always a trip to the office, but during the course of this project there was nothing at all. They truly felt respected, too. We respected them as learners. The question came from them. It was student-led, we were collaborating with them, with their learning. I can't even explain in words how powerful this experience was, for all learners. (LT1, p. 2)

One student introduced themselves in their own language, in Anishinaabemowin, in the past two years she never did that, but recently for the first time felt safe enough to do it. She is engaged in the language program, she is an example of the whole community wrapping

around her, the Elder, the community health worker supporting her, lunch and learn. (BL1, p. 2)

Educators report a number of significant impacts that CIs are having on Indigenous students, including observing that students are:

- Continuing to attend CI events and initiative, even if they are not as consistent in attending school;
- Getting more consistent attention from educators;
- Using Indigenous languages more often and becoming more fluent in them;
- Expressing more curiosity about their culture, heritage, and identity;
- More willing to participate in, learn about, and share cultural practices;
- Learning more about their cultural and family backgrounds;
- Being more willing to self-identify;
- Feeling more comfortable in school environments, especially when community members are present;
- Gaining confidence in sharing their knowledge, experiences, and perspectives; and
- Sharing knowledge with and becoming mentors and leaders of other students.

Many educators specifically point to Indigenous students expressing more pride in their heritage, identity, and community, particularly when they:

- Have their relationships with Elders and community members recognized in the school;
- See their parents sharing knowledge and offering leadership in the classroom;
- Share their own knowledge, learning, or newly acquired skills, with parents, community members, and the school community;
- Demonstrate leadership and offer support to younger students;
- Are able to speak knowledgeably about issues that affect their communities; and
- See teachers and administrators in their home communities and participating in community events.

Educators also note a number of changes in academic skills and skill-building, including Indigenous students:

- Shifting to more positive identities as 'good learners';
- Setting and meeting goals to improve their reading and overall academic skills (particularly in schools where CIs centred goals on improving reading scores); and
- Engaging more deeply and consistently in learning in school.

Some CIs in their 4th year are also beginning to observe concrete improvements in standardized test scores on EQAO, CAAT, and Insight measures, as well as improved rates of graduation among Indigenous students, particularly in schools with Graduation Coaches and Indigenous Tutors on staff.

Educators also note how non-Indigenous students also benefit in significant ways from CIs in their schools, including by:

- Learning with and from Indigenous students about the social causes of struggles on reserves;
- Being gently challenged to consider their own assumptions, stereotypes, prejudice, and privilege;
- Using statistics to explore differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, and asking questions about how such differences are produced;
- Learning histories of colonization as well as treaty relationships;
- Participating in Indigenous pedagogies, particularly on and with the land;
- Discussing the difference between guilt and responsibility in light of on-going colonization.

Chapter Conclusion

Educator interviews, roundtables, and talking circles conducted this year are consistent with many of the findings from previous years regarding educators' perspectives on the challenge of building sustaining partnerships with Indigenous communities and community members. This year's report takes this observation further by attending to ways that on-going relationships with Indigenous partners, community members, Elders, board leads, and Native Language and Culture Teachers are not only critical in supporting the well-being of Indigenous students and sustaining the overall CI, but in fostering and deepening the learning processes experienced by Educators.

Chapter Four also attends to the complex ways in which CIs have developed over the last four years, highlighting the importance of CIs receiving consistent funding, support, and time to be able to build sustainable team and community relationships, reflect on their collective experience, and refine or alter their programs. Educators consistently point to the need for continuity and consistency in the CI to build on successes and to demonstrate to Indigenous students, families, and communities, a solid commitment to Indigenous education.

Finally, this chapter builds on those of previous years by highlighting educators' perceptions of the important roles played by well-informed and supportive administrators, at both the school and board-level. Specifically, educators see such administrators as providing sustaining leadership for CIs by recognizing and supporting educators, offering crucial leadership and direction, gathering and distributing resources, creating incentives for disengaged educators, and helping to embed CIs within school and board planning processes.

This report cites a number of key challenges that continue to face educators as they work to educate themselves, to address their more disengaged or resistant colleagues, to ensure that the inclusion of Indigenous content moves beyond tokenism, and to spread the CI more broadly within their school or board. At the same time, as a whole educators interviewed for this report continue to point to the CI as having a significant impact on the learning and well-being of both Indigenous and non-

Indigenous students, on the decolonizing of their schools, and on their own learning and practice as educators.

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Appendix A

Letter of Introduction to the Directors of Education

To: Directors of Education

Date: April xx, 2017

From: Dr. Susan D. Dion
Faculty of Education,
York University

Subject: Indigenous Education- Focused Collaborative Inquiry Initiative
The Listening Stone Project Year Four: Learning From the Indigenous Education-Focused Collaborative Inquiry Initiative

As you are aware, the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) has commissioned a project regarding the Indigenous Education-Focused Collaborative Inquiry initiative. As the Principal Investigator (PI) for the project, I am providing additional details regarding the information being gathered in April and May 2017.

During the 2016-2017 school year your board, along with 43 other boards, participated in the Indigenous Education-Focused Collaborative Inquiry initiative. The purpose of this initiative is to increase Indigenous student well-being and achievement, support positive relationships with Indigenous communities, and increase knowledge, understanding and awareness of First Nation, 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 Indigenous Education-Focused Collaborative Inquiry teams. Informed by Indigenous research practices and protocols, my work is guided by the following principles: respect for existing knowledge and relationships within community, respect for Indigenous worldviews and traditions, action in support of the development of capacity and skill building, collaboration throughout the process, and ongoing response to community requests for involvement (Absolon and Wilett, 2004).

My work will involve gathering information from Indigenous community members, DSB participants and senior secondary school students involved in the collaborative inquiry. Working in collaboration with CI team leads I will identify and visit one secondary school and one elementary school in each of the four regions.

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 Indigenous student well-being and achievement

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

Provincial findings will be documented in a final report entitled: ***The Listening Stone Project Year Four: Learning From the Indigenous Education-Focused Collaborative Inquiry Initiative 2016-2017.***

In April and May participants will be invited to complete a survey; and, if interested, take part in individual voluntary and confidential 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. Additionally, initial findings will be provided to principals via webinar during June of 2017. These webinars will focus on regional trends and provide principals the opportunity to learn from the findings to inform their planning of programs and services.

Research team assistance includes: Angela Salamanca, M.Ed., Faculty of Education, York University; Krista Johnston, PhD, Gender and Women's Studies, York University and Carmen Carrero PhD Candidate Faculty of Education, York University.

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 Indigenous students families and communities.

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

Appendix B

Assent Script for Over-the-Phone Interviews*

Date of Interview:

Name of Researcher:

Hello, my name is _____ and I'm a researcher with the Indigenous Collaborative Inquiry Initiative called the *Listening Stone* Project led by Dr. Susan Dion. Can I ask you questions about your experience participating in the Indigenous Collaborative Inquiry? Your participation is completely voluntary and anonymous

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 20-30 minutes depending on your responses. Your name will not appear on the interview transcript. I will only describe your role as _____ (Teacher/SWST/Principal/Board Lead/ Centrally Assigned Support Staff/Community Member)

Appendix C

Interview Schedules

Talking Circles: Questions for Community Member

Introduction

Over the past 2-4 years, teachers at schools in your community have been part of a Collaborative Inquiry Project focused on First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education. We are here to learn from you about what the schools are doing and what more they could be doing to support Indigenous student well-being and achievement.

Questions to Initiate Discussion

- 1) How would you describe the current relationship between the Indigenous community and the school community?
- 2) When supporting Indigenous students what are schools doing well?
- 3) What changes need to happen in schools to improve education for Indigenous students?
- 4) What would you say is the most significant need with regard to Indigenous student well-being and achievement in your community?
- 5) During the past 2-4 years educators in this school have been working to improve education for Indigenous students. What have you experienced during the past few years?
 - How would you describe school-community relationships during the past 2-4 years?
 - What changes have you noticed and how have these changes impacted Indigenous students?
 - What could Educators do to improve school experiences for Indigenous students?
 - What advice do you have for school principals about supporting Indigenous students?
- 6) Is there anything else you want to add?

Talking Circles: Senior Secondary School Students

6. Introduction

Over the past 2-4 years, teachers at your schools have been part of a Collaborative Inquiry Project focused on Indigenous Education. During the past 3 years we've been talking with teachers and now we'd like to hear from you. What do you see happening in your school, what changes have you noticed, what further changes would you like to see?

Initiating Activity

*** While I planned to do this as an initiating activity in practice it worked better as a culminating activity**

Working in pairs Talking Circle participants will be given cameras and asked to take 2 photos of places in their school that they like, and 2 photos of places that they don't like. *This might require some pre-planning and facilitation if students are coming from different schools. Facilitators will prepare pictures of common school spaces: office, library, gym to share and talk about during the talking circle.

The talking circle will begin with pizza/lunch and a discussion of their photographs

- Tell us about these places: What do you like/not like about them? Why/how are they important to you?
- What would you change about these places if you could?
- Referencing photos of the school office, library, gym & other sites that facilitators photograph (if they didn't come up in students' own photographs): How do you feel about these places?

Additional Specific Questions

1. What makes you feel good about coming to school and going to class?
2. Have you noticed any changes in your school over the past few years, can you tell us about those changes?
3. What do your teachers do to help you and your classmates learn about Indigenous history and culture?
4. What classes do you like and why do you like them?
5. Describe the relationship between your community and your school, your family and your school?
6. What does your school do well?
7. What changes need to happen in schools to improve education for Indigenous students?

8. Is there anything else you want to add?

LSY4 IQs For Educators

Interview Questions Educators

****These questions were also adapted and used in the Educator Talking Circles***

- 1) Describe your involvement in the Indigenous Education- Focused CI – explain any differences over the years of the inquiry initiative.
- 2) How has being a part of this CI impacted your learning and your work?
- 3) In what ways has the CI continued to affect school-Indigenous community relationships?
- 4) What would you do next to further cultivate positive relationships between local Indigenous communities and your school communities?
- 5) What strategies did your Indigenous Education CI team use to gather evidence of impact on students?
- 6) Did and if so how did Indigenous students benefit from participating in this initiative for a second/third year?
- 7) How did Indigenous students respond to participating in the initiative for a second/third or fourth year? What stories do they tell about their learning?
- 8) What would you say is the most significant need in your school/DSB with regard to Indigenous student well-being and achievement?
- 9) What are the most significant challenges teachers confront in teaching Indigenous content?
- 10) Is there anything else you want to share about the Indigenous Education-Focused CI?

Appendix D

Learning Experiences & Student Voice
LESSON DESCRIPTION: Click here to enter text.
PURPOSE: Click here to enter text.
LEARNING GOALS: Click here to enter text.
EDUCATORS' REFLECTIONS: Click here to enter text.
Students' Responses:
Submit completed form to Dr. Susan D. Dion sdion@edu.yorku.ca