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Improving the Education Outcomes of Aboriginal People Living Off-Reserve: *A Discussion of Delivery Models*

Summary report of presentations delivered at The Colloquium on Improving the Educational Outcomes of Aboriginal People Living Off-Reserve,

**Monday March 15, 2010 and Tuesday March 16, 2010
Delta Bessborough, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan**

Report prepared by:

Saskatchewan Educational Leadership Unit

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WORKSHOP SUMMARY REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The mandate of the Office of the Federal Interlocutor (OFI) is to manage and strengthen federal strategies and relationships towards urban, Non-Status, and Métis Aboriginal peoples in Canada. To be able to advise Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) on the specific needs of these groups, the OFI commissions special events and forums to inform its work and provide policy and practice discussions.

The Colloquium sessions, collectively entitled *Improving the Educational Outcomes of Aboriginal People Living Off-Reserve: A Discussion of Delivery Models*, presented content and themes relevant to the OFI's mandate to manage and strengthen federal strategies and relationships with urban, Non-status, and Métis people in Canada.

The Colloquium was held March 15-16, 2010, at the Delta Bessborough, Saskatoon, SK. It was organized by the College of Education and the Johnson-Shoyama School of Public Policy at the University of Saskatchewan with administrative support from the Saskatchewan Educational Leadership Unit (SELU). The Colloquium was sponsored by the Ministry of Education, the Province of Saskatchewan, in partnership with the Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non- Status Indians, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

Across Canada, improving the education of Aboriginal people off-reserve is recognized as an increasingly important issue; nonetheless, there are relatively few events to share knowledge, experience, and research pertaining to the topic. Perspectives on Indigenous realities rarely focus on improving education off-reserve. Instead, there is a tendency to study the education of Aboriginal people generically under the assumption that First Nations issues on-reserve are similar to those in an off-reserve environment.

As recognized by Statistics Canada (2008), 60% of First Nations people now live off-reserve. An increasingly large number of First Nations people are migrating from reserves and are being educated within provincial systems. This demographic trend highlights the relevancy and purpose of this Colloquium: to gain a better understanding of the pedagogical requirements, governmental implications, and educational aspects of Aboriginal peoples living off-reserve. This colloquium brought together a rich network of Canadian researchers and speakers dedicated to improving the education of Aboriginal people living off-reserve.

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Drawing upon recent Canadian census results and research findings derived from the Aboriginal People's Survey (APS), speakers reported that achievement gaps in young Aboriginals' education continue to persist. The speakers placed special attention on

proposing unique delivery models that would be most appropriate to improving the experience and outcomes for Aboriginal people in public school systems.

Overarching questions that were addressed during the Colloquium included: What curricular, governance, and delivery models are most likely to improve both the experience and success of Aboriginal students in publicly-regulated Kindergarten to grade-12 school systems? How do we define and measure the success of Aboriginal students who attend school off-reserve?

To address these and other questions, the Colloquium organizers assembled a group of prominent local, provincial, and national speakers. During the Colloquium, small group discussions called “Table Topics” enabled participants to deliberate, discuss, and articulate practices related to information presented by the speakers.

OBJECTIVES

The six themes of the Colloquium are outlined below:

I. Policy Questions: Population Perspectives and Geographic Variations: Papers were presented by the Society of the Advancement of Excellence in Education along with a review of an Environics survey of National Aboriginal Achievement.

II. Context of Aboriginal K to 12 Education: Papers presented highlighted census data and Statistics Canada research findings about education levels and satisfaction with education in Canadian provinces. In addition, contextual factors for consideration of Colloquium participants included poverty, colonialism, legal issues, removing obstacles to success, and educational requirements Aboriginal students will need for success upon entering the world after public school.

III. Curriculum Questions: Presentation of papers about curriculum content included highlighted research findings and information related to Aboriginal language as a bridge to improved educational relevance, engagement, and achievement.

IV. Toward Seamless Transitions in K to 12 Education On- and Off-reserve: Papers presenting options and key factors for success of K-12 transitions were addressed from a broad range of perspectives.

V. Governance and Service Delivery in the Off-reserve Context: The exploration of papers about creative governance and service delivery partnership models presented inspiring options and key factors related to addressing current needs.

VI. Publicly Regulated Education Systems: A role in Reconciliation: Papers presented about the education of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students discussed the history, treaties, and best practices for decolonizing classrooms.

The workshop sessions were each one and one-half hours in length, with two keynote sessions given each morning and one keynote session scheduled for each afternoon. For

additional information, look for the Colloquium companion documents posted at the University of Saskatchewan, College of Education website:

<http://www.usask.ca/education/aboriginal/colloquium/index.php>

This companion documents include the presenter biographies and their respective presentation slides.

The afternoon Table Topic small group sessions provided discussion opportunities for small groups. In the small groups participants reacted to the papers and the product of these discussions was documented as part of the Colloquium process.

Including speakers, approximately 70 people attended the Colloquium each day. Colloquium co-chairs Drs. Sheila Carr Stewart (College of Education, U of S) and Evelyn Peters (Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy, U of S) chaired the sessions. Participants came from across Canada and represented a wide variety of backgrounds, including academic institutions, provincial and federal government departments, and Aboriginal representative organizations. Dr. Jim Propp, consultant with SELU, summarized the conference proceedings in preparation for writing this report.

DAY ONE, MARCH 15, 2010: WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS

Dr. Evelyn Peters, Professor and Canada Research Chair, Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy, University of Saskatchewan opened the Colloquium. Dr. Peters welcomed participants and expressed appreciation for the partnership between The College of Education, the University of Saskatchewan, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, the Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, partners of the Colloquium.

Dr. Peters introduced Elder Jean Sutherland who welcomed everyone to the seminar. Elder Sutherland commented on the “tough work” that Colloquium participants had ahead of them, and wished everyone well. Speaking in Cree, Sutherland gave the blessing.

Dean Cecilia Reynolds, Dean of the College of Education, welcomed everyone on behalf of the College of Education. Reynolds updated Colloquium participants that enhancing engagement of Aboriginal and First Nations students was also one of the pillars of the College’s strategic plan. Dean Reynolds reported that the College of Education has a long history of delivering teacher training programs via the Indian Teacher Education Program (ITEP), the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP), and the Northern Teacher Education Program (NORTEP), and that these programs form the “heart of the College of Education services.” The Aboriginal Education and Research Centre (AERC), also situated at the College, features a unique research program and post-graduate programming options.

Dean Reynolds acknowledged the efforts of the Colloquium organizers Dr. Sheila Carr Stewart, Dr. Keith Walker, Dr. Norm Dray, and Jane Preston, doctoral candidate.

Michael Atkinson, Executive Director from the Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy was the next speaker to address the participants. Atkinson explained that this conference is exactly the type of initiative the school of public policy should be involved in given that involvement in decision making for new educational systems, delivery of programs, and positive outcomes for Aboriginal and First Nations learners in Saskatchewan is consistent with the school’s mandate. Atkinson thanked everyone for attending, wished everyone well and invited each person to enjoy the conference.

Allan MacDonald, Director General, Office of the Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, added his comments about the Colloquium. First, MacDonald spoke about education as an indicator of success and as a measure of Canada moving forward economically, socially, and mentally. He then highlighted the need for closer collaboration among First Nations education, and provincial and territorial educational systems. MacDonald commented that this Colloquium is about the exchange of ideas and transferrable models of education that may result in three desirable outcomes: (a)

improvements in making changes better; (b) doing more to identify best practices while recognizing and ending poor practices; and, (c) participants leaving this Colloquium, returning to positions of influence, and articulating into action the outcomes derived over these next two days. Macdonald concluded by thanking everyone for being in attendance and for coming prepared to share ideas.

Darren McKee, Assistant Deputy Minister of Education, Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, thanked Elder Sutherland for the prayer and recognized that the Colloquium proceedings were occurring in Treaty Six territory. McKee thanked the conference partners and acknowledged First Nations and Métis participants for the important work they do. He outlined three educational imperatives for the participants to consider and included: (a) focusing on all children but especially Aboriginal children for whom the system needs adjusting; (b) inviting participants to speak for constituents not present; and, (c) building, sharing, and leading. McKee mentioned that he expected some solutions to be generated during the Colloquium, but also recognized the likelihood that more questions would emerge in the process of creating solutions for improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students.

Dr. Peters closed the introductory session and commented that the opening remarks provided a snapshot of the current status of First Nations and Aboriginal education, and highlighted the educational areas requiring exploration by Colloquium participants.

SESSION A: STATEMENT OF KEY POLICY QUESTIONS

The morning presentations focused on the extensive data set that describes Aboriginal learners' educational outcomes and the persistence of achievement gaps for Aboriginal students' despite their aspirations for educational success. According to Session A speakers, one key to addressing the achievement gap is to focus energy and resources on developing policies that will scale-up best practice strategies and lead to improving educational outcomes for the students.

“IMPROVING THE EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE: KEY POLICY QUESTIONS” - Jarrett Laughlin, Senior Research Analyst, Canadian Council on Learning, Toronto

Redefining success was the key point of Laughlin's presentation, Laughlin's comments underscored the need for policy makers and educators to shift focus and concentrate on developing appropriate schemas for measuring and improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students. To this end Laughlin provided a review of the key findings related to Aboriginal learning and followed this up with the recommendation that current policy and programs move toward more informed solutions.

WHAT WE KNOW

There is a tremendous amount of research evidence illustrating the factors that contribute

to educational success for Aboriginal learners including effective teaching, engaged parents, relevant curriculum, Aboriginal language and culture, and positive role models. There are a considerable number of solutions, but why is there so little improvement in Aboriginal learners' educational outcomes?

Two possible reasons included:

1. The definition of success currently in place and,
2. The indicators measuring success have been ineffective.

So what we know about Aboriginal learning points towards the development of resilient policy and program options that reflect a new definition of success for Aboriginal learners that includes an appropriate definition of success and relevant measures and indicators of success.

REDEFINING SUCCESS IN ABORIGINAL LEARNING

2007 was a critical year for Aboriginal learning because a new broader definition of Aboriginal learning was recognized. The new definition was spiritually oriented, holistic, and embraced lifelong learning that was rooted in Aboriginal language and knowledge. This new definition of learning integrated Aboriginal and Western knowledge.

In June 2007, community workshops resulted in the creation of three lifelong learning models described as: (a) lifelong learning journey, (b) economic, environmental, physical and social well-being, and, (c) sources of knowledge and knowing. In November, 2007, new measurement approaches were needed that

- Monitored the full spectrum of life-long learning,
- Reflected the nature of Aboriginal learning and the importance of experiential learning,
- Accounted for political, economic, and social realities, and
- Focused on learning successes rather than learning deficits.

Taking these Aboriginal learning characteristics into consideration, the measurement model that evolved represented an overlap of Aboriginal perspectives of learning with conventional measurement approaches and this new measurement framework and associated indicators emerged from the overlap.

POLICY AND PROGRAM OPTIONS

The new *Holistic Lifelong Learning Measurement Framework* debuted in December 2009, and featured new information about Aboriginal learning, elements common to the three lifelong learning models, and successfully integrated the unique learning perspectives of each model. The new framework provided a more complete picture of the state of Aboriginal education in Canada.

The *Holistic Lifelong Learning Measurement Framework* reflects a more complete picture of Aboriginal learning. The new *Framework* enables informed solutions to be made while moving policy and program development away from dwelling on Aboriginal students' learning deficits. With an orientation towards developing solutions the new *Framework*, in addressing challenges in the classroom, takes into account non-learning factors such as home and community factors. In this way policy and programs can shift attention to developing solutions that recognize, build upon and celebrate Aboriginal learner strengths.

“IMPROVING THE EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE LIVING OFF- RESERVE: EVIDENCE FROM BC AND ELSEWHERE.” - Dr. John Richards, Simon Fraser University

British Columbia is the only Canadian jurisdiction that assembles and publishes detailed primary and secondary school-level data on Aboriginal student progress. Every year students in grades 4 and 7 complete the Foundational Skills Assessment (FSA) and FSA results classify student performance as “exceeding expectations,” “meeting expectations,” and “not meeting expectations.”

CHANGING COMMUNITIES AND SCHOOLS

Aboriginal people are moving into urban areas and approximately 50% of the Aboriginal populations live in urban communities. With respect to Aboriginal families living on reserves, 40% of their children attend provincial schools, and 60% attend one of the 500 reserve schools located across Canada. In Saskatchewan and Manitoba, 30% of school populations are comprised of Aboriginal and First Nations students, but keep in mind that there is tremendous mobility among Aboriginal families.

2006 CENSUS: LEVELS OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

There has been significant intergenerational progress among Métis and non-Aboriginal students in the area of Highest Educational Level by selected age groups. The 2006 census reports some progress with Aboriginal and First Nations high school completion rates with the age 45 and over cohort and the younger cohort, but high school completion rates seem to have stalled for the age 25-35 cohort.

In Canada high school completion is considered the first rung on the employment ladder and the first step in living without social assistance. In Saskatchewan, the Aboriginal high school completion rate is below national averages and even lower among Indian/First Nations than Métis; furthermore, high school completion rate is lower among Aboriginal men than women. As revealed by the Saskatchewan data, high school graduation rate is 20% for Aboriginal students and students residing in northern communities.

According to the 2006 census data, Aboriginal education problems are cumulative from primary grades and lead to high dropout rates in upper secondary grades. The performance gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students widens significantly

by grade 11. The question becomes what accounts for this gap in achievement?

ABORIGINAL STUDENTS: THE FSA AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND ACHIEVEMENT DATA

From an economists view, there is both a supply of and demand for education and each has its own key factors. The demand side factors include:

- State of the labour market (e.g., recent oil boom, welfare access, high unemployment regions),
- Culture (e.g., legacy of residential school, fear of assimilation).

The supply side factors include:

- Family characteristics (e.g., income, parents' education, family mobility),
- School quality (e.g., district level strategies, teacher quality/value of stable teaching staff), and
- Student peer effect.

With respect to educational supply and demand, the policy question that emerged is: Why is it that some school divisions are finding way better academic performance and achievement than one might expect despite the social and family factors at play? What practices are fostering higher performance and more positive educational outcomes?

Summarizing Aboriginal student FSA performance data from 366 BC schools enabled the five top performing schools and the five bottom performing schools to be revealed. But what are schools doing that enabled high performing students and successful educational outcomes?

British Columbia is the only Canadian jurisdiction that assembles and regularly publishes school- level evidence on Aboriginal student progress during primary and secondary education. Since the 1999-2000 school year, all BC students in grades 4 and 7 have taken basic cognitive skills tests in reading, writing, and numeracy. The FSA data used in this study include results by school and by various characteristics of student populations, including gender and Aboriginal identity.

Published FSA data classify student performance in terms of three grades: “exceeding expectations,” “meeting expectations,” and “not meeting expectations.” The most commonly used statistic is the ratio of the number of schools’ test scores in which students meet or exceed expectations to the number of test scores in a particular school, school district, or entire province. The average meet-exceed ratio (MER) for Aboriginal students was lower across grade and subject levels for the period between 2001 and 2006.

THE TOP AND THE BOTTOM

The study forecast the expected MER for Aboriginal students in each of 366 schools spread across 43 school districts. The districts were ranked by the percent of schools

whose Aboriginal students performed above forecast.

In the top performing districts, Aboriginal MER ranged between 68.2% and 75.1 % and non- Aboriginal MER scores were between 76.3% and 83.9%. In these districts, 70% or more of the schools were above the forecast MER scores.

In the bottom performing districts Aboriginal MER scores were between 35.6% and 57.0% whereas non-Aboriginal MER scores were between 75.5% and 82.9%. In these bottom-performing districts no schools were above the forecast MER scores.

POSSIBILITIES FOR POLICY?

The Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement (AEEA) is an agreement between local aboriginal communities (Status On-Reserve First Nations, other First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and other off-reserve people of Aboriginal ancestry), the school district, and the Ministry of Education for the Province of British Columbia.

The AEE agreement establishes the structures and processes that the parties and other partners commit to use to achieve ongoing improvement in the school learning achievement of Aboriginal learners. The goal, indicators, and target of the agreement are living dimensions with which the parties will work together in good faith to reflect growth in the outcomes that are ambitious, meaningful, relevant, realistic, and attainable for the program and the learners.

The agreement outlines with the provincial government regarding where school districts currently are with respect to Aboriginal and First Nations education and where they intend to be in 3-4 years. The AEEA contains:

- a statement of purpose,
- goals, indicators, targets,
- performance data, and
- Aboriginal Education Planning Council.

In the top-performing BC schools, a correspondence is noted between district MER rankings, signed agreements, and the publishing of annual reports; conversely, with the five bottom performing school districts a correspondence is noted between district MER rankings and a record of signed agreements that go back to 2006 and 2008, but to date have not published any annual reports.

Successful districts emphasize Aboriginal education success as a long-term priority that involves Aboriginal leaders and the broader community, and use objective data on Aboriginal student performance in design of policy and follow through on policy implementation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the research findings derived from Richards study, he offered the following recommendations for strengthening the foundations of Aboriginal educational outcomes.

1. Early childhood education (ECE) is a valuable investment particularly for children from marginalized communities few of whose members have a tradition of formal education. All Aboriginal children should have access to ECE, either on- or off-reserve, as is the case.
2. Provincial education ministries should expand existing provincial precedents that enable school districts to undertake discretionary Aboriginal education initiatives.
3. School districts are, in provincial systems, the locus for a great deal of what is good – and what is bad – in Aboriginal education. Provinces should enable local Aboriginal organizations and individuals to participate in school/district governance where numbers warrant.
4. To improve quality of school management, bands should form school authorities [and] as inducement to bands to consolidate school management under school authorities, INAC should offer a significant - at least 25% - increase in per student funding for schools organized into school authorities.
5. Provincial ministries, band councils, and First Nations school authorities (where they exist) should engage in comprehensive performance measurement activities and the results should be publically reported.
6. The provinces should undertake more aggressive affirmative action to encourage Aboriginal post-secondary students to become teachers. Provincial teacher training institutions should require courses in Aboriginal history and culture for all who aspire to a teaching career.

CONCLUSION

In BC a number of things have been done that are fostering improvement in Aboriginal student achievement outcomes. The school district represents an important foundation on which to base improvements, but district level strategies are not the only piece in the puzzle surrounding Aboriginal student educational outcomes. District level strategies are, however, an area where greater policymaking attention should be directed.

“POLICY LEVERS FOR IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR OFF-RESERVE STUDENTS”: - Helen Raham, Educational Consultant, Kelowna BC

Aboriginal education is a top priority in the Canadian national policy agenda. As illustrated by this Colloquium, educators and policy makers from all jurisdictions in Canada are coming together to identify and/or create policies and strategies designed to

dramatically enhance the education success of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students. Not surprisingly, there are three recurring challenges to rational decision-making:

- The tangle of governance that pervades Aboriginal education and reform efforts.
- The absence of coherent data on how existing policies are working.
- The complexities of the teaching-learning relationship and the many factors that influence student success. With the abundance of unique and interdependent factors embedded in the education experience, how do we set out to identify policies that hold the greatest potential for leveraging wholesale educational success for the Aboriginal student cohort?

In recognition of the complexity of the challenge associated with factors inherent in the teaching-learning relationship, Raham's presentation highlighted a systematic and multidimensional approach to policy-making and began with a summary of the research across eight domains that influence educational outcomes for Aboriginal learners.

The Canadian and international research included evidence on delivery models and approaches used, performance and success rates, implementation issues, and promising practices. Implications for policy within each domain included identification and "scaling up" of what works in order to leverage greater progress for more students. Given the theme of this Colloquium, the policies identified are oriented towards improving outcomes for off-reserve Aboriginal students. Ten policy recommendations "with the collective power to close the achievement gap" concluded this presentation.

STRATEGIC APPROACHES

This section presents the key findings related to the eight domains that influence educational outcomes for Aboriginal learners along with discussion of policies for "scaling up" practices with the potential to leverage greater progress for more students.

The research identified eight key domains influencing educational outcomes and included:

- Literacy and language,
- Culturally-based curriculum and instruction,
- Student engagement and retention,
- Home and community partnerships,
- Teacher supply, quality and support,
- School leadership,
- School programming and
- Assessment, monitoring and reporting

LITERACY AND LANGUAGE

Literacy and language skills were critical to learning and academic success and were a key predictor of high school completion. Successful literacy programs also encompassed high quality pre-school programming, and included expert teaching of reading across the curriculum at all grade levels. For Aboriginal learners, oral language was a bridge to development of reading proficiency and, with skilled instruction Aboriginal children can learn to read well in either their first or second language.

Teachers' expertise was a critical factor to students' language and literacy success; teachers have to know what to do and when to do it. Children taught by teachers who had received literacy coaching tended to make greater literacy gains in comparison to children whose teachers had not received literacy coaching. Hence, school-based literacy coaches can have a powerful role in staff development and, therefore, school districts should ensure that every school has a literacy coach on site.

CULTURALLY BASED CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Culturally based curriculum and instruction that included culturally relevant materials was widely accepted as beneficial to Aboriginal learners. The research showed that cultural connectedness was a key to learner success, however, the degree of culturally based curriculum and instruction in the educational program should be determined by a collaborative process between the school community, Aboriginal parents, Elders, and community. A community that was engaged in the educational process was found to contribute to greater success with learners.

ENGAGEMENT AND INSTRUCTION

Dropping out of school is entirely preventable because it is often related to in-school conditions including lack of supportive relationships, weak instruction and support services, perceived irrelevant curriculum, poor attendance and behavior, and low parental engagement with the school. With successful engagement and retention practices, it is essential that schools learn, develop, and/or acquire the interventions and supports required to keep Aboriginal students engaged in school and planning for higher education, training, and successful entry into the workforce.

Attendance is strongly associated with school completion and, therefore, schools must be proactive in addressing attendance, tardiness, and behavior issues. Relevant programming and positive and supportive in-school and community relationships are also key issues for learner success. Lack of attendance was a symptom of rather than an obstacle to educational success for Aboriginal learners.

HOME AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Success rates improved for Aboriginal learners when parents and community were involved in the education of their children. International research findings in the areas of

Home and Community Involvement identified that families play a vital role in learning success because families not only help their children learn, but families also instill positive attitudes and motivation regarding learning.

Partnership efforts should focus on increasing student engagement and achievement. The role of Aboriginal parents and community should become an integral component in the formal decision-making structure (e.g., school board trustees, school councils) and informal avenues of participation. Efforts to realize and build capacity among Aboriginal families and communities to support learning will pay off over time.

TEACHER SUPPLY, QUALITY AND SUPPORT

Pedagogy is the critical variable in improving outcomes for at-risk populations: simply put, good teaching is a fundamental to Aboriginal learners' success. Not surprisingly, the recruitment and training of teachers for Aboriginal classrooms is a top priority in Canada. Teacher expertise has powerful effects on student learning, but so do "soft skills" including teachers who are warm and caring, hold high expectations, and possess an extensive repertoire of instructional strategies and knowledge of culturally appropriate approaches.

Professional development matters. In fact, fact school-based teams that provided sustained and ongoing school-embedded professional development that focused on deepening teachers' pedagogical skills and content knowledge resulted in improved teacher practices, enhanced student achievement, and demonstrated larger effects at lower performing schools.

Mentoring, leadership, and internship types of programs for new teachers along with training and credentialing programs for mentors should also pay long-term dividends in student achievement. Education authorities at the district level should allocate staff who have the expertise to coordinate, support, and evaluate services for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students.

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Schools serving First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students require exceptionally skilled and committed principals who must be adept at creating a safe and welcoming environment for Aboriginal learners. School leadership needs to establish high expectations and integrate programming and services to support their needs. Similarly, incorporating Aboriginal cultures and languages into the school's curriculum and life of the school create cultural connections.

Recruiting and developing a high quality and resilient staff and building positive relationships with parents and communities enables engagement in the educational process and another relevant connection among educational partners. At the district and school levels, investments in policies that strengthen school leadership translate into improved Aboriginal student performance.

SCHOOL PROGRAMMING

Research findings related to effective programming pointed out that Aboriginal learners and their families benefitted from seamless programming from early childhood to post-secondary education. The most effective school programming was holistic with a broad range of supports - and community resources - for students and their families to achieve this goal. Programming was flexible and personalized for particular learners' needs and was enhanced by the contributions made by Aboriginal educators, support workers, community connectors, and Elders.

Additionally, full-service community schools contributed to reducing risky behaviors in at-risk youth and had positive effects on attendance, achievement and family involvement. The full-service model required fundamental changes in school organization and program delivery; however, delivery of high quality programs and services can be challenging for remote communities and schools with low enrolments.

ASSESSMENT, MONITORING AND REPORTING

Schools and school systems focused on improvement routinely collected and used evidence in planning and decision-making. For instance, performance information was used in achievement gap analysis, planning, and resource allocation. Among assessment practices, classroom based formative assessment techniques enabled improved learning, and tended to have the greatest effects with lower-achieving students. Teacher proficiency in using assessment to guide instruction was a key factor in the progress of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students.

KEY IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

A coordinated approach to educational policy that collectively addresses these eight key areas of influence is the most effective strategy for improving Aboriginal students' educational performance and achievement. The key policy recommendations include the following:

- Literacy is a priority for all Aboriginal students. Invest in teacher training, recruitment and professional development and create conditions for success in delivering quality Aboriginal language programs.
- Cultural connectedness is a key to improving education achievement for Aboriginal students; therefore increase the relevancy of their learning by investing in the training of culturally proficient teachers and partnerships with Aboriginal organizations to develop high quality local cultural curricula and learning activities.
- Engagement is demonstrated by student attendance and attendance is key to school completion. Build upon the in-school supports including tutoring, homework clubs and build upon the family and community supports consistent with the full

service school model described earlier in this summary.

- Ensure that all necessary steps are taken to develop a sufficient supply of highly skilled teachers for Aboriginal classrooms and enable ongoing and meaningful professional development including mentoring.
- Strengthen the accountability and capacity of school boards to govern for continuous improvement in the educational achievement of the Aboriginal cohort.

It is important to acknowledge the inter-relatedness of these strategies and the need to implement them in tandem; action on some policy items while ignoring others will not lead to positive results. Raham concluded this presentation saying, “among school administrators, parents, and chiefs there is much resistance to the [educational outcomes indicator] numbers and there is fear in Aboriginal communities that the numbers will be used to embarrass, or shame them.” With that said, Raham acknowledged that “there is a need for more research to dig down and reveal best practices and more needs to be done with information sharing.”

SESSION B: CONTEXTS OF ABORIGINAL EDUCATION K-12

“AN OVERVIEW OF EDUCATION DATA FOR INUIT, MÉTIS, AND OFF-RESERVE FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE” - Evelyne Bougie, Statistics Canada, Aboriginal Statistics Program

Dr. Bougie presented current education data related to Inuit, Métis, and off-reserve First Nations that included demographics on levels of schooling; factors related to school achievement; and language and culture at school.

DEMOGRAPHICS ON LEVEL OF SCHOOLING

According to the 2006 Canada Census of Population report, greater numbers of Aboriginal people do not have a high school diploma in comparison to the general Canadian population. Within the Aboriginal 25-54 years of age cohort, 25% of women and 31% of men have less than a high school diploma. In contrast, 11% of non-Aboriginal women and 14% of non-Aboriginal men hold less than a high school diploma. In Saskatchewan the percentages are slightly higher with 26% of Aboriginal women and 33% of Aboriginal men having less than a high school diploma, in comparison to 11% of non-Aboriginal women and 18% of non-Aboriginal men who reported less than a high school diploma.

Interestingly, findings derived from the 2006 Aboriginal Peoples’ Survey (APS) identified the top reasons Aboriginal men and women age 15-34 did not complete their schooling. For men, 26% indicated they left school early because they wanted to work. As for women, 23% reported that they left school early because of pregnancy and/or to take care of children.

That Aboriginal people are more likely to have completed apprenticeships, or a trade and/or college certificate was another finding highlighted in the 2006 Canada Census of population data.

FACTORS RELATED TO SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT

This section of the presentation contained highlights from the study, *School Experiences of Off-Reserve First Nations Children Aged 6 to 14* which is available at <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/090116/dq090116a-eng.htm>.

First Nations children aged 6 to 14 who lived off reserve were as likely as all children in Canada to be doing well in school (based on parents' knowledge of their child's school work, including report cards).

In 2006, about seven in 10 off-reserve First Nations children aged six to 14 were reported by their parents to be doing very well or well in school. These findings are similar to those for children aged six to 14 in the general Canadian population.

First Nations girls were more likely to be reported as doing very well or well in school, as compared with First Nations boys. These findings are also similar to those for the general population in Canada.

Among First Nations girls aged six to 14 who lived off reserve, three-quarters were reported by their parents as doing very well or well in school, compared with 65% of their male counterparts.

The key factors associated with higher perceived school achievement are the following

1. School factors

- Getting along well with teachers or classmates.
- Having parents who were strongly satisfied with their child's school including the quality of teaching, the academic standards, and level of discipline.

2. Out-of-school activities:

- Reading books every day.
- Playing sports at least once a week.
- Taking part in art/music activities at least once a week.

3. Socio-demographic factors:

- Living in households classified within the highest income range.

The factors associated with lower perceived school achievement present a contrasting view and include the following factors.

1. School factors:

- Prolonged absenteeism i.e., during the school year missing school for two

or more consecutive weeks.

2. Health factors:

- Learning disability or attention deficit disorder.

3. Family background:

- Parents attended Residential Schools. Children whose parents had attended residential schools were less likely to do very well or well than those whose parents had not attended Residential Schools. About 12% of off-reserve First Nations children had parents (one or both) who indicated that they had been students in the residential school system that operated across Canada between 1830 and the 1990s.

Off-reserve parents of First Nations children indicated that they were satisfied with their child's education. On the 2006 APS survey parents surveyed reported 95% strongly agree or agree to the statement that the school provided enough information about their child's attendance; 89% strongly agree or agree that they were satisfied with the quality of teaching at the school; 85% strongly agree or agree with the statement that their child was challenged to work to his/her full potential at school.

Parents also reported high levels of satisfaction with the school having high academic standards and strongly agreed or agreed with the availability of extracurricular activities at the school.

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE AT SCHOOL

Aboriginal language spoke by First Nations children was most commonly found in North West Territories schools. In the Territories 66% of First Nations children aged six to 14 reported using their Aboriginal language 'some to all of the time' at school; similarly, in the Yukon, 51% of students aged six to 14 reported using their Aboriginal language 'some to all of the time'. In British Columbia and Atlantic Canada, 18% of students reported using their Aboriginal language some to all of the time, compared to 17% of students in the Prairies, and 12% in Ontario.

Studies in the area of Aboriginal language learning, acquisition, and use found that speaking an Aboriginal language may contribute to positive self-esteem, community well-being, and cultural connectedness. Fluency in an Aboriginal language positively impacts self-esteem, which was associated with positive school achievement.

In the area of culture at school, there was a positive impact made by Aboriginal teachers teaching Aboriginal children. At the high end of the spectrum, the 2006 APS results revealed that 50% of Inuit children were taught by an Inuk teacher and 49% of Inuit children were taught in the Inuit language.

Among Métis children aged six to 14, the Aboriginal Peoples' Survey findings identified that in the matter of 'helping Métis children learn an Aboriginal language' teachers

ranked third (22%) behind parents (43%) and grandparents (39%), although the important role schools play in learning Aboriginal languages cannot be overlooked.

About half (53%) of the Aboriginal high school students aged 15 and older reported that they were learning about Aboriginal Peoples in school and 45% of students perceived that what they were being taught was usually accurate.

IN CLOSING

Information drawn from the 2006 Canada Census and 2006 Aboriginal Peoples' Survey highlighted that the factors associated with off-reserve First Nations children's educational achievement were similar to the factors associated with students' educational success within Canada's general population.

Although the Census and APS research findings identified an improved educational profile of First Nations peoples living off reserve in Canada, high school completion rates continue to be lower than high school completion rates found within the total Canadian population.

It is exciting to see the positive impacts of school factors on improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal students. The school factors included Aboriginal teachers teaching children Aboriginal language and culture, regular reading and fine arts programming, and meaningful and accessible after school and extracurricular programs.

“IMPROVING THE EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE LIVING OFF- RESERVE: A DISCUSSION OF DELIVERY MODELS” - Maureen Johns Simpson, Executive Director, First Nations, Métis, and Community Education, Saskatchewan Ministry of Education.

First Nations and Métis (FN/M) education is foundational across the curriculum in Saskatchewan. First Nations and Métis educational achievement was deemed so important to the province that it warranted its own branch within the Ministry of Education. In this session, Ms Johns Simpson presented a synopsis of, *Inspiring Success: Building Towards Student Achievement*, the provincial policy document governing FN/M education within the K-12 education system.

CONTEXT

When thinking about FN/M and Inuit education policy development, it is context - not paternalism - that is a key priority in the matter of educating children. Context focused on the elements that all humans hold in common, or should hold in common, included a holistic view of the child and recognition that children are not yours or mine, but rather, children are *ours*.

Worldviews and educational paradigms are fundamental to the manner in which learners experience, engage and contribute to society. Similarly, the function and outcomes of

education are reflections of the prevailing worldview and educational paradigm. For instance, in education today context relates to the ways in which we view teaching children: are learners perceived as cups that receive? Or, are learners accepted as candles that need to be lighted?

Our view of children is the first context that influences how we will teach and impacts on how children learn. Education seeks “ethical space” in which responsible and caring adults provide comprehensive and coordinated supports to children that inspire educational success and achievement.

Inspiring success in children’s achievement is a program that was created by all educational partners. Metaphorically, the world we live in would be incomplete if all songbirds’ unique songs were suddenly silenced; by comparison, our world is also incomplete when all voices aren’t heard on important decisions concerning education. Inspiring success in learners seeks ethical space where voices can be heard and collaboration can occur.

INSPIRING SUCCESS

In creating the *Inspiring Success* policy document, the educational partners highlighted key factors related to current demographic, historical, moral, and economic imperatives:

- Demographic imperative: given the educational outcomes for FN/M learners, it is imperative that educational practices that facilitate positive achievement for FN/M and Inuit learners be implemented.
- Historical imperative: North America is the point of origin for Aboriginal culture and language and, thus it has to become the ‘safe haven’ for protecting Aboriginal culture and language.
- Moral imperative: it doesn’t matter who’s children we have in schools; morally and ethically all children are to be helped.
- Economic imperative: Cost-benefit analysis suggests that it is imperative to pay and invest in education of all children now, so they will be able to earn a living and contribute to society later.

As a method of articulating *Inspiring Success* into practice, the document contains a foundational approach to education and includes an integrated and holistic orientation to curriculum, instruction, assessment, learning environment, governance, and community involvement. The foundational approach incorporated into *Inspiring Success* embodies James Banks’ Four Levels of Content Integration model as a method of implementing multicultural curriculum reform. The four levels of integration reflected in *Inspiring Success* are the following:

1. Level One, the Contributions Approach: highlights cultural heroes, holidays, and

discrete cultural elements.

2. Level Two, the Additive Approach: Level two is about integrating ethnic content and units of study into existing curriculum without any transformation of methodologies or structure of the particular curriculum.
3. Level Three, the Transformative Approach is the transformational level, where teachers select, redesign, and create new units of study that replace existing curricula so learners become engaged in exploring content, skills, and objectives using lenses afforded by the multiple perspectives contained within diverse ethnic and cultural groups.
4. Level Four, the Social Action Approach focuses on social action. At Level Four students become engaged in exploring diverse perspectives and are required to make decisions on issues and develop actions aimed at solving the issues.

The orientation towards realizing and building capacity across the educational system underpins the foundational approach underlying *Inspiring Success*. The capacity orientation enables cultural competency to become part of the process that allows individuals and systems to develop the capacity to work more effectively.

To achieve equity of opportunity is one thing, but one purpose of this Colloquium was to reveal and/or construct practices that foster equity of benefit for FN/M and Inuit learners; equity of benefit that enables FN/M and Inuit learners to gain a strong cultural identity and benefit from it. Ultimately, equality of opportunity and equality of benefit are achieved via a representational workforce, and thus, policy documents such as *Inspiring Success* hold part of the key to success.

INSPIRING SUCCESS: GOALS

Children are at the centre of the circle comprised of the mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual selves, and hence, solutions need to be created that are similarly holistic, act on core values, and respect children. The goals associated with *Inspiring Success* include the following:

1. Equitable outcomes for FN/M and Inuit learners,
2. Knowledge and appreciation for the unique contributions of FN/M people in Saskatchewan,
3. Data collection and reporting on measures demonstrate accountability towards improved educational outcomes as outlined in the Ministry's FN/M education policy framework,
4. Shared management of the provincial education system by promoting and sustaining partnerships with FN/M peoples at the provincial and local levels. The

key here is working *with* FN/M peoples not working for, or working to.

FN/M worldviews recognize and respect the delicate balance of the interdependence within oneself and all living beings. Within this balance of the mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual selves, learners are prepared for their lifelong journey to find balance, and to nurture the unique skills and special gifts each child has.

A COMPREHENSIVE COMMITMENT AND COLLABORATION OF EFFORT

In a recent policy statement the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education has committed to working collaboratively with all educational partners to build capacity. The goal of this commitment is to enable transformational change within the provincial education system and create a culturally responsive and resilient learning program that benefits all learners.

The matter of building resilience into the learning program and the organizational models that govern school districts and local schools emerged as a key policy issue in this presentation.

In closing, Ms Johns Simpson stated that resilience is “the capacity of individuals to navigate resources that sustain well-being” and “adapt well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant forms of stress.” Ms Johns Simpson challenged participants to return to their respective positions of influence and authority and construct practices that move “culturally responsive and resilient learning programs” forward.

“DO WE STILL SCALP INDIANS? THE STATE OF ABORIGINAL EDUCATION IN CANADA” - Del Anaquod, First Nations University of Canada, Regina SK

Professor Anaquod opened this session with a brief historical account of the 1756 Scalp Proclamation. In 1756, many Mi’kmaq districts were still at war with the British forces and therefore many skirmishes between the Mi’kmaq and the British forces occurred. Governor Lawrence in 1756 issued the scalp proclamation, which reads:

And, we do hereby promise, by and with the advice and consent of His Majesty's Council, a reward of 30£ for every male Indian Prisoner, above the age of sixteen years, brought in alive; or for a scalp of such male Indian twenty-five pounds, and twenty-five pounds for every Indian woman or child brought in alive: Such rewards to be paid by the Officer commanding at any of His Majesty's Forts in this Province, immediately on receiving the Prisoners or Scalps above mentioned, according to the intent and meaning of this Proclamation. (British Scalp Proclamation, 1756)

The Scalp Proclamation of 1756 represents just one of a host of barbaric acts committed by the British Forces during the colonial period in Canada. The Scalp Proclamation also represents the reality that the “truth” tends to be determined by whoever holds the power and authority necessary to write the rules of the day. In reference to educational policymaking Anaquod stated that “schools and policies do not have a lock on the truth.”

“POVERTY PIMPS”

There are many people who make their living working with the downtrodden. For instance, in Saskatchewan there are teachers, police, social services, public health, mental health, lawyers, judges, corrections officers who work with the disadvantaged. People who work in this sector have been referred to as “poverty pimps” because those people who work in this sector generate an income from the misfortune of others and therefore there is a perception that it is not in the best interests of these workers for the problems they work with to be entirely eliminated.

Demographically, there are a disproportionately high number of Aboriginal people who are clients of social services and health services, or are involved with the criminal justice system and corrections. Anaquod pointed out that Aboriginal people are more likely to be disadvantaged members of society and with Aboriginal birth rates outpacing all other segments of the Canadian population, “the time is about right for the perfect storm.”

“WE ARE A DIVIDED PROVINCE”

“Saskatchewan is a divided province,” commented Professor Anaquod, “on one hand we have a shrinking elderly white population and on the other hand we have a burgeoning young Aboriginal population.”

The high school dropout rate for Aboriginal youth is over 50% and rising. Anaquod predicted that “by 2020, 28,000 Aboriginal teens might quit school, and that is a lot of frustrated youth.”

The upshot is that the shortfalls identified in Aboriginal educational programming need to be addressed immediately. The time for study and data collection is finished and the immediate priority is the development and implementation of best practices that re-engage Aboriginal students and enhance their school completion and graduation rates.

Anaquod warned that if the obstacles to Aboriginal student success are not attended to immediately, “we are sowing seeds of ‘homegrown terrorism’.” Citing a defense management expert’s observations, “the conditions are ripe for a major Aboriginal uprising. Most Canadians and their political leaders are ignoring all the signs of a looming Aboriginal uprising in their midst.”

SIGNS OF CHANGE

On a positive note, a developing middle class, a growing Aboriginal business sector, and increasing numbers of Aboriginal leaders and role models are signs of change and improvement in Aboriginal communities.

The Aboriginal middle class that is developing in Saskatchewan is characterized by higher than average household income levels, higher levels of education, and greater

degrees of involvement in community and school affairs. The growth of an Aboriginal middle class is a direct reflection of the developing Aboriginal business sector. In fact, Aboriginal business is one of the fastest areas of growth in the Saskatchewan economy.

Another sign of improvement is the growing number of Aboriginal professionals and leaders of today. For instance, the First Nations University of Canada, the Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority, and Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations are three organizations that have professionals and leaders who are highly visible, energized and highly engaged in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.

FINAL COMMENTS

“Maybe as societies we are really no more than social animals” and where we as individuals end up is unknown because “life is a lottery. The only great equalizer in the end is that we all die someday.”

Even though there are signs of improvement in Saskatchewan Aboriginal communities, there is much work to do. To this end, the education system must address FN/M cultural myths and refocus its attention on improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal learners.

The purpose of education is empowerment and choices, so a person “stands a chance in society. It is a transmission of culture and we are all trying to improve society in our own ways.”

As a call to action, Anaquod challenged Colloquium participants to “get out of the box and try some different [practices and programs] that instill self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-respect.”

SO DO WE STILL SCALP INDIANS?

The government of Canada has never rescinded the 1756 proclamation, however, in 2000 the Federal government confirmed that the colonial proclamation no longer had any force or effect in Canadian law.

In 2000, Robert Nault, Minister of Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND), notified all Chiefs and officially acknowledged that the proclamation was inactive. However, for the proclamation to be permanently removed an Order in Council must be passed by the Federal government and to date this has not happened. For some bizarre reason, The Scalp Proclamation of 1756 still remains on the record even though it has been apologized for and is completely useless.

DAY ONE TABLE TOPIC DISCUSSIONS

The table topic discussion groups reflected on the key positive points communicated in the morning policy presentations. Participants explored the key challenges and generated

suggestions for praxis that were relevant to closing gaps in Aboriginal students' educational program. In exploring the issues and possibilities, participants were energized and committed to developing meaningful practices.

EDUCATIONAL INDICATORS: WHERE TO NEXT?

So far at the conference we have heard highlights of progress and listened to information that informs us about how to consider preliminary interventions.

KEY POSITIVE POINTS

It is encouraging that efforts are under way to develop indicators that consider not only assessing literacy and numeracy skills, but also outcomes that consider a more holistic view of learning and knowledge. Indicators are evolving at all levels that recognize Aboriginal purposes for learning. There is a growing body of research that highlights international comparisons of Indigenous groups and educational indicators. These comparisons could provide possible 'best practices' in developing assessment models that more broadly consider what Aboriginal students educational success might look like.

KEY CHALLENGES

There has been some progress in answering questions including, "What types of indicators should we be using?" and, "What is the purpose of Aboriginal education?" However, attempting to answer the questions will always be challenging because of the great diversity of opinion and varying perspectives. The overarching challenge is how do we get people to agree on specifics about what we are trying to achieve (product/outcome) and how we will know when we get there (assessment and indicators)? Organizations tend not to look at indicators beyond four-year time frames yet many of the challenges require more long-term policies/programs and time to demonstrate effectiveness/ineffectiveness. Aboriginal language preservation is an example of a challenge that requires assessment over generations.

There is also a need to evaluate teacher quality and practices to check the alignment with the objective of achieving certain benchmarks, but using explicit indicators can be a major challenge. Are the assessment/testing techniques culturally appropriate? Is the information being used and communicated to the parents/guardians and community in a manner that leads to greater cooperation and shared goals or is the information used in a way that leads to finger-pointing and laying blame? It can be difficult to show balance in identifying positives and negatives in the use of indicators.

SUGGESTIONS

This is an evolving process in which challenges will not be solved quickly. However, we are all committed to improving the educational outcomes of Aboriginal people living off-reserve and accept that the improved use of educational indicators play an important role. Indicators focusing on literacy and numeracy remain very important and these skills are

foundational to post-secondary training. More needs to be done in developing teaching and assessment strategies that are culturally appropriate (standardized testing has a role to play but one-size will not fit all).

Indicators that focus on things such as high school completion rates and post-secondary education participation rates continue to be important. Yet, more work can be done that focuses on the whole child and learner (emotional, physical, mental, spiritual, behavioral, and intellectual health). Indicators that reflect the learning process as well as learning outcomes may be beneficial and could reflect factors such as access to Elders, interconnectedness/cohesion of community and school, cultural continuity and safety, parental/guardian/family involvement, development of general life skills, level of extracurricular activities, Aboriginal culture/curriculum, and Aboriginal teachers as role models.

More information sharing among schools, divisions, governments would be beneficial because communities may have different objectives for their educational systems and experience different realities. For example, the same set of indicators used in an isolated northern community with a relatively small student population should not be used in a large urban community school. This information may, however, provide ideas for moving Aboriginal education forward. Rather than fearing information, use it to build solutions. Some schools and divisions have worked effectively with their communities to employ assessment strategies and indicators that rally people around the idea of collaboration and achieving progress together. These stories can be shared with other administrators and policy makers.

Colleges of education should continue to be more involved and aid development of relevant indicators by providing specialized teacher training and professional development in the area of creative and effective assessment practices.

Learning from each other and utilizing our expertise is very important to ensuring best practices happen in the classroom for real planning. Ongoing consultation, coordination, resourcing and monitoring are key (e.g., the Aboriginal Enhancement agreement) to development of indicators relevant to Aboriginal students' learning.

Student progress needs to be monitored throughout the school year and all school staff need to share in the responsibility of improving student outcomes across subject areas.

POLICY CHANGES: WHAT? WHO?

Policy is here. What we need to do is develop and activate mechanisms that enable action appropriate to improving Aboriginal students' learning outcomes.

POSITIVE POINTS

Participants recognized that many previous policies and programs enabled positive contributions to Aboriginal learner success. These successes included:

- Mandatory treaty education (Saskatchewan).
- Interest/change at the decision making level (e.g. CMEC agreement to improve outcomes).
- Saskatchewan: willingness to look at problems/issues from multiple lenses in an “ethical space.”
- Increasingly aware of research and effective practices.
- *Inspiring Success* policy document is example of a comprehensive approach.

It was noted that stakeholders are communicating with one another and this is acknowledged as a positive step and important to creating positive change.

CHALLENGES

There are volumes of policy and recommendations available, but the challenge remains how do we obtain the political will to move recommendations forward? The issue is obtaining the political will and support to move forward with change because without it the chaos will most likely worsen. Governments listen to enterprise and development and perhaps political will could result from demonstrating how Aboriginal education could positively impact enterprise and development.

Often the interest in improving education is concentrated in communities with large First Nations/Métis population. One challenge revealed in the discussion was how do you create a win/win mentality when people see it as win/lose? For example, when First Nations people win, others may see themselves as losing.

Individual circumstances and history are unique, so policy needs to be at a higher macro level, but the challenge is initiating timely and responsive action in moving from the political to the practical. It was noted that there is so much information and so many plans that a real challenge is in selecting the priority focus: Where do we start? There are multiple plans, so how do we bring them together? Understandably the big goal is to “eliminate the gap,” but we need to think about the smaller goals and the indicators along the way.

It is challenging for Aboriginal people to move past the shame and blame and share in goal setting and educational planning. Similarly, teachers may be frightened to buy into change because of how the non-Aboriginal parents may react; for example, plans to involve students in a traditional feast caused negative comments by some parents. The positive change message becomes lost when teacher bashing occurs – everyone needs to look at the policies within each organization that will help improve Aboriginal students’ learning and then push these policies.

SOLUTIONS

This group was very prolific in the development of solutions. The highlights are presented as the following:

- There is no need to create new policy – the policy is there. The challenge is finding the political will to move it forward while ensuring care that policies are focused on student needs and not on political agendas.
- Partnerships – share responsibility to move to better outcomes.
- Contract approach commits all parties (governments, school division, etc.).
- Choose the goals, recognize that the “how” may vary. Accept change is long term and recognize there is no “quick fix.”
- Increasing cultural competence at all levels to deal with oppression and racism.
- Important to set the bar high and stretch to meet it. Match high expectations with appropriate resources and funding support.
- Implement practices that reflect the intent of the *Inspiring Success* policy document.
- Consolidate/integrate systems to enable horizontal and vertical integration.
- Implement practices that are responsive to 21st century ways of learning (i.e. technology).

There was agreement among table topic participants that educators and policy makers already know *what* needs to happen, but deciding *how* to move forward can be challenging. There is a need to make changes in the community so the community becomes an additional catalyst for the necessary support for change in the schools. Creating a groundswell from the “grassroots level” up and pressuring governments to change emerged as a theme common to suggestions for moving Aboriginal education forward.

SESSION C: CURRICULAR QUESTIONS

Dr. Peters’ began this session by reporting that new and innovative ways to implement change in educational practices benefit Aboriginal students. The research evidence shows that existing best practices result in positive learning outcomes even when these practices appear to be unconventional or non-traditional. The following three presentations outlined three unconventional best practices that connected to positive outcomes for Aboriginal students.

***"KNOWLEDGE OF ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE AND SCHOOL OUTCOMES" -
Ann Guevremont, Statistics Canada, Health Analysis, Ottawa***

In this presentation, Ms Guevremont highlighted the key role that the ability to speak an Aboriginal language has on improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students.

Research findings related to Aboriginal students' educational outcomes are plentiful, and there are mountains of data that show Aboriginal students have noticeably lower achievement and performance rates in comparison to the national averages. That something needs to be done to improve educational outcomes immediately is abundantly clear; the priority is to create and/or borrow best practices that work. In the spirit of finding solutions, Guevremont presented research findings that identified that the ability to speak and understand an Aboriginal language was a positive factor in improving educational outcomes.

CULTURAL CONTINUITY

The ability to understand and speak an Aboriginal language has been identified as an important part of Aboriginal culture, yet survey results illustrated that there were differences in percentages of Aboriginal people all across Canada who were able to converse in an Aboriginal language. Acquisition and fluency in an Aboriginal language enabled Aboriginal people to experience cultural continuity, and the connection to cultural continuity has been associated with decreased suicide rates in many Aboriginal communities in the province of British Columbia.

POSITIVE IMMERSION OUTCOMES

That the Aboriginal population in Canada has lower high school completion rates is *est perspicuous* and well represented in the data. There is cause for optimism because recent studies have shown positive outcomes tend to result from immersion programs in New Zealand, Hawaii, and the Inuktitut immersion program in Nunavik. English or French language acquisition - rather than immersion - in first year was revealed to be the best predictor of educational success. Immersion programs increased self-esteem in kindergarten students, which was found to be a second positive immersion outcome.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND THE DATA SOURCE

According to Guevremont, the purpose of this study was to determine if there was a relationship between speaking an Aboriginal language and positive educational outcomes. The 2006 Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS) provided data set well suited to answering the research questions.

The 2006 APS, a national survey of Aboriginal Peoples (First Nations living off-reserve, Métis, and Inuit), included 45,000 respondents and was comprised of two demographic components:

- a) 15,500 children 6-14 years and,
- b) 29,500 adults 15 years and older, and 18-34 year olds. The APS focused on issues that included health, language, employment, income, schooling, housing, and mobility.

Two key definitions provided on the APS assisted participants in answering the survey questions. First, *speaks an Aboriginal language* employed responses that ranged from *with effort, relatively well, or very well* to *only a few words, or not at all*. Second, the description and frequency of language instruction at home was derived from participant responses to the item *learned or taught an Aboriginal language in school*. Parents were asked to identify who helped the child in learning his or her Aboriginal language; young adults were asked if they were taught an Aboriginal language or taught in an Aboriginal language in their last year of school.

SCHOOL OUTCOMES

The data collected and analyzed yielded positive findings about school outcomes for Aboriginal students and included parent ratings that revealed their perceptions.

From the parents' view they reported that their child(ren) were doing very well in school, that they would go far in school, and that they were satisfied with their schools. The high school participants revealed that they preferred high school graduation to withdrawal, and preferred to graduate from a Post Secondary Education (PSE) program rather than not attend at all.

In seeking a relationship between speaking an Aboriginal language and positive educational outcomes, the findings identified that with respect to off-reserve First Nations students 92% of students do not speak an Aboriginal language, 5% speak an Aboriginal language but don't learn it in school, and, 3% speak an Aboriginal language that is learned in-school.

For Métis students, 97% reported that they do not speak an Aboriginal language, whereas 2% speak an Aboriginal language that is not learned in school, and just 1% of Métis students speak an Aboriginal language learned in school. Considering the benefits found between Aboriginal learners and the ability to speak an Aboriginal language, the data suggest that increasing the availability and uptake of Aboriginal language instruction in schools, homes, and communities requires additional support and encouragement in the rollout and implementation of programs and practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY

As revealed in the research, there were some complicated results that tended to reaffirm what was already known about the benefits of teaching an Aboriginal language to Aboriginal children in the school setting. Although additional data would help derive a more complete understanding of the processes involved, the current data revealed that an association exists between children learning an Aboriginal language in school and enhanced educational achievement and performance outcomes.

“STUDENTS’ ACADEMIC SUCCESS AND PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT” - Yves Bousquet, Principal, Fairhaven School, Saskatoon SK

Yves Bousquet, is currently serving students as the Principal at Fairhaven School in Saskatoon SK. Previously, Yves was the Principal at Princess Alexandra School in Saskatoon SK and is perhaps best known for his work in helping the school and community transition to a *parents as equal partners* model of parent engagement. In addition to his service in the school system, Yves’ area of expertise is in developing positive and reciprocal relationships among school educators and staff, students, families, and communities, and he regularly consults with educators in Canada and the United States.

One key to improving relationships with parents is for educators to change the way they speak to parents and families; for instance, to say ‘I need help from you as to how I can teach your child addition’ builds the relationship with parents. In contrast, telling parents, ‘your child can’t do addition’ creates distance between parents and educators. Parents hold considerable knowledge about their children and educators need to be taught how to work with parents to build trust and gain access to this parent knowledge, which can be used to improve a child’s school success. The upshot is for school personnel to communicate more openly with parents.

Bousquet spoke of Princess Alexandra teachers using email for daily follow up of learning objectives as well as for forwarding optional activities designed to extend the child’s learning at home. Weekly report cards were also utilized, and the traditional “staff meeting” evolved into school meetings to which parents were welcomed into. These meetings adopted an emergent and equitable approach to the agenda and thus dispatched with the Principal generated agenda; moreover, these meetings encouraged a “parents as partners” model and became the forum for the equal and reciprocal exchange of information, problem solving, and goal setting.

SUCCESSFUL PARENT ENGAGEMENT: EDUCATORS GO INTO THE COMMUNITY

School educators need to go into their communities to learn about their community. Going into the community enabled educators, families, and communities to engage in regular ‘small talk’ (e.g., the weather), which helped everyone get to know each other, and began the process of cultivating trust.

In cultivating trust with parents, the community interaction led to teachers inviting parents to come in and teach students about topics that connected with expertise found in the community; for example, a parent or Elder teaching the students about “traditional means of forecasting weather” was one instance of utilizing parent expertise in the classroom. This type of community connection has been shown to be a successful strategy that fosters integration of Aboriginal and Métis knowledge into the existing provincial curricula.

Integrating the school with families and communities helped to establish trust among

stakeholders but also helped to activate a change in orientation among educators so rather than telling parents “your child can’t read,” the question to parents became “how can *WE* help your child read?” and in this way educators ask parents or caregivers to join the partnership focused on teaching the child to read.

PARENT ENGAGEMENT AND THE IMPORTANCE OF TRUST

Developing trust is integral to educators developing trust with families and community. In developing trust, it is critical that parents regularly receive the same information as educators receive about school discipline, anti-bully programs, attendance, and/or curriculum initiatives.

At Princess Alexandra School, Bousquet recalled one influential parent who championed a “traditional Aboriginal/Métis approach” where “the community [was] given a say [in decision making] and people become engaged.” In this process, trusting relationships were built via emergent school-community practices including but not limited to opening up school meetings to parents and families.

These meetings did not operate with an agenda set by staff and school-based administration, but rather functioned in an emergent manner. For example, the school librarian noted that students were not signing books out from the school library. At the school meeting, parents, and families were notified of this situation and became collaborators engaged in finding out why students were not signing out library books. Working as partners, these collaborators developed solutions to remedy the situation.

POLICY IMPLICATION

A key to meaningful parent engagement is the relationships. “We value our parents and families, respect them as partners and honor them. [Successful] engagement is all about relationships and beliefs and thus, Bousquet advocates “be[ing] a student of the community [because] needing to adapt is two-way.”

“I SEE YOU. AFFIRMING CANADA’S FORGOTTEN PEOPLE: THE MÉTIS” – Karon Shmon, Gabriel Dumont Institute

Ms Shmon reported that the “[Métis] have a lot of catching up to do. The government was not responsible for education until 1945, [nor was there] legal recognition of Métis until the 1980s.” Education for Métis learners in Saskatchewan may appear to be ahead of other provinces in Canada, but educational change may not be the most accurate indicator because the educational changes that have occurred have not always benefitted Métis children. “We have a long way to go, but we are making headway.” In making headway, the Gabriel Dumont Institute is one program that has contributed significantly by fostering educational changes and positive educational outcomes for Métis children in Saskatchewan.

THE GABRIEL DUMONT INSTITUTE (GDI)

GDI, a completely Métis-directed educational and cultural entity, is unique in Canada. Since its inception in 1980, GDI has focused on education through cultural research as the way to renew and strengthen the heritage and achievements of Saskatchewan's Métis. Soon after GDI's inception, it became evident that it would need to become more directly involved in education in order to fully serve the many needs, including employment needs, of Saskatchewan's Métis community.

In meeting this mandate, the Institute developed Métis-specific curriculum and began to train Aboriginal teachers to deliver programming that was contracted from the province's universities, colleges, and technical institutes. The first and, perhaps best known of these efforts, the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP), trains Métis and First Nations teachers to meet the needs of the province's Aboriginal students in the K-12 system. SUNTEP also serves as a Canadian model for Aboriginal adult education programs.

COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAM DELIVERY

2010 marks the 30-year anniversary of GDI, which coincides with the milestone of being close to graduating its 1,000th teacher this year. One of the reasons for GDI's success is its community-based program delivery, which means GDI takes the program to the students rather than requiring students to leave their home communities for teacher preparation studies in Saskatoon or Regina.

GDI is credible among Métis for two reasons: first, GDI believes that all Métis can learn skills necessary for teaching Aboriginal and First Nations learners; and second, GDI operates with a "flattened bureaucracy" and traditional values including respect is something earned not given.

The GDI program delivery is culturally affirming and acknowledges that students come in to classrooms with the capacity to learn. Shmon stated that Métis history is a "history of omission" because "our history has been omitted from the stories of Aboriginal and Métis people's involvement in the founding and settling of Saskatchewan." The perceived absence of the Métis from the history signals an important lesson for the GDI program and that is that "you shouldn't have to hang up your culture at the door when entering schools." The GDI program is culturally affirming because the students have their Métis culture honored at all levels of their program.

With respect to GDI's teacher preparation programming, the awareness of culture, community, and diverse groups enabled development of 'best practices' that are consistent with Métis ways of knowing and an important outcome is that teacher candidates that complete the program see more than deficits in their students. Rather than dwelling on the deficits, teacher candidates who receive their professional preparation at GDI look for the "gifts" their students possess, which is also a key aspect of Métis ways of knowing.

IN CLOSING

In closing, GDI includes a rich set of ideas and experiences through which the passion of Métis people and GDI shines through. From Shmon's perspective, changing public opinion and gaining widespread support for practices that enhance learning outcomes for Aboriginal and Métis learners is the key policy issue at this time.

DAY TWO, MARCH 16, 2010: WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS

Dr. Carr Stewart and Elder Jean Sutherland opened Day Two of the Colloquium. Dr. Carr Stewart welcomed participants and thanked everyone in attendance for supporting a better future for Aboriginal and First Nations off-reserve students. This Colloquium represented an opportunity for First Nations and non-First Nations people to come together and focus on improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal people living off-reserve.

Elder Sutherland welcomed everyone to Day Two of the Colloquium and reflected on Day One of the Colloquium stating that “every impact is so valuable for our children and grandchildren,” and “our children need your input in getting their education.” Speaking in Cree, Elder Sutherland gave the prayer.

OPENING REMARKS

Allan MacDonald, Office of the Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Ottawa, welcomed participants to Day Two and commented that key insights and ideas for practice were derived from Day One presentations and discussions. MacDonald highlighted that building networks and continuing collaboration with one another would be challenging for participants, but so very necessary to the goal of improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students. MacDonald rallied the group saying, “There are a lot of great ideas, but now we need to implement into action.”

Michael Gatin, Acting Director, First Nations, Métis and Community Education, Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, Regina, was participating in the annual CIF conference and therefore, unable to attend Day Two of the Colloquium. Maureen Johns Simpson brought opening remarks on his behalf. Reflecting on Monday’s sessions and interaction, Johns Simpson shared with the participants that she was looking forward to Day Two, but reinforced that “when considering change there is an emotional connection for people to commit to new ways.” It is very challenging to face change alone, so Johns Simpson invited participants to join together to form a critical mass by “making a new friend and make them a part of the change we are trying to make. Let’s not quit, but double the mass focused on changes necessary to the goals we have surfaced in this Colloquium.”

SESSION D: GOVERNANCE AND SERVICE DELIVERY INNOVATIONS

“WE ARE NOT BIG, BUT WE ARE NOT SMALL” - Lon Borgerson, Director of Education, Île-à-la Crosse School Division, Saskatchewan

Mr. Borgerson acknowledged Elder Sutherland for giving the prayers each day of the Colloquium and thanked the presenters for Monday’s sessions and encouraged

participants to continue the conversations that have ensued along the way.

Borgerson reflected that “it was 33 years ago since I drove into Île-à-la-Crosse, the community [that] has been a touchstone . . . it is where I learned theatre, narrative, story, and research.” In the course of his journey, Borgerson realized that relationships have a fundamental role to play in education.

In commenting on the essential role of relationships, Mr. Borgerson disclosed that “[I] see the result of educational outcomes from 20-25 years ago,” because “on a daily basis I find former students who are confident, articulate people with great senses of humor.” Borgerson attributed student success at Île-à-la-Crosse to “jumping quickly on the Northern Teacher Education Program (NORTEP). NORTEP is one example that dispels the myth that “everything we have done in the past was a mistake and it is only now we are on the right track.” From Borgerson’s view it is important to build on past knowledge and best practice, “rather than bungee jumping from trend to trend. [It is] also important to reflect critically on both the past AND present and as [I have learned] over and over again in Île-à-la-Crosse, [we have] to keep our sense of humor.”

THE AGE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Saskatchewan educational indicators for Aboriginal and Northern children tend to present a depressing picture. Saskatchewan is now publishing the rankings of schools, but Manitoba has refused to publish the rankings of their schools. In Manitoba school rankings are not published in the interest of offsetting the potential for competition between schools and the likelihood that classroom practice could shift to teaching to tests rather than providing students a relevant education.

Borgerson pointed out that socio-economic factors, health, culture, and spiritual contexts are missing in the educational indicators, and accordingly the indicators tend to miss reporting the good things that can happen in schools. Given that these contexts are not included, the indicators can be exploited, misinterpreted, and misunderstood by members of the community, politicians, media, and government. That there needs to be a focus on the challenges in education is not in dispute, but Borgerson underscored the need for a balance among educational indicators and the story it tells about Aboriginal and Northern learners.

Île-à-la-Crosse is small and therefore accountability occurs on a daily basis; this is a community-based school division and when something happens, the Board hears about it. “The most important accountability is to the people in the community and this is built into a small school division.” In the 35 years of local control “we have built-in accountability on a daily basis and “we live with the context of our young people’s lives and we see those social, economic and health indicators every day.” This is the advantage of being a community-based school division: *We may not be big, but we’re small*, and if someone is in crisis, we all know. If someone deserves to be celebrated, we all know.

At its July 2009 planning session, the Île-à-la-Crosse Board of Education reviewed its

priorities by responding to this question: *What are the most important things we need to do for the young people of our community in the year(s) to come?* The Board determined that their educational priorities include “a balance of programming that is inclusive of all students” and to provide “schools of opportunity for every young person in the community.”

FOUR PROVINCIAL PRIORITIES

Île-à-la-Crosse has implemented a whole bank of provincial education priorities and along with teaching provincial curricula. It determined some time ago that teaching healthy lifestyles was a learning priority. As a result, they developed a suicide prevention program, an Elders program, and partnerships and relationships within the community. “We want our young people to find joy and purpose in life,” and, “we want our young people to be proud of who they are,” so learning priorities also included cultural and spiritual learning, teaching Michif language, teaching Métis culture and language, and developing a website and curricula that include Michif and Métis language and culture.

Mr. Borgerson commented on the status of the following four provincial education priorities:

1. Higher Literacy and Achievement: “We must address the ‘achievement gap’ of our students in reading, writing and mathematics,”
2. Equitable Opportunities: “We want our schools to be places of opportunity for every young person in this community - to engage those who attend and invite those who do not,”
3. Smooth Transitions: “We need to provide security and stability in our students’ lives each step of the way. The pre-K for 3 year-olds and Adult 12 are two examples of programming that support learners in Île-à-la-Crosse community,”
4. Accountability and Governance: “As a community-based school division, our first line of accountability is to our students, parents and community,” and Borgerson mentioned radio broadcasts as one method of communicating with their stakeholders.

In addition to delivery of curriculum, Île-à-la-Crosse children also benefit from culture camps and arts education. Arts education has been found to be particularly engaging for students and has the added benefit of enabling students to build confidence and self esteem.

EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS: THE ARTS EDUCATION PROGRAM

In our haste to address the achievement gap, we have to be careful not to create other gaps. As one example, most of Borgerson’s former students place particular value on the drama and sports programs they were once a part of. Quoting his thesis, *Storytelling in*

Play: Upisask Theatre Revisited, Borgerson spoke of one former student and participant in his research who commented that

Drama was the most important thing in my high school life, I think. It gave me a lot of confidence. It definitely raised my self-esteem. It made me feel capable of doing a lot of things...It gave me a sense of pride, that I could step onto the stage and talk, and communicate with people verbally and openly in front of a crowd, and be quite humorous in a sense. Or serious. And I think it's a skill that I learnt that's helped me throughout my life after high school. I mean, and it's still helping me now."

The programs that former students say made a difference in their lives must not be sacrificed in the name of accountability.

IMPLICATION FOR POLICY

A key implication for policy is to ensure that arts education, cultural education, and spiritual education are protected components of educational systems. According to Borgerson, in our haste to address the achievement gap identified by educational indicators, we have to be careful not to create other gaps. Most of his former students place particular value on the drama and sports programs they were once a part of. Referring to Victoria, a former student, Mr. Borgerson challenged that “we have to give Victoria an opportunity to read and write and do math - not to raise provincial norms - but to give her lifelong skills; we also need to make sure she gets to dance.”

“ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS IN THE SCHOOL ORGANIZATION: LEADERSHIP, GOVERNANCE, AND SERVICE DELIVERY FOR ABORIGINAL STUDENTS.” - Dr. Jacqueline Ottmann, University of Calgary

Dr. Ottmann is a former elementary and high school teacher who taught in both First Nations and provincial school systems. After serving as a principal, Ottmann learned that she needed to “grow my circle of influence including teacher preparation.” Reflecting on praxis, or more specifically, taking what we know about Aboriginal education and putting it into practice, Ottmann posed the question, *How do we make policy and make it live?*

SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

Organizations including schools have to be responsive to changing demographics including unprecedented growth of the Aboriginal population, and “we need to change how organizations look and feel [in order to become] organizations without boundaries; in this way, schools [become] open-door organizations that reflect community and societal values and beliefs.” Citing Kamara (2010) Dr. Ottmann identified four key factors that may contribute to high quality school-community relationships:

- Changing views of the role of schools,
- Changing demographics,

- A growing appreciation of “contextualism” and “ecological settings,”
- A sincere desire to develop multi-setting collaborative partnerships.

In educational organizations there is a strong desire to develop multi-setting collaborative partnerships to facilitate improvement and build upon the learning successes already in place.

PARTNERSHIPS

Block (1993) asserted that strong partnerships require moving from authoritarian to shared decision-making behaviors. To this end, valid partnerships require exchange of purpose, joint accountability, right to say no, and absolute honesty. Trust is a critical factor in cultivating strong partnerships even though trust takes a long time to build.

PARTNERSHIP MODELS

With reference to Boyd (1997), Dr. Ottmann presented three partnership models:

1. Bureaucratic model – closed system, no reciprocity, hierarchical,
2. Professional model – flexible, considers the needs of both the staff and students, but it is the professionals who are perceived as having the answers,
3. Democratic model – encourages collaboration and cooperation and involves staff, parents, and community members. In this model all voices are heard and all contributions are honored.

Given that high performing relationships require trust, common purpose, joint accountability, right to say no, and honesty, the democratic partnership model is best suited to making positive changes with educational practices.

In the education literature high performing high poverty schools (HHP) were found to have clear and direct focus on instruction and setting high standards for expectations, instruction, and achievement outcomes. A committed and dynamic staff is essential to student learning in HHP schools. Setting the development of multiple support systems as a high priority was also found to be significant to the academic success of students with diverse needs.

Commenting on Yves Bousquet’s presentation of engagement at Princess Alexandra School in Saskatoon SK, Ottmann connected this success story with the high standards, committed staff, and multiple support systems that high performing schools require, but what leadership orientation enables and sustains this type of paradigm shift within schools?

LEADERSHIP

Flexible and strong leadership is required if improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal children is to have a chance. Strong leadership is described as transformational, distributed, and instructional and contains the essentials necessary to sustaining trusting partnerships and building high performing schools.

Positive and effective school-community interrelationships were found to be essential to the development of effective programs designed to enhance student learning. Positive interrelationships also highlight the need for flexible and strong leadership practices. Citing Leithwood, “leaders are cultural agents who bring values to bear on decision-making and policy decisions.”

HOW DO WE ENABLE EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS?

One key for practice is the implementation of culturally responsive teaching strategies; “not acting sends a loud message [because] we only resource what we value.” Social justice and social action implies that we have choices and we all have to decide whether we will act or not act. With creating betterment in communities as the major aim of human agency, the key issue is moving from policy to practice.

Why is moving policy to practice so difficult? How do we create the bridge to develop praxis? Dr. Ottmann advised that in creating praxis there is a need for deeper exploration of cognitive and affective values and beliefs and advocated engaging in reflective practices including meta- cognition, or thinking about our thinking.

Explorations of essential questions need to be asked at the individual, organizational, and societal levels in order to include these perspectives in educational decision-making. The essential questions to which Dr. Ottmann referred to included:

- Who am I?
- Where do I come from?
- Where am I going?
- What is my responsibility?
- What is important? What do we value?
- What do we do to align values and beliefs?
- How do we move the educational rhetoric into corresponding actions or practices at the school level?

Schools are a reflection of societal values and belief systems, so in order to change schools and school systems a cultural shift may be required.

WE SEE, WE FEEL, WE CHANGE

Learning is an emotional activity that informs both our collective history and our individual history. Education is part of the process and as Ottmann indicated, “the goal is

to strive for quality relationships and partnerships.” The past is important because it connects the partnerships and relationships of the past with partners and relationships of today. For example, the First Nations chiefs at the Treaty negotiations decided that what they did then was to reach forward into the future for seven generations; this action demonstrate not only the forward thinking of the chiefs, but also illustrates how decisions made today have an intergenerational effect.

GOVERNANCE AND SERVICE DELIVERY INNOVATION

Creating a sense of urgency about improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal learners represented one key policy implication that emerged from Dr. Ottmann’s presentation: “if we believe something is important it will get done. A true sense of urgency connects the cause - social justice - with focusing in on what is important. We need to take time to really listen to each other and really connect.”

Perhaps what is needed is that educational stakeholders shift their focus to promoting a strong sense of urgency and commit energy, resources, and planning to the development and implementation of sound educational practices at the school level.

For meaningful solutions to be developed, according to Ottmann, cultivate relationships and partnerships with decision makers and stakeholders at the school division level and ask the essential questions. Engage all voices and work collaboratively to develop and implement best practices.

“MI’KMAW SELF GOVERNANCE IN EDUCATION” - Eleanor Bernard, Executive Director, Mi’kmaw School Division, Membertou, NS

Ms Bernard opened this presentation by commenting on the honor she felt speaking to Colloquium participants about Mi’kmaw language and education.

GOVERNANCE AND EDUCATION SERVICE DELIVERY MODELS

In providing background content, Bernard outlined the models of Mi’kmaw governance and education delivery, a model that differs from other Canadian First Nations because the Mi’kmaw are not part of the *Indian Act*, rather they are governed by one the first sectoral agreements in Canada. The Mi’kmaw is one tribe in Nova Scotia that comprises ten communities within the province of Nova Scotia. As for educational service delivery, the Mi’kmaw delivery model represents a Regular Management Organization (RMO), although the legislation governing education differs from other First Nations in Canada.

The Mi’kmaw school division operates as an (RMO) but is governed by Bill C30 and provincial Bill 4. Bill C30, also known as the *Mi’kmaw Education Act*, is equivalent legislation to provincial legislation Bill 4, also referred to as the *Mi’kmaw Education Act*. The legislation governing Mi’kmaw education gives jurisdiction for education service delivery to the member communities and chief and council.

EDUCATION SUCCESSES

Executive Director Bernard reported that Mi'kmaw language revival commenced with an immersion program for K-3 students and many students, including Bernard's own son, became fluent Mi'kmaw speakers. Interested in knowing how well the Mi'kmaw language initiative was in supporting successful educational outcomes, McGill University conducted a longitudinal study of Mi'kmaw language.

Their early findings identified that students in the immersion program who spoke the Mi'kmaw language performed at par or above when compared to students who were not speakers of the Mi'kmaw language. This finding demonstrated that the ability to speak an Aboriginal language was a positive contributor to enhanced educational outcomes and school improvement planning.

School improvement planning in the Mi'kmaw school division can take advantage of access to the provincial testing services and in this way they ensure that their school improvement decision-making continues to be evidence-based.

Graduation rates are another indicator of success for learners in the Mi'kmaw school division. With respect to graduation rates, five programs designed to support and encourage students with diverse education needs were added and according to Bernard, graduation rates doubled over the last 10 years. This graduation rate increase is celebrated as a key educational success.

PROGRAMS RELATED TO EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS

First among the five specialized programs that supported school improvement was the Comprehensive Master Education agreement, which outlined the province's school success responsibilities. As for related programs, Bernard also mentioned that the implementation of the provincial information system and the inclusion of students in math and science programs contributed to increased engagement in these areas of study. Similarly, positive outcomes resulted from connectivity with other Mi'kmaw across Canada; for instance, a province-wide sports animator program, sporting tournaments involving all schools, and the implementation of the First Nations help desk and video conferencing tool enabled greater connections among Mi'kmaw.

For all the Mi'kmaw successes in Nova Scotia, Bernard also pointed out that challenges still remain. Interestingly, the challenges facing the Mi'kmaw divide along policy and funding issues.

CHALLENGES

The first challenge resulted from the absence of Federal policies on the implementation of education sectoral self-government agreements. The challenge is that the Mi'kmaw tend to receive the same treatment as First Nations governed by the *Indian Act* legislation. As Bernard stated, "they push and we push back" and from this perspective a

'policy issue' impedes implementation of meaningful change.

Bernard mentioned that funding is also another challenge. Understandably, the funding formulae used by Ministries of Education and school divisions across Canada are not always resilient to ever-changing, multi-faceted, and diverse educational programs and learner needs. The matter of funding formulae is a challenge to ongoing Mi'kmaw educational success primarily because the formula is over 20 years old and may not reflect 21st century educational realities. Money challenges in education seem to have a tendency of emerging in all areas of service delivery, but should not impede meaningful change.

Money issues attributed to decaying facilities represented a third key obstacle to continued education successes with the Mi'kmaw people. The challenge of decaying educational facilities is not exclusive to Nova Scotia or the Mi'kmaw, people; a common challenge for educational systems across Canada is responsive funding initiatives in order to allocate funds to the program areas where there is the most need. Not surprisingly, it is the fixed costs in education - including salaries, transportation and facility operating costs - that impact upon capital projects and facility upgrade decisions. It is a given that decaying schools provide less than ideal learning environments and tend to have a negative impact upon students' learning success.

GOVERNANCE AND SERVICE DELIVERY INNOVATIONS

The Mi'kmaw First Nations student success results from "doing school improvement plans" that include student achievement tests in literacy and numeracy. Perhaps not a new innovation, improvement plans used in the Mi'kmaw school division include an assessment piece that enables analysis of practices in order to determine the elements of the plan that work from the elements in the plan that do not work. This process reflects accountability in the sense that study and assessment of improvement plans result in school officials being able to tell the story of the initiative and whether it worked or not. Initiatives that do not contribute to realizing improvement goals can then be discontinued based upon the data.

Bernard spoke of school improvement and innovative delivery models and in the process highlighted that it is a collective effort of all stakeholders that enabled improvements in students' educational success. High quality teachers have been shown in the research findings to be a key contributor to Aboriginal students' educational success. To ensure that teachers in the system are high quality teachers, the professional development for Mi'kmaw school division educational staff is developed in partnership with the province.

In closing, as Bernard highlighted throughout the presentation, governance and service is about the communities we live and work in, and therefore, with relevant educational service delivery innovations - including Mi'kmaw language - "the bottom line is that the innovations be in the best interests of all students."

SESSION E: TOWARDS SEAMLESS TRANSITION IN K TO 12 EDUCATION ON- AND OFF-RESERVE

Dr. Peters convened Session E by thanking participants and presenters for coming to the Colloquium and making contributions to the conversation about seamless transitions for students in K-12 education both on- and off-reserve. Stories of success and instances of best practices provided the common thread in this group of presentations.

“TOWARD SEAMLESS TRANSITION: SAKEWEW HIGH SCHOOL RISING TO SUCCESS ACADEMICALLY AND CULTURALLY” - Colin Sutherland, Principal, Sakewew High School, North Battleford, SK

Principal Sutherland is a youthful man, full of energy, and in possession of a great sense of humor. Following a few comical jabs at a colleague, and acknowledgement of his mother, Elder Jean Sutherland, Principal Sutherland observed that seamless transitions in K-12 education requires “thinking outside of the box” in developing new ways to engage and retain students. The out-of-the-box approach to finding strategies that support positive educational outcomes for Aboriginal students compares with Helen Raham’s challenge that educators dig deeper to find best practices and it appears this is what is occurring at Sakewew High School.

The organizational theory literature is rife with studies that reveal effective and responsive organizations are organizations that embrace change and organizational learning in their mission, values, goals, and actions. What makes these organizations different is their ability to be transformative. As guides on this journey, all stakeholders need to know the mission of the school and use it in their work with students. With reference to the Sakewew High School mission, *experiencing culture, engaging partnerships, empowering and educating youth*, Sutherland highlighted the elements that make the school different, and offered examples and stories that related their out-of-the-box thinking to learner success.

WHAT MAKES THE SCHOOL DIFFERENT?

The overarching impetus for the creation of Sakewew High School was to provide a learning environment that encouraged students to remain in school, complete their program, and graduate. Part of this mandate for the school was to enable First Nations students to connect to their culture and further develop pride, self-esteem, and self-confidence by learning more about their Aboriginal culture and heritage. The positive effect of cultural connections on successful educational outcomes for Aboriginal learners has been demonstrated by the studies presented earlier in this report.

Sutherland outlined four specific ‘out-of-the-box’ elements that make Sakewew High School different. First, the school is governed by a joint board of education between the school, First Nations communities, the Light of Christ RCS School Division, and the Living Sky School Division (LSSD). This is the first joint board of this kind in Saskatchewan and perhaps Canada, but the partnership was considered necessary given

that half the student population is from First Nations communities and the other half of the student population are urban residents.

Recognizing that the student population at Sakewew High School is a combination of students from First Nations communities and students from urban areas resulted in the school receiving 50% of its funding from INAC, and 50% from the provincial school board under the joint board partnership. The joint board also enables teachers to become members of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation as well as ensuring the school is eligible for additional provincial and federal funding programs.

The imperative of the joint board and the management board is to function as a support system for meeting the educational needs of Aboriginal learners who attend Sakewew High School.

Innovative governance and service delivery provide supportive systems that make it possible for Aboriginal youth, who attend Sakewew, to experience culture, engage in partnerships, become empowered, and receive a high-quality education. Sutherland reported that despite "Sakewew being a great school, retention is still a problem," although their approach is to keep working and developing solutions that reach out to students.

One such school-level initiative is the Monday afternoon meeting. At the Monday meetings the support services team reviews action plans, engages in problem-solving, and develops innovative ways to better engage students. Sakewew has integrated school linked services in the form of a team of support personnel who assist and support students in the areas of home visits, attendance, day-care, nutrition, social services liaison with students, post-secondary education and employment, mental health, addictions counseling, public health, police school liaison, Kidsfirst program, Elders program, and cultural coordinator. Perhaps not a mainstream practice in all schools, but as Sutherland explained, the Monday meetings at Sakewew and the school-linked services represent two school-level practices found to help improve student retention and ultimately graduation.

From Sutherland's perspective, the main difference at Sakewew High School was illustrated each time a student need was identified. Once a gap or need that impacted on student attendance and learning was revealed, it activated a collaborative problem-solving process that involved children, families, teachers, linked services, and student support personnel. It is this climate of support and focus on finding solutions that sets Sakewew High School apart.

SCHOOL CLIMATE

School climate is one of the correlates of effective schools that also connected with innovative practices at Sakewew High School. First, the orientation among staff is that "the students own the building – it is their home" so the facility is one more way to honor and support the students. Whether it is posting their artwork, successful engagement with

parents and community, partnerships, or offering emotional, social, mental, and physical supports to the students, Sakewew High School embraces learner supports as a key priority of the school and its mission.

IMPLICATION FOR SEAMLESS TRANSITION K-12 EDUCATION

So how is Sakewew High School different? Sakewew High School endeavours to be a transformative influence in the lives of its students and stakeholders by leveraging the school's supports and partners.

The supports at Sakewew make a huge difference in the students' lives and educational outcomes. According to Sutherland, "the supports are what make our school successful. We encourage all schools to engage in partnerships that support youth and learner success."

"STORIES OF CHILDREN'S EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS: STOBART COMMUNITY SCHOOL" - Craig Schellenberg, Principal, And Lawrence Eyahpaise, Elder, Stobart Community School, Duck Lake, SK

Mr. Schellenberg and Mr. Eyahpaise greeted participants and prefaced the presentation by stating that their purpose was to highlight successful practices and stories of students' success at Stobart Community School.

ELDER EYAHPAISE

Eyahpaise is currently the cultural liaison coordinator at Stobart School, but in 1992 he worked with the Willow Cree as a language instructor. In commenting on contributors to children's well-being and educational success, Elder Eyahpaise stated that "in order for children to succeed, they need the right people around them and one of the most important people are the grandparents" to maintain the connection to the past and pass on cultural traditions.

All people in the school need to have expertise in and about traditional dancing, singing, and ceremonies so the children can learn and bring these cultural traditions forward. According to Eyahpaise, sustaining cultural traditions is essential to enhancing students' success.

For students to be successful, the school staff needs to take some risks and attend cultural events, and visit students' homes. For instance, Eyahpaise reported that "our principal attends Round Dances and Sweat Ceremonies and really takes time to be with these kids."

A key contributor in support of seamless transition between grades in the K-12 school system seems to be ensuring that children "have the right people around them." Encouraging and supporting the school staff to take time to be with the children, to learn

about them, and to enable them to get to know the staff inside and outside the classroom was identified as a key factor to student success and seamless transitions through the school system.

CRAIG SCHELLENBERG, PRINCIPAL, STOBART COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Stobart Community School, a provincial school within the Prairie Spirit School Division, is located close to Beardy's and Okemasis First Nation and the Constable Robin Cameron Education Complex High School. Principal Schellenberg prefaced the presentation by stating that this Colloquium provided a forum to share stories of successful teaching and learning practices at Stobart Community School.

The Stobart community is culturally diverse and is comprised of Métis and First Nations peoples and Mennonites descendent from early settlers in this area of Saskatchewan. Since 1999 the student population shifted and is now 85% Aboriginal and 15% non-Aboriginal. With the demographic shift, Schellenberg reported that at that time “we needed to step back and ask, who are we and what do we want to be?”

In 2007, Stobart Community School received a First Nations-Métis education grant that enabled First Nations and Métis perspectives to become infused into the curriculum. An unanticipated outcome of this grant was that it also triggered a deeper exploration of the essential purpose of Stobart Community School.

IMPACT OF THE GRANT

The First Nations-Métis education grant became a vehicle for Stobart Community School to “go deeper into learning what we were as a school and [helped] determine what we needed to focus on” with respect to supporting students’ success. In the course of exploring the purpose and goals of the school, the matter of non-Aboriginal teachers emerged, and “we grappled with this by going deeper [and] it has been a process of personal and professional development.”

The process of this deeper exploration of Stobart Community School not only revealed personal and professional development needs of non-Aboriginal teachers, but the process also identified social, economic, and epistemological gaps and spaces that Schellenberg admitted “we could get lost in.” Alternatively, the gaps and spaces were reframed as opportunities and “we began to see bridges that connected our gaps.”

SUPPORTING SEAMLESS TRANSITIONS

The role of personal and professional support in the successful implementation of fundamental change within organizations is a well-documented theme prevalent in the professional literature. In the process of investigating the purpose and goals of their school, the school team at Stobart Community School realized that an Elders program and a research program were two elements deemed essential to supporting Aboriginal student success.

By exploring their purpose and goals, the Stobart Community School team realized there was considerable value in an Elders program for two main reasons. First, an Elders program could enable students and Elders to get together and talk and in the process of dialogue build the cultural connections necessary to enhancing Aboriginal students' school success. Similarly, the Elders program could help Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators acknowledge the ways of knowing, knowledge, and expertise within the community that could help and guide teachers in their work with children.

Research emerged as the second element the school team considered essential to learning about, implementing, and assessing successful teaching and learning practices at Stobart Community School. Engaging First Nations and Aboriginal research was considered beneficial to Aboriginal student success because First Nations and Aboriginal research would be “nourishing the learning spirit of our teachers” as well as contributing to “decolonizing our pedagogy” in the school.

Referring to non-Aboriginal teachers who teach Aboriginal students, “we have to examine our own space with respect to colonialism and support catharsis and finding one's own space. For instance, teaching new content – such as sweat lodge ceremonies - implied new ways of teaching and teachers found ways to step out of their box and develop new relationships with Elders and new relationships with students and community.” In this way, surrounding students with the right people supports learner success and seamless transition through the K-12 school system. Successful practices at Stobart Community School began with the realization that the educational system is way bigger than an individual school.

In closing, Schellenberg disclosed that “these spaces [or gaps in schools] exist and as educators we need to find ways to step into them” and develop new relationships that support students in their journey through the K-12 school system.

“NEW PARTNERSHIPS: SHARED INTERESTS FOR IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES FOR ABORIGINAL STUDENTS” - Matt de Vlieger, Director, Education Partnerships Indian and Northern Affairs Canada

It was the concept of partnerships that enticed Mr. de Vlieger to attend this Colloquium and he began the presentation by pointing out that the focus of Indian and Northern Affairs elementary and secondary programming is First Nations people living on-reserve. Interestingly the Colloquium title, *Improving Educational Outcomes for Aboriginal People Living Off-Reserve: A Discussion of Delivery Models*, focuses on people living off-reserve, and “too often in the past that kind of dynamic might have led to the familiar ‘not my department, not my jurisdiction’ kind of discussion, but not anymore.”

With an issue as important as improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students, education and educational outcomes are acknowledged as shared priorities. De Vlieger commented that he is currently working on INAC's education partnerships program, “which is designed to share information, knowledge, ideas, and expertise across what otherwise would be barriers.” Partnerships between levels of government and among

organizations and institutions are precisely how to reach out to other partners who can contribute to improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students.

BACKGROUND

Presented in earlier sessions at this Colloquium, the demographic and statistical descriptions of Aboriginal people tell much of the current story:

- The Aboriginal community is characterized by a young and fast-growing population, but,
- Literacy and numeracy scores, student achievement, and graduation rates for First Nations and Aboriginal students lag well behind graduation rates for non-Aboriginal students.

Paradoxically, there are also huge opportunities for Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan and across Canada because,

- Employment access – there is a labour market demand for knowledgeable and skilled workers and the Aboriginal population possesses a huge untapped potential in meeting Saskatchewan and Canada’s challenges.
- Within Aboriginal communities there are many forward thinking and visionary First Nations and Aboriginal leaders and educators.
- There is an overall transformative effect of education.

As far back as 1876, Chief Ahtahkakoop, a Treaty Six signatory, stated that “education is to be the new buffalo” an observation that definitely applies today. Essential to individuals unlocking their potential, education is also integral to the social, economic, and cultural future of communities across Canada.

FOR POLICY-MAKERS

There is good news for Canada’s public policy makers because of recent and widely shared commitments to fostering better student outcomes. Governments are supportive of initiatives that target improving Aboriginal student outcomes. For instance, the *First Nations Student Success Program* provides for implementation of school success plans and strategies to improve literacy and numeracy and student retention. Another key initiative is strengthening relationships.

Enhancing relationships and sustaining hubs of expertise is the purpose of the *Education Partnership Program* (EPP). The EPP is targeted on enhancing partnerships and seeks to ensure that all partners have useful contributions and expertise to share. Aboriginal educators and Elders have historical, language, and cultural knowledge and expertise to share, and “by working together, we have better opportunities to meet student needs.”

SEAMLESS TRANSITIONS

Upon consideration of this presentation and the theme of Session E, *towards seamless transitions*, a link to the EPP becomes apparent. The EPP targets the following four key areas:

- Development of First Nations-provincial strategies to improve programs and services for
- Aboriginal students attending provincial schools,
- Collaboration and sharing of professional development and culturally relevant curriculum services and expertise,
- Improved coordination between First Nations and provincial schools to ensure smooth transitions for students, and
- Creating better links between early childhood education (ECE), elementary, high school, post-secondary education (PSE), and employment.

Examples of successful partnership approaches include:

- The long-standing tripartite arrangement involving the Mi'kmaw that Eleanor Bernard spoke of,
- The tripartite arrangement with the First Nations Education Steering Committee in place in British Columbia since 1999,
- The recently signed agreement in Alberta that commits three Alberta treaty groups to creating a central hub of education expertise, and
- The agreement Manitoba has in place that focuses on early learning and school readiness.

In addition to these successful EPP approaches, there are also a number of joint activities under the EPP that are tripartite type arrangements. These are Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) arrangements that are reviewed by a National Selection Committee whose members are education experts. Funding available under this program enables schools to provide a wide variety of programming that is targeted towards engaging and retaining students. These programs have been well received with representation from over 70% of First Nations communities to date.

SYNOPSIS

In closing, there are many good things happening and this Colloquium provides an opportunity to learn from each other because right now “we have the opportunity of a lifetime to make a difference.” All the right “ingredients” are present including the shared

interests, the compelling need, and the will to succeed. Now is the time to concentrate on action and tangible practices that support Aboriginal students' educational success.

***“MY JOB IS TO SHARE WHAT THE CREATOR GAVE YOU” - Don Pinay,
Director of Education, Yorkton Tribal Council***

Mr. Pinay is considered the possessor of an extensive knowledge and experience with First Nations education, and with extensive references to his own experiences in provincial schools, Mr. Pinay outlined the critical and positive influence of “the people who really cared about me” in his own seamless transitions from public school to PSE and employment.

In telling stories of his childhood, Don highlighted the positive influence of his siblings, parents, and grandparents during his formative years. “I always had someone who shared with me. [My family] shared sounds [Aboriginal language] with me that made me comfortable.”

Don mentioned that while attending school in St. Vital, Manitoba, he had “this white teacher who really cared about me and I really learned from her.” Later the family moved to Seven Persons, Alberta, and while going to school, the principal took an interest in what the students were doing and as students, “we felt welcomed and we felt approval.” Later in Don’s education career, “I modeled what I did as a principal from this lady principal.”

Pondering the question, *What allows us to survive?* Mr. Pinay related that in his life and story of survival, “all learners have the academic component, but need people who are supporting, approving, and encouraging.” Additionally, Aboriginal children’s education must incorporate the Circle that includes the emotional, physical, spiritual, and mental areas. This Circle, or Medicine Wheel, can help support children’s success and can also help to answer the question, *Where do I fit in?*

FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

In order for Aboriginal students to be successful, all stakeholders must play their respective parts in ensuring that “the Circle is fully prepared for whatever is out there in the world. An understanding and connection to the Medicine Wheel is a factor in supporting Aboriginal learners’ success.”

Teachers teach reading, writing, and mathematics well, but Aboriginal students need to celebrate their successes, so there is a need for educators to use assessment tools that both showcase Aboriginal learners’ successes and identify the gaps in their learning. As gaps are identified, teachers need to prioritize instruction to close the gaps. “As service providers we must support teachers’ prioritizing and we must support the teachers’ Circles too.” When needs arise, “show teachers what to do; we can’t do enough to support teaching and learning of Aboriginal students in our schools.”

In closing, the previous speakers presented stories of success with the partnerships between governments, organizations, communities, families, schools, and students. These instances of partnerships highlighted one way to “bring the silos together and break down walls,” and move forward working together in providing the appropriate programming and supports Aboriginal students need for educational success.

DAY TWO TABLE TOPIC DISCUSSIONS

The presentations delivered in the morning sessions focused on innovations in governance and practice that enable seamless transitions for Aboriginal students K-12 and beyond. Energized by the stories of innovation and Aboriginal students’ educational success, the table topic discussion groups demonstrated a vigor and commitment in approaching the task of exploring tangible progressive solutions for seamless transitions.

INNOVATIVE CURRICULAR PRACTICES

Participants in this group recognized that in the area of innovative curricular practices that support Aboriginal students there are numerous positive examples to think about. Mandatory Treaty education in Saskatchewan is regarded as a positive innovative practice with considerable potential in support of improving Aboriginal student educational outcomes.

Professional learning communities (PLCs) within schools generally meet once a month to discuss what’s working and what’s not working, and then they explore appropriate curriculum and/or instruction changes. For example, at Duck Lake the staffs from Beardy’s and Okemasis education system participate in setting the professional development together to ensure relevance to their needs. In addition, curriculum writers are having conversations on how to improve the curriculum to make it more Aboriginal specific/friendly.

Also at Duck Lake, they are just starting Cree language instruction, which is delivered by “team teaching.” Furthermore, Cree language has been incorporated into social studies and some other subjects. When the Cree language program was first under consideration, there was some worry that some non-Aboriginal parents might have a problem with the change, but so far both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parents have been extremely supportive of the change. Elders have been involved in the change process Duck Lake because they have been willing to sit down, listen, and offer advice to teachers regarding the cultural relevance of lesson plans. It is inspiring that in the Duck Lake context communities are considered whole communities instead of Aboriginal vs. non-Aboriginal people.

The *Inspiring Success* policy document is a key driver of curriculum change in Saskatchewan at the present time. Additional positives in Saskatchewan include providing anti-racist education for teachers and providing teachers more exposure to cultural competencies in both pre-service program and in-service programs. Despite all the positive things happening with innovative governance and service delivery models,

there are challenges that remain.

CHALLENGES

As with many sectors in society, no two school systems operate exactly the same as one another. The same is true in how school divisions approach curriculum change; each system implements curriculum differently which can be an obstacle to sustaining province-wide momentum for change.

Treaty education was regarded as challenging; participants need to reconcile questions including what does Treaty Education mean to us as teachers, community members, administrators, students, and parents? Similarly, there are challenges with the way in which Aboriginal language preservation is conceived and implemented.

Not surprisingly when discussing challenges the group volunteered that in order to have change occur, there needs to be leadership that supports change. A related challenge is with teachers; the implementation of change comes with the challenge of training all teachers – the new as well as those who have been around for a long time.

Lastly, finding and retaining the cheerleaders and champions who are experts in motivating people to change can be a considerable challenge to the success or initiating change, although some participants reported that they are starting to see this happen more frequently.

SOLUTIONS

After deliberation and discussion of the positives and the challenges, participants in this small group created an extensive list of solutions that are in support of innovative school services and seamless transitions. In addition to having a champion in senior administration and keeping the pressure on celebrating what has been working, the group came up with the following solutions:

- Provide teachers with the necessary resources,
- Involve a number of participants in the change process: Elders, teachers, students, administrators, school divisions, governments, community, etc,
- Think of community as a whole instead of Aboriginal vs. non-Aboriginal,
- Focus on and celebrate what is in the students' best interest,
- Need to continue pushing forward and improving what's working,
- Borrow from the lessons learned in other immersion programs,
- Open communication and information sharing,

- Design the educational programs so that it accommodates the student, rather than having students accommodate the system,
- Band schools and provincial schools should work more closely together to ensure that there is curricular consistency and no gaps in programming for transient students,
- More resource/support people in schools (similar to Sakewew high school),
- Have the private sector get more involved in the schools. Have the funds to support a number of initiatives (e.g., literacy), and is a great way to recruit future workforce,
- Create alternative programs for students who have problems with the regular curriculum. Train them in things which will result in a job (e.g., trade certificates, chain saw operator, etc.).

Upon review of this list of proposed solutions, there is an apparent need for change efforts to be team efforts with everyone “on the same page from the top down and from the bottom up.” There is also the need to find common connections that focus on strengths, develop vision that everyone can accept and follow, develop creative partnerships in order to engage people with expertise, and continue providing anti-racism and anti-oppression professional development.

INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIPS IN EDUCATIONAL GOVERNANCE

Key Positive Points

There is a growing awareness that we need better measures, and there has been some improvement in learning outcomes; the Ministry of Education is expanding the definition of student/school success.

It appears there is a greater willingness among various stakeholders (e.g., federal and provincial governments, school boards and associations, individual First Nations and Tribal Councils, individual schools, etc.) to engage in partnerships, and most education sectors and government policy makers are on board. Partnering and networking is leading to more relationships among various stakeholders, and is noted in the sharing of information (avoiding re-inventing the wheel), and learning from each other. Overall, there is a greater sense of ownership among stakeholders to tackle challenges collaboratively.

Key Challenges

While there are a growing number of partnerships, in many ways the public in general does not understand this complexity nor do they realize the partnerships are happening. Partnerships may be occurring among the various organizations, however in some

instances there may be inadequate information (e.g., the various silos within a government may not be communicating with each other), or their actions may have an effect on each other such duplication of services or policy-making that overlaps.

When enhancing partnerships, the organizations working together have different models of governance and their own unique challenges. Differences may be challenging and may contribute to a lack of trust among various individuals and decision-makers if differences are not reconciled effectively. Also, racism among various individuals may prohibit effective partnerships from forming or working effectively.

Accountability mechanisms can be challenging because of differences from one organization to another. The complexities inherent in partnerships can make it difficult to agree on not only what constitutes accountability but also the weight of responsibility attributed to accountability criteria in each organization.

Organizations change and sometimes, just as agreements are about to be reached or need to be renewed, changes in members occur (e.g., school board and First Nations reps change; the funding for various positions is not renewed), which can make it difficult to maintain consistency.

Suggestions

There is a need for much more effective communication among governments and organizations and administrators. A greater emphasis should be placed on keeping all parties at all levels informed and consulted concurrent with encouraging simplified processes to enable more effective formation and maintenance of agreements.

Better communication among parents/guardians/Elders/and the community as meaningful partners has been attributed to improved educational outcomes, and more work could be done to sharing information and could help simplify administration and allow for more seamless transitions for students from one system to another. We need to do a better job telling and sharing the success stories of partnerships (e.g., Prairie Valley School Division/First Nations Advisory Committee) because celebrating success stories provides encouragement for everyone.

With enhanced communication there could be wider reach within the educational community especially when the media share success stories with the public. Better communication among all stakeholders can also help to build trust and ensure everyone is represented at the discussion table.

It is not surprising that discussing complex challenges can lead to confrontations, misunderstandings, and hard feelings. One suggestion is to encourage people to speak openly and share their concerns and apprehensions, as well as listening to each other respectfully. However, if someone speaks and/or acts in a racist manner, we need to have the courage to stand up for what is right and address the matter.

A final suggestion is to encourage more First Nations and Métis people (and people in general) to consider running for positions on school boards. This Table Topic discussion group mentioned that there are examples in the classroom of how teachers have creatively taught lessons/units on civic literacy and involvement, but this information did not accompany the table topic notes.

SESSION F: PUBLICLY REGULATED EDUCATION SYSTEMS: A ROLE IN RECONCILIATION

“RECONCILIATION AND PUBLIC EDUCATION: TREATIES AS A FOUNDATION FOR RELEVANT TEACHING” - Dr. Jim Miller, University of Saskatchewan

With respect to Treaty rights, many parties in Canada including the courts, the provincial governments, and Parliament desire reconciliation. According to Dr. Miller, “the first century after Confederation reconciled the French and the English in Canada. This second century after Confederation is for reconciling First Nations, Aboriginal, and non-Aboriginal Treaty issues.”

Treaties are the ideal platform for reconciliation because they involve all three Aboriginal peoples with the Crown. Treaties, found in all regions of Canada, provide an inclusive forum for reconciliation.

Treaties are valid in all regions of Canada and were found in all parts of Canada in the early post-contact period. These initial Treaties were informal commercial compacts made according to Aboriginal protocol, or kin-making. The commercial compacts permitted Europeans to pursue economic activities and achieve commercial objectives.

All Canadian people are treaty people because we are included in one or more of the kin, peace and friendship, and/or Territorial Treaties. Because treaties embrace all people in Canada and are found everywhere in the country treaties serve as a platform for building reconciliation. We are all treaty people, and therefore the Treaties can be used to restore the original treaty partnership.

HOW DO WE WORK WITH TREATIES TO FOSTER RECONCILIATION?

The Office of the Treaty Commissioner (OTC) in Saskatchewan is a very encouraging example of treaties fostering reconciliation through public education. The OTC provides education support via resource people available at their speakers' bureau, the development and distribution of classroom curriculum materials and resources, and by trainings teachers to teach Saskatchewan students about treaties and treaty rights. The overarching goal of the OTC's education program is to promote understanding, build positive relationships, respect each other, and honor our diversity.

The public education component of the treaty education program includes short video

vignettes, advertisements, and the speakers' bureau. The classroom portion of the program is focused on Saskatchewan schools and school children and includes curricula, resources, and teacher in-service. In developing and packaging the materials entitled *Teaching Treaties in the Classroom*, the OTC collaborated with tribal councils, curriculum planners, and classroom teachers.

The grade specific content contained in *Teaching Treaties in the Classroom*, is overlapping yet distinctive: grade seven focuses on First Nations land known as Saskatchewan; grade eight teaches students about building the foundation for treaty relationships; and, the grade nine program is a course of study about establishing the treaty process. In the high school program, the grade ten course is about treaties negotiated in what is now Saskatchewan; the grade eleven course provides for study of the impact of colonialism on treaty relationships; and the grade 12 program investigates the treaty relationship today.

These resources represent a very rich group of resources and in 2007 the Government of Saskatchewan mandated its implementation and use in all provincial schools.

LESSONS LEARNED

Visionary, imaginative, and strong leadership is essential to the success of using the treaties to restore the partnerships between Aboriginal people and the Crown. Restoring the partnership using the treaties is a labour intensive initiative, but the Saskatchewan experience demonstrates that treaties can serve as a foundation for reconciliation building efforts. In 1997, Chief Justice Antonio Lamer stated, "[I]et's face it. We're all here to stay," and thus we have to learn to build relationships and learn to live in harmony.

"RESEARCH ON RACIAL MICRO-AGGRESSIONS, INDIGENOUS IDENTITY, AND URBAN FIRST NATIONS YOUTH" - Dr. Tracy Friedel, University of British Columbia

Racial micro-aggression was defined as subtle insults made verbally, non-verbally, and/or visually, and directed toward people of color. Micro-aggression often occurs automatically or unconsciously. The cumulative effects of racially motivated micro-aggression may translate into the antecedent of many afflictions including mental health, alienation, depression, early school leaving. In view of this connection, micro-aggression is a useful lens through which we can learn about Aboriginal youth.

PLACE-BASED EDUCATION – RESEARCH WITH URBAN ABORIGINAL YOUTH

Focus group consultations revealed that there is an invisible hierarchy of racism in Canada with Aboriginal people at the bottom of the order. Furthermore, it was found that Aboriginal people received the most intense and frequent racism.

Friedel outlined a study that involved Cree, Cree-Métis, Blackfoot, Dene, and Assiniboine youth aged 14-16 years and focused on the research question, *What does it*

mean to be Aboriginal? The qualitative research design included interviews, fieldwork, and visual research and as the research unfolded, the concept of “racialized identity” emerged.

Racialized identity, a form of stereotyped racism that was originally constructed in the Colonial era, still exists with present urban Aboriginal youth. The Aboriginal participants in the study volunteered instances of racialized identity that included, “[you are Aboriginal?] Oh my gosh! Were you in a gang?” This type of racial micro-aggression becomes internalized by Aboriginal youth and was a contributor to low self-esteem that may lead to material and psychic injury.

IMPLICATION FOR RECONCILIATION

So how do Aboriginal youth typically deal with micro-aggression? Micro-aggression serves to make aggression more covert and difficult to deal with. Frustration, self doubt and isolation are typical emotional responses and may result in early school leaving.

Friedel pointed out that with the analysis of racial micro-aggression revealed “the failure of liberal education to achieve equality of opportunity for all Canadians” and highlighted the need for critical anti-racist education programs in Canadian schools that disrupt micro-aggression as the status quo.

Myths, stereotypes, and history that are not taught perpetuate micro-aggression, and therefore, to eliminate micro-aggression it makes sense to focus on disrupting racist practices that reinforce racializing the identity of Aboriginal people. According to Friedel, “disrupting racist practices is reconciliation.”

“IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES, PUBLICLY REGULATED EDUCATION SYSTEMS AND THE ROLE IN RECONCILIATION: WE ARE ALL TREATY PEOPLE” - Ken Horsman, Director of Educational Programs, Office of the Treaty Commissioner, Saskatoon, SK

Mr. Horsman opened his presentation by sharing his observation that “this Colloquium focused on improving educational outcomes and thank you to those who support the OTC. It is through these partnerships that we make progress.” Mr. Horsman also acknowledged the work of Susan Beaudin in the development of the OTC’s *Teaching Treaties in the Classroom* curriculum, teacher training, and resources.

CONTEXT

Despite sincere and earnest efforts to improve Aboriginal education, there is a need to admit these earlier efforts had some problems. For the most part, earlier Aboriginal education programs have been found to be unsuccessful, but this is about moving forward and not about assigning blame. Moreover, the point of studying these earlier programs in Aboriginal education is to develop programs that are significantly improved. Realizing that with Aboriginal education there are no quick fixes, gatherings such as this

Colloquium illustrate that practitioners, policy-makers, and decision-makers are on the right track, but everyone must commit to trying harder.

KEY MESSAGES

There is little doubt that racism is the fundamental challenge to relevant and successful Aboriginal education programming and reconciliation. Teaching Treaties promotes harmony and understanding as the antidote to combating racism. As outlined in Dr. Miller's presentation, "we are all treaty People" and this realization is the critical first step to improving understanding and harmony. As long as Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people do not realize we are all treaty people, "they are not getting it."

Mr. Horsman reinforced the importance of "listening to the Elders and the youth" to better understand the issues and to reveal possible reconciliation solutions. In addition to listening to Aboriginal Elders and youth, education has a major role to play in reconciliation because both education and reconciliation are focused on building relationships. The Treaty education program developed by the OTC in Saskatchewan provides a province-wide approach to promoting and understanding that we are all treaty people and thus, treaty education is a key contributor to rebuilding relationships and partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

ABOUT RECONCILIATION

Reconciliation and education are both about relationships. Education is essential in building relationships with Aboriginal people that enable equitable participation in the economy and access to opportunities for improving their livelihood. Similarly, reconciliation requires rebuilding the original legal and political partnerships between Aboriginal people and the Crown and education is an integral to building the relationships that reconciliation requires.

Horsman described that reconciliation as comprised of the political, legal, socio-economic, and spiritual pillars. The combined capacities of education – especially Treaty education – and relationship building enables understanding and rebuilding of the partnerships between and among the political, legal, socio-economic, and spiritual pillars. Rebuilding the treaty partnerships builds bridges allowing us to address racism and create harmony through respect, understanding, and knowledge exchange. Accordingly, "we must first address racism in schools as a prerequisite to reconciliation and Aboriginal student achievement."

WHAT HAS BEEN WORKING

Although efforts at Aboriginal education and reconciliation have not performed nearly well enough, it is important to take stock of the successes so far and use this momentum to move forward with policies and practices designed to improve Aboriginal student education outcomes. The following list represents some of Saskatchewan's success stories:

- Oskayak High School, Sakewew high school Won Ska Cultural School,
- Onion Lake Cree immersion program,
- SUNTEP, ITEP, and NORTEP teacher preparation programs,
- Mandatory treaty education,
- *Inspiring Success: Building Towards Student Success* policy document,
- Alternative education programs,
- Community education, and
- Shared standards and capacity building council.

As presented in earlier sessions, schools that provide Aboriginal language programs, an Elders program, cultural and spiritual practices and the pipe, a First Nations world view, and teach the treaties, are able to connect better with Aboriginal students who, in turn, are able to perform better in school and experience educational success.

CLOSING COMMENTS

“We know what to do to move forward, but we require a greater sense of urgency to get going, and a great sense of hope to build reconciliation.” Education is about relationships and reconciliation is about relationships; therefore, education has a major role in reconciliation and this is where Treaties education comes into the discourse. At the school-based level, “if you have relationships with kids in schools we begin the reconciliation process.”

REVIEW OF THEMES

At the end of two days of presentations, discussions, conversations, and networking, a number of challenges, solutions, and positive examples of Aboriginal education and positive Aboriginal student outcomes emerged from the presentations and table topic discussion groups. This next section summarizes the prevailing themes that emerged in Sessions A-F.

In the matter of key policy questions, presentations by Laughlin, Richards, and Raham revealed that policies must activate practices in support of district level strategies. Recent studies identified ECE, language and literacy, experiential learning, and discretionary strategies as practices that foster success for Aboriginal students. It seems that the key issues for policy-makers are twofold: First, the definition of success must be relevant to Aboriginal learners; and second, educational policies concerning Aboriginal education must recognize the social, economic, and political contexts and realities of Aboriginal students in recommending goals, indicators, and targets.

In Session B, participants learned about the contexts of Aboriginal education including population demographics, demographics on school level completion, and school achievement. Bougie, Anaquod, and Johns Simpson spoke about factors that resulted in positive educational outcomes for Aboriginal students. Aboriginal teachers, learning

Aboriginal language and culture, fine arts, and meaningful and accessible extra curricular activities build resilience into the Aboriginal students learning program and need to be protected as integral components of the educational program.

A key theme that emerged from Session B was that foundational approaches to education - including the *Inspiring Success* policy document in Saskatchewan - contain an integrated and holistic orientation to curriculum reform, complemented by flexible learning programs and instructional practices. Given the changing demographics in Saskatchewan, it is time to adopt practices that are culturally relevant and engaging for Aboriginal students, and instill self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-respect.

In Session C, Bousquet, Shmon, and Guevremont presented three approaches to curricular questions about improving Aboriginal educational outcomes. First Guevremont highlighted the profound role that the ability to speak an Aboriginal language has on improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students. When Aboriginal students learn an Aboriginal language in school from an Aboriginal teacher, student outcomes are very positive. Perhaps the lesson here is that if language creates a cultural connection and supports student success, then policy should reflect that this relationship represents relevant teaching.

Shmon's presentation about GDI enabled participants to reflect on the positive relationship between curriculum and instruction and educational achievement. Curriculum and instruction that are relevant to Aboriginal students' ways of knowing, contribute to obtaining positive educational outcomes. GDI's teacher preparation program follows a similar architecture. Not only is the program comprised of best practices that focus on drawing out the "gifts" the learner possesses, the teacher candidate program can be made to fit the student's circumstances. Perhaps the key message here is that to improve Aboriginal learning, "template teaching" needs to be replaced by culturally relevant, student-centered curriculum.

Bousquet's presentation focused on building relationships and trust with parents and communities by engaging them as educational collaborators. With reference to his experience and success with this model, educators and parents built a relationship that contributed to improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal students. The relationship was successful in large part because parents contributed their knowledge and expertise and worked *with* educators in developing a culturally relevant learning program.

Session D presentations began with Borgerson, Ottmann, and Bernard sharing their experience, knowledge, and information about governance and service delivery innovations. Borgerson related some of the lessons learned from his 33-year career at Île-à-la-Crosse, SK. With respect to students' success, innovations typically blended provincial curricula with cultural education, spiritual education, arts education, theatre/drama, and sports. These curricular innovations enabled students to develop verbal communication skills, confidence, self-esteem, a sense of pride, and a sense of place. The overriding message is best expressed by Mr. Borgerson, who cautioned that "in our haste to close the achievement gaps, [we must] be careful not to create other gaps. [We must] ensure that arts, sports, cultural education, and spiritual education are

protected. Students need to learn to read, write, and do math, but they also need to dance.”

Dr. Ottmann spoke about “culturally responsive teaching” along with the characteristics of high performing schools, and reinforced the importance a sense of urgency plays in initiating change. With respect to innovation the key theme that emerged from this session was that schools that have high standards, committed staff, and multiple support systems available to diverse learners tended to enable positive educational outcomes for Aboriginal students. In addition, there is considerable emphasis placed on changing Aboriginal education, but within society there needs to be a sense of urgency and a call to action. According to Ottmann, “if we believe something is important it will get done, therefore, a strong sense of urgency is fundamental to educational change. To initiate educational change, a shift in focus is required to promote a strong sense of urgency,” and provide momentum for ongoing governance and service delivery innovations.

Responsive and relevant education is about the communities in which we all live and work. Therefore, service innovations, including teaching Aboriginal languages, are about the best interests of students. Mi’kmaw language immersion program, high quality teachers, partnerships with stakeholders and all levels of government, and regular assessment of innovations illustrate that “success [results from] a collective effort of all stakeholders” because of its responsiveness to learner needs.

Seamless transitions in K-12 education for students on and off reserve was the topic for Session E presentations. Sutherland, Schellenberg and Eyahpaise, de Vlieger, and Pinay were the keynote speakers in this session. Each speaker shared stories that highlighted educational best practices and Aboriginal learner success. Sutherland spoke about the “out-of-the-box” practices that characterize Sakewew High School; moreover, the prevailing theme in this presentation was that partnerships and leveraging school partnerships for out-of-the-box best practices can transform students’ lives and enable positive educational experiences. For instance, school linked human services and a climate of support are available so “if a student needs something, we find a way to meet the need” thus supporting seamless transitions in the K-12 system and beyond.

Schellenberg and Eyahpaise highlighted their observation that successful children tend to have “the right people around them, especially their grandparents.” A key message was that seamless transitions occur by finding the gaps in the school, then “step[ping] into the gaps,” to develop new relationships that support Aboriginal students’ educational success throughout the K-12 educational journey.

From de Vlieger, participants learned that seamless transitions result, in part, because of partnerships based upon shared interests, compelling need, and a will to succeed. Partnerships resonated as a key factor in supporting seamless transitions in the K-12 system, PSE, and into employment. Partnerships “[are] how we reach out to partners who can contribute to improving educational outcomes. For example, Elders have historical, language, and cultural knowledge and expertise to share with Aboriginal youth and, by working together, there are better opportunities to meet student needs. Now is the time to

concentrate on practices that support Aboriginal student success K-12 and beyond.

Mr. Pinay gave one of the most animated presentations of the day. The passion with which he spoke about education infused energy into the story he told of his own educational experience. Despite his family moving and his having to change schools as a boy, Mr. Pinay attributed his own educational success to “always having people around who really cared about me, supported me, approved and encouraged me.”

Dr. Miller, Dr. Friedel, and Mr. Horsman spoke about education and its role in reconciliation. First, Miller explained the treaty-making process in both the pre-Confederation and post-Confederation periods, and emphasized the point that because Treaties are agreements between Aboriginal people and the Crown and because they exist in all parts of Canada, all Canadians are Treaty people. Considering the original Treaties documented the original partnership, it makes sense that Treaty education provides the means to learn about the Treaties and restore the original Treaty partnerships. Treaty education as a means of reconciliation emerged as the key theme in Miller’s presentation. Dr. Friedel presented her research findings generated from a study of micro-aggression and its impact on Aboriginal youth. Micro-aggression was defined as subtle verbal hits, non-verbal and visual bullying; the cumulative effect of which may become the antecedent of many afflictions affecting Aboriginal youth, including mental health issues, alienation, depression, and/or early school leaving. Friedel’s analysis of racial micro-aggression revealed the need for critical anti-racist education programs in Canadian schools in order to disrupt micro-aggression as the status quo. According to Friedel, disrupting micro-aggression “is reconciliation.”

Teaching Treaties, according to Mr. Horsman, promotes harmony and understanding, which can be a powerful tool in defeating racism. The prevailing theme that emerged from Horsman’s presentation is that we are all Treaty people; realizing we are all Treaty is the critical first step to creating understanding and harmony. A second theme that emerged was that reconciliation and education are both about relationships; education is fundamental to building relationships with Aboriginal people and reconciliation is about restoring the original Treaty relationships, and therefore, education has a major role in reconciliation. As Mr. Horsman commented, “this is where Treaty education comes in because . . . “if you have relationships with kids in schools we begin the reconciliation process.”

CONCLUDING THE COLLOQUIUM: CLOSING REMARKS

Elder Sutherland compared the picture presented in the data as “the aerial view” of Aboriginal peoples’ education, adding that “what you need is the picture from below – it is not just about listening, but more about doing.” Reflecting upon the Session F speakers, Elder Sutherland remarked, “I know our school has the Treaty Education kit and my job is to push [the implementation] of this [program].”

From Sutherland's experience, "making a difference in one child accomplishes a lot" and programs including Cree immersion, extra-curricular, and Elders programs support Aboriginal students success in school and ensures "we do not lose our culture." In closing, Elder Sutherland commented "I thank the Creator every day for teachers and teachers' love and commitment to children."

On behalf of the College of Education, and the Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy, University of Saskatchewan, Dr. Carr Stewart thanked the Colloquium presenters and participants for their contributions to the conference and focused on participants' opportunity to make a difference. Dr. Carr Stewart challenged participants to leave the conference today with the idea of making a difference.

As negotiated in the Treaties, Canadian First Nations and Aboriginal people were promised an equal education system. As presented at the Colloquium, the educational indicators highlighted gaps in achievement and retention and high school completion and graduation rates. Equipped with the knowledge and understanding of innovative practices, praxis is the next step for improving Aboriginal students educational outcomes.

To this end, networking and establishing committees in order to move ideas into practice were highlighted throughout the Colloquium as necessary and important actions in improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal learners. In concluding the Conference, the chair reminded everyone that "it takes a community to raise a child," and reminded participants to continue to work on creating policies, indicators, and best practices that will support improving Aboriginal students educational outcomes

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