

Educators' Perspectives about a Public School District's Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement in British Columbia

Kevin White

University of British Columbia

Jozsef Budai

University of British Columbia

Daniel Mathew

University of British Columbia

Mary Rickson Deighan

University of British Columbia

Hartej Gill

University of British Columbia

Historically, the education of Aboriginal people in Canada has been a paternalistic and colonial undertaking, causing great harm and loss to Aboriginal peoples and their traditional knowledge(s) and ways of knowing. In attempts to move forward from the legacy of residential schools in British Columbia, school districts and Aboriginal groups have begun to forge new partnerships to meet the educational needs of Aboriginal youth in the form of Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements (AEEAs). The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of educators as they implemented such an agreement in the Burnaby school district. Our research intended to answer questions regarding the nature of the agreement's impact on the ways in which educators of Aboriginal youth worked. In terms of how the members of the Aboriginal Education Support Team (AEST) perceived the implementation of the AEEA, our research team found two significant and recurring themes. Firstly, notions of success for Aboriginal students still relied heavily on Eurocentric measures, such as graduation rates, undermining other more holistic notions of success. Secondly, the flow of information and awareness within the district was perceived to flow well vertically up the district hierarchy, but did not diffuse as prevalently across the district between and within schools. The study also includes several recommendations to help support the AEST as they continue their important work in continuing to implement the current agreement. Finally, potential areas for future research are also suggested.

Introduction

It is generally accepted that the education system has failed Aboriginal people in Canada. Prime Minister Stephen Harper (2008) publicly recognized that the Canadian government's system of residential schools caused great harm to Aboriginal people. Specifically, Mr. Harper recognized that the consequences of the "residential schools' policy were profoundly negative and that this policy has had a lasting and damaging impact on Aboriginal culture, heritage and language" (Harper, 2008, para 17). Indeed, graduation rates for Aboriginal students remain low and Aboriginal people remain underrepresented in the ranks of university and college. In 1999, the Minister of Education in British Columbia (BC), Mr. Paul Ramsey, was signatory to a *Memorandum of Understanding on Aboriginal Education* which acknowledged that schools in BC had been largely unsuccessful in providing a quality education for Aboriginal students. The resulting framework led to the creation and implementation of Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements (AEEAs) in 51 school districts in BC as of November 2010. The proliferation of these agreements throughout the province since 1999 captured our interest as teacher-researchers. We began to wonder how these agreements were impacting Aboriginal education in schools and educators' knowledge about Aboriginal education. Though most districts with an AEEA have engaged in local inquiry projects regarding different aspects of the agreements, our research team was unable to find any published academic studies on the subject. It is our hope that the current study will add to the limited research in this area. Our study aimed to work closely with the Aboriginal Education Steering Committee and build on its significant work done in the Burnaby district with regard to its AEEA. The timing of this study is important since the five-year term of the current AEEA in Burnaby will conclude on June 30, 2013. It our hope that the data and analysis produced by our study, along with many of the other inquiries conducted by the Burnaby School District Aboriginal Education Steering Committee, will be utilized during the negotiations for the second AEEA.

Purpose

The purpose of our study was to investigate the experiences of educators involved in the implementation of the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement (AEEA) in the Burnaby School District. The term *educators* included any person having contact with Aboriginal youth in an educational context with regard to the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement.

Our study intended to address the following research questions:

1. What opportunities, if any, is the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement providing for educators to provide a culturally relevant curriculum for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth?

2. How, if at all, does the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement impact the daily life of educators and Aboriginal youth as perceived by those educators implementing this agreement?
3. What do educators involved in the implementation of the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement perceive as successful? What, in their view, are some indicators of success/progress towards the four goals outlined in the agreement?

Historical Background

The historical background of Canadian legislation affecting First Nation's people began in 1857 with the Province of Canada's *Gradual Civilization of the Indian Tribes Act*. Prior to this act, all responsibility for Aboriginal affairs rested with British authorities who, ironically, recognized Aboriginals as distinct communities with a national identity and were granted political powers associated with any other nation, as recognized by King George III's *Royal Proclamation of 1763*. As the control gradually shifted away from British authorities, Canadian authorities introduced the *Gradual Civilization Act* of 1857 with the intention of "civilizing" Aboriginal populations of Canada and encouraging First Nations people to give up their Aboriginal title, culture, and traditions to become members of the broader Canadian society (Carney, 1995). A decade later, the *British North America Act* (or the *Constitution Act, 1867*) passed in British Parliament, granting four colonies in North America the right to confederate and manage all of their internal affairs under the auspices of a central government. Subsection 91(24) of the *Constitution Act, 1867* granted the Canadian Parliament legislative authority over "Indians, and Lands reserved for the Indians." The first consolidated *Indian Act* was passed through Canadian federal legislation in 1876, enshrining previous assimilationist policies into law, effectively establishing Aboriginal peoples as wards of the state. While there have been numerous key revisions legislated into the *Indian Act* since 1876, the Act remains fundamentally unchanged to this day.

The "civilizing" intention of Aboriginal education in BC was a tragic and violent act of colonial oppression. Early schools run by religious groups were supplanted in 1876 by the federal *Indian Act*, which formalized the federal government's responsibility for ensuring the education of Canada's Aboriginal population. The first residential school in BC, created in Mission in 1863 by the Roman Catholic Church, was followed by others mandated by the federal government. In 1920, the federal government revised the Act to make attendance at residential schools mandatory for every Aboriginal child between the ages of 7 and 15 (Brasfield, 2001). There were 16 such residential schools in BC, and they operated from 1863 until as recently as 1984 (Brasfield, 2001). The remote nature of many Aboriginal communities, coupled with the government's mission to colonize and assimilate Aboriginal peoples, spurred the creation of centralized residen-

tial schools to which children were brought. This incredibly violent disruption of communities and families has left an unforgivable legacy on future generations. Survivors of this experience continue to suffer from many social and mental health issues due to psychological, physical, or sexual abuse during the time of their residential school attendance (Brasfield, 2001), as well as a significant loss of knowledge of their own culture and/or language. Residential school students were forcibly raised in an isolated setting without the opportunity for strong parental bonding or the opportunity to learn from appropriate Aboriginal role models. This forced and prolonged separation of children from their parents and community resulted in significant cultural and language loss and disrupted the oral and experiential transfer of traditional knowledge. This separation continues to impact current-day parent-child relationships in this community and represents a continuing challenge and obstacle for maintaining Aboriginal culture and traditions.

The negative legacy of abuse and trauma inflicted upon Aboriginal people by the colonial residential school system has also left a deep mistrust amongst them of the educational system. Additionally, due to curricular exclusion and lack of Native language instruction, the educational system today continues to colonize the children of residential school survivors, creating conditions affecting each successive generation. Aboriginal communities have long objected to the inherent paternalism of the colonial *Indian Act* and its imposed regime, which they view as fundamentally ill-suited to their needs and aspirations. In particular, Aboriginal communities have pushed for more direct control over their own education and for modifications to the *Indian Act* to allow for opting out of federally-provided education for Aboriginal peoples. This is supported by the recommendations of the 1972 *Indian Control of Indian Education* policy paper which was generally accepted by the federal government in 1973 (National Indian Brotherhood/Assembly of First Nations, 1972). Further support followed 30 years later in the 2002 final report of the Minister's National Working Group on Education, which stated, "the jurisdiction that First Nations require to govern and manage the education of their learners should be exclusive and all encompassing" (2002, p. 10). More recently, in 2006, Parliament enacted the *First Nations Jurisdiction over Education in British Columbia Act*, establishing a First Nations Education Authority in the province, authorizing agreements for Aboriginal communities for jurisdiction over education, effectively nullifying educational provisions in the *Indian Act* for participating communities. The challenge remains, however, to meet the needs of Aboriginal students, especially in urban centres such as Burnaby, where the Aboriginal community may be comprised of people from across the country. Aboriginal people are a diverse culture and so is their pedagogy and knowledge (Battiste, 2002). It is for these reasons that Aboriginal communities, in partnership with local school districts and the

BC Ministry of Education, began to look at how Aboriginal education could be enhanced. Thus, as a way of trying to meet the needs of Aboriginal students, various policies and initiatives created in individual school districts eventually evolved to become the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements in British Columbia.

Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements—General Overview

The BC Ministry of Education states that an Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement (AEEA) is:

... a commitment made by each school district, involving all local Aboriginal communities and the Ministry of Education, to work together to improve the success of all Aboriginal students. The agreements are based on mutual respect and trust and represent a five-year vision of success for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students in each school district (Aboriginal Education Enhancements Branch, BC Ministry of Education, 2009)

In developing an agreement, the individual school district and local Aboriginal communities work together to develop goals, targets, and indicators of success. The BC Ministry of Education (2010) states that all Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements in the province should contain “specific performance and delivery expectations for all Aboriginal learners”.

AEEA Framework for Burnaby

British Columbia’s Ministry of Education (2010) emphasizes that any Enhancement Agreement “establishes a collaborative partnership between Aboriginal communities and school districts that involves shared decision-making and specific goal setting to meet the educational needs of Aboriginal students” (para. 1). This requirement posed a unique challenge for the Burnaby School District in its journey toward the implementation of their Enhancement Agreement. The challenge was outlined as follows: “Burnaby is a unique community with an absence of First Nations bands and Aboriginal organizations and agencies with whom to develop an Enhancement Agreement” (BC Ministry of Education, 2008). Therefore, the Burnaby School District looked to create goals for its Enhancement Agreement through a series of parent meetings held over a five-month time period. The feedback from the parent meetings led the committee to add a fourth goal to the three already agreed upon. The fourth goal reflects the importance of the historical context for the Aboriginal community in Burnaby, which is now reflected in the Burnaby AEEA commitments, with the aim to increase the knowledge and understanding regarding Aboriginal history and issues for all staff and students.

The government of British Columbia upholds the AEEA as the means by which the district and Aboriginal communities can improve Aboriginal student achievement (Bond, cf. BC Ministry of Education, 2008). As teacher-researchers, this claim captured our interest. Although a great deal of work has been done by government and local inquiry groups at the district level, published academic research in this area appears to be completely absent.

Methodology

Collaboration and research with Aboriginal people must be approached cautiously and carefully in order to avoid bias and overcome the privileging of Eurocentric knowledge that exists within the dominant culture. Historically, research has often misrepresented, undervalued, skewed or stolen Aboriginal people's unique viewpoints, beliefs, and knowledge (Pidgeon & Hardy Cox, 2002; Smith, 1999). This is due to the belief that [Eurocentric] knowledge, culture, and ways of knowing are superior to other cultures (Battiste, 2002; Smith, 1999). Our methodology was impacted significantly by the work of these scholars as well as the Burnaby School District community.

Initially, we had decided (mainly to maintain anonymity of our participants) to collect our data through a quantitative survey using a Likert scale format. However, this approach changed as we met with various members of our community. As part of the research process, we met with the administrators in the district and formed an important relationship with the Vice Principal in charge of Aboriginal Education, Lyn Daniels. She guided our research and provided us with invaluable support along our entire research journey. Through her leadership, we were invited to attend meetings of the AEEA Steering Committee which consisted of parents, educators, administrators, and local interest groups. Influenced by the results of the AEEA Steering Committee's research with students, we came to the realization that a quantitative survey would exemplify the most Eurocentric approach that we could use, given the context and subject area of our study. A significant concern was that this approach would give little consideration and space to the voices and stories of our participants. Re-evaluating the research method resulted in a change to a qualitative questionnaire, allowing for greater participant voice and richer detailed narratives. We chose questionnaires over interviews or Indigenous Storywork (Archibald, 2008) because we knew that it would be uncomfortable for our participants to share responses directly with the research team in a face-to-face setting, especially given that several of the researchers were Burnaby educators. Through the use of the web-based Survey Monkey® tool, we were able to get valuable and detailed information from our participants while preserving their anonymity. The nineteen-question questionnaire was distributed to all 11 members of the Aboriginal Education Support Team (AEST), and to interested educators at a scheduled meeting of the AEST and via email. Both paper and electronic versions (Zoomerang® online survey questionnaires) were made available. Of all these questionnaires, five were returned. Given other district responsibilities of our potential participants, we believed that this was an excellent return rate.

Our study focused specifically on this group of educators due to their unique position in the district in relation to the AEEA. The AEST connectedness to the spirit and goals of the AEEA influences how they interact

with students, colleagues, parents, and the community. The relationships formed as a result provide the AEST with a unique position within the social fabric of the district to observe the AEEA in action. As district-based educators, they have contact with many different schools within the district and are able to follow students even as they move within the district. Although we recognized some of the AEST members as participants on the Enhancement Agreement Advisory Committee, we found little evidence of the voices of these educators within the AEEA; this prompted our research team to focus on this unexplored perspective.

Data Analysis

As outsiders, Eurocentric scholars may be useful in helping Indigenous people articulate their concerns, but to speak for them is to deny them the self-determination so essential to human progress. (Battiste, 1998, p. 21)

Although two members of the research team are insiders of Indigenous heritage and all of our team consisted of educators, we also identified as outsiders in that we were doing this research from the academy rather than from the district or the Aboriginal community. Therefore, following Alcott and Battiste's cautions regarding speaking for others, our research team chose to include our respondents' narratives verbatim to allow their voices to come through in our data analysis. Therefore, all quotes from the respondents' questionnaires found in this paper are left unchanged without any adjustments to grammar or spelling.

Key Words and Phrases	Code
having skills or knowledge, improvement, increase, healthy lifestyles, academic achievement, career goals, academic progress, none, I don't know	Success
welcoming, self esteem, community, invited in, friends, relationships, anti-racist, partnerships, sense of place, excluded, left out	Belonging
pride, awareness, knowledge of, acknowledging, aboriginal content, traditional knowledge, strength of culture, cultural competency, traditions, heritage, confidence	Culture
residential schooling, resentment, lack of voice, Aboriginal issues, understanding, respect for heritage	History
programs, resources, curricula, posters, professional development, programs, staff, resource people	People/Resources
in the future, we are planning, should, change, develop, would be better if, I would like to see	Interesting

Figure 1. Open Coding Keywords and Phrases: Codes Based on Themes Found in the AEEA

Open Coding Phase

Our data analysis method was based on the qualitative process of open and focused coding. The themes that we coded in the open coding phase were taken directly from the Burnaby AEEA. We included a sixth code, *interesting*, as we believed that themes outside of those in the AEEA would emerge. Figure 1 explores some of the codes that emerged as a result of our initial analysis.

Transition to Focused Coding

One of the obstacles in looking at the factors contributing to Aboriginal student success in school is the definition of success. (Melnechenko & Horsman, 1998, p. 7; Canadian Council on Learning, 2008)

We discovered that many different themes emerged from the process of open coding. Our decisions regarding which themes we would focus on was informed, in part, by our own experiences as educators and the ongoing process of collaboration with those involved in implementing the AEEA across the Burnaby School District. We began by breaking down the *success* code and combining it with elements from the *belonging*, *culture*, *history*, *resources*, and *interesting* codes to create a tree code organization, as shown in Figure 2 (Gibbs and Taylor, 2005). We created three subcodes to recognize our participants' notions of *success*. The first, *decolonized/unrecognized success*, was created to recognize the AEST or Aboriginal perspectives about success. The second, *Eurocentric/Western success*, accounts for institutionalized notions of success, such as Dogwood

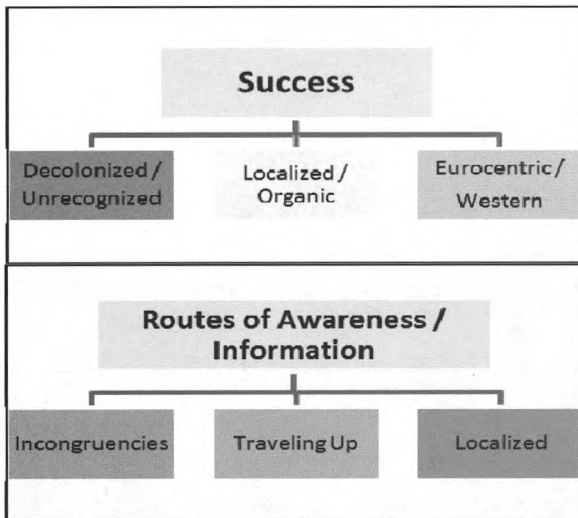


Figure 2. Code Tree for Success Themes

diploma completion and graduation rates. Finally, *localized/organic* success was created to recognize school-based successes resulting from individuals or small groups in one location (see Figure 2).

When creating the coding tree for the theme of success, the research team reflected on the *First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Holistic Lifelong Learning Models* developed by the Canadian Council on Learning (2008) (<http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/Reports/RedefiningSuccessInAboriginal-Learning/RedefiningSuccessModels.html>). The research team locates success as being in the “tree’s extended branches, which represent the individual’s harmony and well-being” (Canadian Council on Learning, 2008). Thus, the sub-codes of *decolonized/unrecognized*, *localized/small*, and *Eurocentric/Western* all combined together to create examples of success. The codes and the key words and phrases our team used during this phase of data analysis are described in Figure 3.

The second theme that emerged from our data revolved around the routes that awareness and information regarding the AEEA was traveling through the district organization. Here, again, we created three sub-codes to highlight the different means by which awareness and information related to the AEEA was travelling back and forth within the district hierarchy. First, we recognized that our respondents acknowledged the existence of small successful school-based programs. Awareness and information regarding what is working to make these programs a success, however, does not often travel beyond the school site. We coded this as *localized* awareness. Additionally, some of our respondents noted various different people in the district to whom they had spoken or to whom they

Success	
Key words and phrases	Subcodes
Prescribed learning outcomes, outcomes driven, graduation rates, ministry reporting, test scores, summative types of assessment, curriculum, school completion rates, scores	Eurocentric / Western
Aboriginal circle, seem happy to participate, pride in culture, consultation, Eagle feather, community, well being, willingness to embrace heritage, differentiated, experiential learning, collaborative, whole students, all aspect sof the student	Decolonized/ Unrecognized
School teams, school based programs, staff member, unique, some schools, some teachers, school based team, single schools, couple of staff	Localized / Organic
Routes of Awareness / Information	
Key words and phrases	Subcodes
Small groups, unique, limited scope, a few, individual understand, working alone, few teachers at a single school, small group	Localized
Administration, district level, administrative levels, school board, staff development teams, district teams, district leadership	Traveling Up
Unsure, I don't know vs. Indepth awareness, knowledge	Incongruencies

Figure 3. Focused Coding Key Words and Phrases: Code Trees for the Focused Coding Phase

had made formal presentations. We recognized that our respondents generally cited examples in which this awareness or information was usually traveling up the district hierarchy. We coded this as *traveling up* awareness. Finally, we discovered that some of our respondents' responses seemed incongruous in comparison with one another. At this point in the research we were unable to determine whether this was due to the wording of the questions, the long nature of the online version of the questionnaire, or if the level of awareness regarding the AEEA among the respondents was disparate in nature, without conducting further research. For the purposes of this theme, we coded this as *incongruencies* in knowledge.

Learnings

We would like to acknowledge that we are aware, at this specific point in time, that the Burnaby School District is still relatively early in the implementation phase of the AEEA and that the goals of the agreement may not have had enough time to come to fruition. The district and the AEST are currently working on completing their Annual Report and are conducting their own research with regard to the AEEA. It is our hope that the discourse contained in this research project will add to the body of knowledge available to the AEST and the Burnaby School District.

"the same as always—looking at graduation rates and transitions"

(Respondent One, Question Two)

"According to the graduation rate that is compiled by the Ministry of Education we have not made progress in this area."

(Respondent Three, Question Thirteen)

"DATA without context is the only success measurement since implementation."

(Respondent 4, Question Two)

Through our learnings, it became apparent that most of our respondents perceive that success is still generally measured using only Eurocentric means; successes that do not fit this Eurocentric norm are not often identified or celebrated as such. One respondent out of our five participants did describe measurements of success that fit more closely with those described by current Aboriginal scholars. The three *Holistic Lifelong Learning Models* (Canadian Council on Learning, 2008) show Western and Indigenous knowledge intertwining to form the trunk of the tree. Battiste (2002, p. 5) advocates "animating the voices and experiences of the cognitive 'other' and integrating them into the educational process." Our research team believes that our respondents are finding successes in experiences that reflect a non-Eurocentric or decolonized experience of *success*. These success stories, however, reside in a specific local context or with an individual staff member.

"except in the small Aboriginal groups within single schools"

(Respondent One, Question Four)

“One staff member takes a small group of students on a leadership gathering where they get to focus on spiritual well being for seven days”

(Respondent Three, Question Nine)

Respondents seemed to indicate that, though they do recognize some small successful programs related to the goals of the AEEA, these successes seem to be attached to a specific person, team, or group. Thus, the programs led by the people or teams referenced by our respondents are less likely to be maintained since school staff change over time. Respondent Three (Question Nine) references this sense of program fragility as follows: “Some of these activities are ongoing but some are not due to staff changes and availability of resources.”

In the research process, the research team had an informal discussion about our learnings with the District’s Vice-Principal for Aboriginal Education. In this discussion we were able to develop a better understanding of the successes the district is experiencing with Aboriginal students, such as the Eagle Feather Ceremony. The Eagle Feather Ceremony, which predates the AEEA, is attended by over 600 parents, students, staff, and members of the community. It is a ceremony that recognizes Aboriginal students’ successes and is widely embraced in the AEEA initiatives. This program, however, was only mentioned as a *success* by one of our respondents. The research team continues to wonder why, when the AEEA defines success in more decolonized terms, that our respondents still seem to point to very Eurocentric measures of success. As Demmert (2001) and the three *Holistic Lifelong Learning Models* (Canadian Council on Learning, 2008) demonstrate, strong cultural identity and awareness of heritage combine with academic achievement to create a successful individual.

“Through the programs we offer learning the value of ceremonies and hearing of the past”

(Respondent Five, Question Nine)

“Eagle Feather Program helps motivate Aboriginal students and validates their cultural beliefs”

(Respondent Two, Question Nineteen)

Our respondents point to additional measures of success that differ from the Eurocentric norms including culture and belonging when responding to questions not directly linked to measurements of success, but only Respondents Three and Five (Question Two) did so when asked how success is measured. A member of our research team, Kevin White, has two children who currently attend school in Burnaby. He related the following story as part of our team discussions around the relationship between a sense of belonging and cultural pride and connection to the theme of success:

My children are a part of the Aboriginal Circle program and are excited to be a part of the ongoing activities. In our family conversations they talk about the arts and crafts projects they created and were able to share with students in their regular classrooms. These are often small First Nations crafts, such as ceremonial rattles, necklaces, weaving and sewing projects, and drawings and paintings that are manageable for young children and can be done in a reasonable amount of time. The projects they bring home are often a topic of discussion and a point

of pride for them as they share their creations with family and friends. They also are able to talk about some of the themes and stories that were shared during Aboriginal Circle time that help them to understand and have pride in their history and culture. They always look forward to attending the Circle times and are quite excited when the Aboriginal Circle days come up on their calendars (Kevin White, personal communication, 2011).

Echoing this theme, one of our respondents discussed how he/she had noticed how some of the students had started to reclaim their Aboriginal identity: "then they are feeling okay about being who they are and want to be identified as Aboriginal to me this shows a sense of belonging" (Respondent Five, Question Two); and "The Aboriginal culture and beliefs is being validated ... again, by others deepening their understanding of Aboriginal culture and education, Aboriginal students are likely to feel proud of their heritage" (Respondent Two, Question Nine). These ideas of success, in terms of reclaiming identity and students' greater sense of belonging and how this relates to a holistic version of success, are part of the AEEA: "How does achieving a sense of belonging and pride in cultural heritage for Aboriginal students correlate to their education participation, outcomes and future aspirations?" (Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement Advisory Committee, 2008, p. 7).

In addition, our research team would like to add that information we have gathered, as part of our ongoing collaboration with the community and the Burnaby School District, has revealed that the Steering Committee, through its reporting process, is moving towards a decolonized measure of success. The research team wonders how broader systemic and institu-

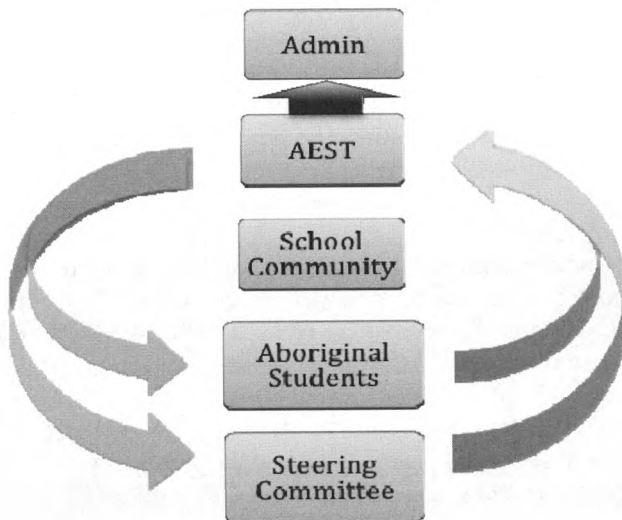


Figure 4. Visualization of the Paths of Information and Awareness

tional issues might be preventing the AEST from challenging this notion of Eurocentric success in a more significant way.

The second finding of our research project is that information regarding the progress towards the goals, commitments, and performance indicators found in the AEEA does not travel uniformly throughout the district; information seems to travel up the district hierarchy more completely than it spreads throughout the district as a whole.

"The AB team has done numerous presentations to the board, the administrators, the staff development teams, the school district as a whole, the Aboriginal education contacts."

(Respondent Three, Question Eight)

"It has allowed the conversation to happen within the administrative level but has not reached the school level itself. No structural changes has [sic] happened within the school system to allow for any change let alone for authentic Aboriginal voice."

(Respondent Four, Question Four)

Our respondents seem to indicate that they perceive information and awareness is stronger at the higher levels of the district organization (refer to Figure 4). They perceive that the "general teaching population" does not have a good working knowledge or awareness of the AEEA.

"at this time we have a very small group of dedicated committee members"

(Respondent Five, Question Four)

"It is doubtful that we will get a sense of how much people know district wide but we will have a sense of the knowledge people have based on the various pockets of teaching and learning activities that are going on around the district."

(Respondent Three, Question Eight)

Respondents Three and Five seemed to indicate that, in addition to localized successes, awareness and knowledge related to the goals of the AEEA may also be localized in specific schools or committees throughout the district. When asked if the AEEA has changed the awareness and understanding of the history of Aboriginal peoples (Question Eight), Respondent Two replied, "limited. The general teaching population needs more professional development opportunities." This also seems to point to the lack of a widespread awareness of Aboriginal issues according to some of our respondents.

Our research was limited in its ability to discover the reasons why the general school community lacked awareness of the AEEA. The research team wondered if the requirement to create an Annual Report for the Ministry of Education has placed a greater emphasis on convincing district and Ministry leadership of the value of the decolonized nature of the goals and performance indicators of the AEEA, leaving little time and resources to engage the general teaching population in the same way. Teachers have a large role to play in the project of decolonization:

As teachers begin to confront new pedagogical schemes of learning, they will need to decolonize education, a process that includes raising the collective voice of Indigenous peoples, exposing the injustices in our colonial history, deconstructing the past by critically examining

Respondent	Describe the ways, if any, Aboriginal students are developing healthy lifestyles based on traditional teachings with the implementation of the Burnaby AEEA.
1	unknown
4	Other than what the students receive during Aboriginal circle (which was in place prior to the EA) there has no development.
3	We haven't focused on this area of the enhancement agreement in a strategic way. Most of the secondary staff have applied for and received grants from "Honour Your Health challenge". They used the grant to purchase refrigerators and water cooler dispensers for the various Aboriginal education rooms through out the secondary schools. A couple of staff organized students to participate in the sun run as part of the Honour Your Health challenge. One staff member takes a small group of students on a leadership gathering where they get to focus on spiritual well being for seven days. Some of these activities are ongoing but some are not due to staff changes and availability of resources.
5	Through the programs we offer leaning the value of ceremonies and hearing of the past.
2	The aboriginal culture and beliefs is being validated...again, by others deepening their understanding of aboriginal culture and education, aboriginal students are likely to feel proud of their heritage.

Figure 5. Responses to Demonstrate the Incongruous Nature of the Narrative

the social, political, economic and emotional reasons for the silencing of Aboriginal voices in Canadian history, legitimating the voices and experiences of Aboriginal people in the curriculum, recognizing it as a dynamic context of knowledge and knowing and communicating the emotional journey that such explorations will generate. (Battiste, 2002, p. 20)

We did, however, discover that in the responses to a number of questions there seemed to be a wide range of responses, from rich detail to single word answers. In Figure 5, citing the responses from Question Nine regarding the development of healthy lifestyles based on traditional teachings, one can see an example of the range of responses.

Some Closing Reflections

As we come to the end of our research, it is important to recognize that the process by which the Burnaby School District implemented the AEEA is unique. The manner in which the district honoured Aboriginal community involvement and recognized the importance of decolonizing education has been inspiring. Although educators are encouraged, they recognize that there continues to be much work to do. These thoughts from our participants were insightful in helping us answer our research questions. With respect to the AEEA's ability to provide more culturally relevant curriculum for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth, we found that there was greater awareness of Aboriginal culture being spread throughout parts of school communities and that the AEEA is allowing Aboriginal students to feel greater pride in their cultural heritage and a stronger sense of belonging. Both of these values are consistent with more holistic lifelong learning

models. Further, there is a strong perception among the AEST that the general teaching population is not well informed about the AEEA. The primary reason for this perception was due to information and awareness discrepancies and specific localized knowledge bases. Our participants indicated the need for increased professional development for all educators and a greater awareness of Aboriginal epistemologies and pedagogies. It was evident that many students were benefiting from localized programs, but our participants indicated that more needed to be done to spread these initiatives to all areas of the school district. The AEST perceived three different types of successes based on our findings: success was identified as (1) decolonized/unrecognized; (2) localized/organic; and (3) Eurocentric/Western. These definitions of success showed that the AEEA's implementation is helping to create a broader and more holistic view of student success that is not solely focused on traditional Eurocentric measures of a successful student.

We believe it is important to recognize that the Burnaby School District has celebrated success through the collaborative method by which the AEEA itself was developed. It is noteworthy that the process by which this agreement was created is unique in the way that it recognizes the value of the Aboriginal community and the decolonized approach to performance indicators and targets.

Possible Future Directions

What kind of cognitive shock would school be forced to endure if Aboriginal consciousness and language were to be respected, affirmed and encouraged to flourish in the modern classroom, like the Constitution of Canada asserts? (Battiste, 2004, p. 12)

We hope that the Burnaby School District will continue to expand and strengthen the understanding and awareness of Aboriginal knowledge(s) and ways of knowing throughout the district. Our respondents seemed to already be aware of some steps that could be taken in that direction. Respondent Three (Question Six) mentioned that the development of a teaching resource is planned. Respondent Two (Question Eight) noticed a need for more professional development opportunities for all teachers. Respondent Three (Question Seven) did note that, "this year the opening to the district professional day featured speakers and performers that emphasized the importance for acknowledging and affirming Aboriginal peoples' history and identity in all aspects of the school system in Burnaby." If the AEST and the Burnaby School District are able to continue communicating to the general teaching population through professional development days, through meetings with elementary school Aboriginal contacts, through the connection to Aboriginal communities (as suggested by Dr. Tracy Friedel at the public sharing of this research in April 2011), and through the sharing of resources and other means, the research team believes that they will be able to grow the *various pockets* of knowledge,

awareness, and teaching beyond the small, local school level. The sustainability of programs and committees that are small or based in a single school is always in doubt but increasing Aboriginal leadership in schools as well as in the district, in general, would be a crucial step in this area. As Respondent Three (Question One) notes, "Keeping in mind that there are specific job descriptions attached to these two roles [Aboriginal teacher and Youth and Family Worker] I would like to see small teams of staff members in each school that are made up of admin, teachers, counsellors and YFW that focus on the needs of each student in the school." These teams would enable the district to tap into the local knowledge base found in individual schools and increase the likelihood of success and sustaining programs over time. As Battiste (2002, p. 15) writes, "knowledge is not a commodity that can be possessed or controlled by education institutions, but is a living process to be absorbed and understood." While the Burnaby School District, with the leadership of Lyn Daniels, is a model for other districts in regard to the AEEA implementation, the AEST and the Burnaby School District will need to continue to work toward bringing awareness of Aboriginal knowledge(s) and ways of knowing alive for all educators. It will also be crucial to create leadership models that can sustain these changes and counter Eurocentric pedagogies, curriculum, values, and organizational dynamics, through a greater focus on the ideas of the holistic learning models.

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge that our research project is located in the traditional territory of the West Coast Salish peoples, including the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil Waututh.

We would also like to acknowledge the contributions of the Burnaby School District Vice Principal of Aboriginal Education, Lyn Daniels, whose insights and guidance were invaluable.

Thank you, also, to our respondents without whom we would not have been able to carry out our research.

References

- Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement Advisory Committee. (2008, June 4). *Aboriginal voices: Creating our future*. Burnaby, BC: Burnaby School District & BC Ministry of Education.
- Aboriginal Education Enhancements Branch, British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2009, May 14). *Aboriginal education enhancement agreements* [Brochure]. Victoria, BC: Author. Retrieved from www.bced.gov.bc.ca/abed/agreements/brochure.pdf
- Alcoff, L. (1991-1992). The problem of speaking for others. *Cultural Critique*, 20(Winter), 5-32.
- Archibald, J.-A. (2008). *Indigenous storywork: Educating the heart, mind, body and spirit*. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press
- Anfara, V., & Mertz, N. (2006). Introduction. In V. Anfara & N. Mertz (Eds.), *Theoretical frameworks in qualitative research* (pp. xiii-xxxii). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Ball, J. (2004). As if Indigenous knowledge and communities mattered. *American Indian Quarterly*, 28(3-4), 454-479.
- Battiste, M., Bell, L., Findlay, I. M., Findlay, L., & Youngblood Henderson, J. (2005). Thinking place: Animating Indigenous humanities in education. *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 34(2005), 7-19.

- Battiste, M. (1998). Enabling the autumn seed: Toward a decolonized approach to aboriginal knowledge, language and education. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 22(1), 16-28.
- Battiste, M. (2002). Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy in First Nations education—A literature review with recommendations. In *Final report of the Minister's national working group on education: Our children—Keepers of the sacred knowledge* (p. 49). Ottawa, ON: Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development Canada, December.
- Battiste, M. (2004, May 29). Animating sites of postcolonial education: Indigenous knowledge and the humanities. Plenary address presentation at the meeting of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE), Winnipeg, MB.
- Battiste, M. (2005). *State of aboriginal learning*. Background paper for the National Dialogue on Aboriginal Learning, Canadian Council on Learning, Ottawa, ON.
- Bernard, R., & Ryan, G. (2003). Techniques to identify themes. *Field Methods*, 15(1), 85-109.
- Brasfield, C. R. (2001). Residential school syndrome. *British Columbia Medical Journal*, 43(2), 78-81.
- Brendtro, L., Brokenleg, M., & Van Bockern, S. (1992). *Reclaiming youth at risk: Our hope for the future*. Bloomington, IN: National Education Service.
- Brendtro, L., Brokenleg, M., & Van Bockern, S. (n.d.). *The circle of courage philosophy*. Retrieved from www.reclaiming.com/content/about-circle-of-courage
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2008, October 31). *Enhancement agreements development and/or implementation*. Victoria, BC: Author. Retrieved from www.bced.gov.bc.ca/abed/agreements/sharedpractice/sd41_development.pdf
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2008, June 4). *First agreement signed for Burnaby Aboriginal success* [Press release]. Victoria, BC: Author. Retrieved from www.news.gov.bc.ca/news_releases_2005-2009/2008EDU0070-000853.htm
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2010). *Elements of an Aboriginal education enhancement agreement*. Victoria, BC: Author. Retrieved from www.bced.gov.bc.ca/abed/agreements/criteria.htm
- British Columbia Ministry of Education, & First Nations Education Steering Committee. (2008). *English 12 first peoples: Integrated resource package*. Victoria, BC: Author.
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2005, June 4). *School districts with enhancement agreements*. Victoria, BC: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/abed/agreements/agreements.htm>
- Brokenleg, M., & Van Bockern, S. (2003). The science of raising courageous kids. *Reclaiming children and youth*, 12(1), 22-27.
- Burnaby School District. (2006). *Aboriginal education enhancement agreement*. Burnaby, BC: Author. Retrieved from http://sd41.bc.ca/aboriginal_education/enhancement_agreement.htm
- Burnaby School District. (2011, January). *2011 superintendent's report on student achievement*. Burnaby, BC: Author. Retrieved from http://sd41.bc.ca/parents/pdf/stud_ach_2010.pdf
- Burnaby Teachers' Association. (2010). *About us*. Burnaby, BC: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.burnabyteachers.com/about-us/overview.htm>
- Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. (1995, March 13). *A new future* [Video]. Moose Factory, ON: Author.
- Canadian Council on Learning. (2008, April). *Redefining how success is measured in Aboriginal learning*. Ottawa, ON: Author. Retrieved from www.ccl-cca.ca/ccl/Reports/RedefiningSuccessInAboriginalLearning/RedefiningSuccessModelsFirstNations.html
- Carney, R. (1995). Aboriginal residential schools before confederation: The early experience. *Historical Studies*, 61(1995), 13-40.
- Charmaz, K. (2005). Chapter 1: An invitation to grounded theory. In K. Charmaz (Ed.), *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide thorough qualitative analysis* (pp. 1-12). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

- Constitution Act, 1982, being Schedule B to the *Canada Act 1982 (UK)*, 1982, c 11.
- Creswell, J. (2007). Data analysis and representation. In J. Creswell (Ed.), *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed, pp. 147-176). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Czaja, R., & Blair, J. (2005). Questionnaire design: Writing the questions. In R. Czaja, & J. Blair (Eds.), *Designing surveys: A guide to decisions and procedures* (2nd ed., pp. 59-83). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Dannemann, K., & Haig-Brown, C. (2002). A pedagogy of the land: Dreams of respectful relations. *McGill Journal of Education*, 37(3), 451-468.
- Davies, M. B. (2007). Analysing your survey data. In M. B. Davies (Ed.), *Doing a successful research project using qualitative or quantitative methods* (pp. 113-133). New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillian.
- Demmert, W. G., Jr. (1999). Indian education revisited: A personal experience. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 38(1), 5-13.
- Demmert, W. G., Jr. (2001). *Improving academic performance among Native American students: A review of the research literature*. Charleston, WV: Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.
- Demmert, W. G., Jr. (2005). The influences of culture on learning and assessment among Native American students. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 20(1), 16-23.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2000). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln, *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 1-32). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. (1995). *Bill C-31 information sheet (QS-6047-002-EE-A5)*. Ottawa, ON: Author.
- Dion, S. D., & Dion, M. R. (2004). The braiding histories stories. *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies*, 2(1), 77-100.
- Environics Institute. (2010). *Urban aboriginal peoples study: Background and summary of main findings*. Toronto, ON: Author.
- First Nations Education Steering Committee. (2004, September). *Anti-racism workshop protocols*. Retrieved from www.fnesc.ca/Attachments/Anti-Racism/PDFs/Anti-Racism%20Toolkit%20WKSP%20Protocol.pdf
- First Nations Jurisdiction over Education in British Columbia Act* (S.C. 2006, c. 10). Ottawa, ON: Department of Justice.
- Gibbs, G., & Taylor, C. (2005, June 30). *How and what to code*. Retrieved from http://onlineqda.hud.ac.uk/Intro_QDA/how_what_to_code.php
- Silver, J., & Mallett, K. (with Greene, J., & Simard, F.). (2002). *Aboriginal education in Winnipeg inner city high schools*. Winnipeg, MB: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Manitoba.
- Haig-Brown, C. (2008). A rant of globalization with some cautionary notes. *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies*, 6(2), 8-24.
- Harper, S. (2008, June 11). Prime Minister Harper's apology. *Speech presented to the House of Commons*. Ottawa, ON.
- Hurley, M. C. (2009, November 23). *The Indian Act* (PRB 09-12E). Ottawa, ON: Library of Parliament, Parliamentary Information and Research Service.
- Indian Act* (R.S.C., 1985, c. 1-5). Ottawa, ON: Department of Justice.
- MacDonald, H. (2003, July 20). Exploring possibilities through critical race theory: Exemplary pedagogical practices for Indigenous students. Refereed paper presented at the NZARE/AARE Joint Conference, James Cook University, Auckland, NZ.
- Melnechenko, L., & Horsman, H. (1998). *Factors that contribute to Aboriginal students success in school in grades six to nine*. Executive summary prepared for Saskatchewan Education.
- Michel, M, Erickson, M. A., & Madak, P. R. (2005). *Why an Aboriginal public school? A report to the Prince George School District No. 57 Aboriginal education board*. Prince George, BC: Prince George School District.

- Minister's National Working Group on Education. (2002). *Our children: Keepers of the sacred knowledge*. Ottawa, ON: Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development Canada.
- National Indian Brotherhood/Assembly of First Nations. (1972). *Indian control of Indian education: Policy paper*. Ottawa, ON: Author.
- First Nations Education Steering Committee. (2010, November 18-20). 16th Annual provincial conference on Aboriginal education: Norming excellence. Vancouver, BC: Author.
- Orr, J., Paul, J. J., & Paul, S. (2002). Decolonizing Mi'Kmaq education through cultural practical knowledge. *McGill Journal of Education*, 37(3), 331-354.
- Pidgeon, M., & Hardy Cox, D. G. (2002). Researching with aboriginal peoples: Practices and principles. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 26(2), 96-106.
- Province of British Columbia. (2006). *2006 Census Profiles: Summary version—Burnaby*. Victoria, BC: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/data/cen06/profiles/detailed/59015025.pdf>
- Province of British Columbia. (2010). *Shared practices: enhancement agreement development and/or implementation*. Victoria, BC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/abed/agreements/sharedpractice/sd41_development.pdf
- Raham, H. (2010, March 15-16). Policy levers for improving outcomes for off-reserve students. Paper presented to the Colloquium on Improving the Educational Outcomes of Aboriginal People Living Off-Reserve, Saskatoon, SK.
- Simpson, L. (2000). Stories, dreams and ceremonies: Anishinaabe ways of learning. *Tribal College Journal*, 11(4), 26-30.
- Simpson, L. (2001). Aboriginal peoples and knowledge: Decolonizing our processes. *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, 21(1), 137-148.
- Smith, L. T. (1999). Colonizing knowledges. In L. T. Smith (Ed.), *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples* (pp. 58-77). New York, NY: Zed Books.
- Stavenhagen, R. (2004). *Human rights and indigenous issues: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people* (E/CN.4/2004/80). New York, NY: United Nations, Economic and Social Council.
- Stewart-Harawira, M. (2005). Cultural studies, Indigenous knowledge and pedagogies of hope. *Policy Futures in Education*, 3(2), 153-163.
- The University of Texas at Austin. (2007). *Coding qualitative data*. Austin, TX: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.utexas.edu/academic/ctl/assessment/iar/programs/report/focus-QualCode.php>
- Tompkins, J. (2002). Learning to see what they can't: Decolonizing perspectives on Indigenous education in the racial context of rural Nova Scotia. *McGill Journal of Education*, 37(3), 405-422.
- Weber-Pillwax, C. (2004). Indigenous researchers and indigenous research methods: Cultural influences or cultural determinants of research methods. *Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health*, 2(1), 77-90.s
- Wilson, C. (2001). [Review of the book *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*]. *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*, 17(December), 213-217.