Aboriginal Inquiry: Lifting All Learners
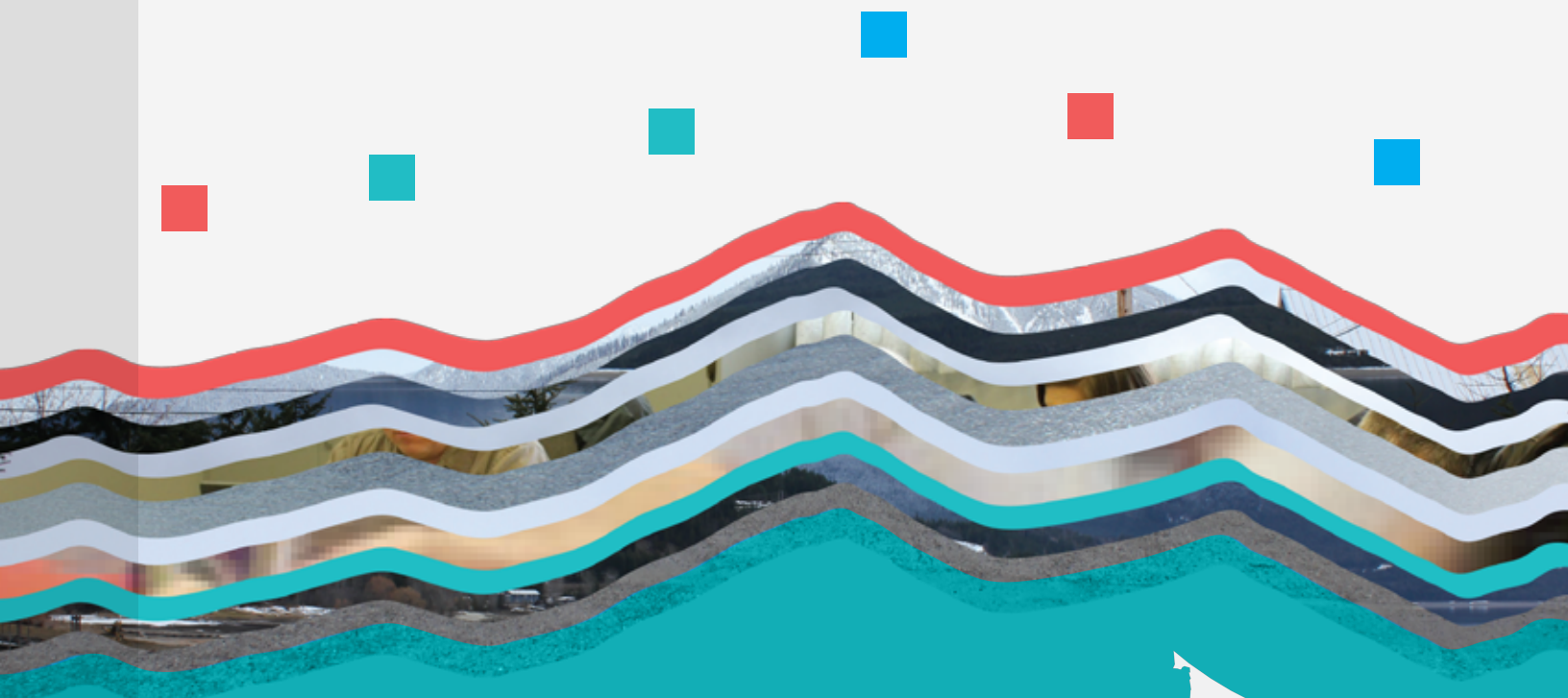
An Impact Assessment of the Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network (AESN)

Aboriginal Inquiry: Lifting All Learners

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An Impact Assessment of the Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network (AESN)

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"The happiest future for the Indian race is absorption into the general population, and this is the object of the policy of our government. The great forces of intermarriage and education will finally overcome the lingering traces of native custom and tradition."

Duncan Campbell Scott, (1914) Deputy Superintendent of Department of Indian Affairs (1913 to 1932) (ARC, BC website)

"But now, they say the time has come for the hardest work. 'If we want to live at peace with ourselves, we need to tell our stories'."

— Richard Wagamese, Indian Horse

"Today the Aboriginal people and other Canadians stand on opposite shores of a wide river of mistrust and misunderstanding. Each continues to search through the mist for a clear reflection of the waters along the opposite shore. If we are truly to resolve the issues that separate us, that tear at the heart of this great country, Canada, and this great province of British Columbia, then we must each retrace our steps through our history to the source of our misperception of each other's truth. The challenge is to define, clearly, new visions and pragmatic mechanisms that will allow our cultural realities to survive and coexist. We must seek out those narrow spots near the river's source where our hands may be joined as equal and honourable partners in a new beginning."

— Rod Robinson (Nisga'a)

"Don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You've heard it now."

— Thomas King (2003)

"Stories have the power to make our hearts, minds, bodies and spirits work together... Only when our hearts, minds, bodies and spirits work together do we truly have Indigenous education."

— *Jo-Ann Archibald* (2008)

"If they catch a little bird they put it in a cage. Probably the cage will be very fine, but still the bird will not be free. It will be in bondage, and that is the way with us."

— Richard Wilson, Lax Kw'alannms, 1887 (in Frank, 1995, para 4).

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§ 1: Introduction

This document reports on the work of the Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network (hereafter referred to as the AESN), a professional learning network for teachers, principals, vice principals and support professionals who are employed in British Columbia's (BC) public schools, including both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators. The purpose of the AESN is to improve learning results for Aboriginal learners and to increase understanding of genuine Aboriginal culture and history for all learners. The Network is designed to build the capacity of teachers and principals through an annual cycle of inquiry, the application of current research, including Aboriginal knowledges and pedagogy, with an emphasis on classroom based performance assessment as a means for determining success and improvement. This Network has been in operation since 2009 and is effecting change in many BC schools, school districts, classrooms and communities. The research project was designed to identify effective practices of the Network; in other words, it seeks to quantify its impact on students, teachers, principals, vice principals and communities in reaching its goals.

The AESN has four major components:

1. An annual cycle of inquiry at the individual level connected to the collaboratively developed Aboriginal Enhancement Agreements

2. Regional meetings to share resources, research, and findings

3. Submission and publication of inquiry reports

4. Public sharing of such reports at regional and provincial forums

1.1 Assessing impact

While program evaluations are common in the education sector and guidelines well established in the past (see for example, *The program evaluation standards, 2*nd *edition,* 1994), recent trends in the social sciences literature document a shift towards how such evaluative exercises might provide better and more timely information to the organizations they work with, particularly in terms of realizing the organizational mandate or goals. Such thinking focuses more on the organization's quality, its worth in terms of meeting client or participant needs, its significance or importance to a community or group, as well as how potential lessons might be learned. In other words, it is more of a *value driven* exercise than one driven by quantitative, final outcome measures (Stufflebeam, 2007). The term impact assessment has therefore become a more common way of framing how such value-oriented outcomes might be considered and reported. Marula et al (2003) for example, suggest assessment is better described as *"... analogous to a reflective process through which social change actors and advocates articulate their change goals and formulate the criteria with which they will evaluate the successes and failures of change efforts. This in*

turn guides the actors in rethinking their change efforts, influencing whether and how their further efforts should be modified" (p. 58 as cited in Lall, 2011, p. 5).

Other trends in impact assessment include the use of participatory research methods (McGregor, Clover, Sanford & Krawetz, 2008) that emphasize a need for reciprocity-- including co-researcher roles-- processes of shared knowledge creation and dissemination, and realizing socially just outcomes. A related field of research that is particularly important in the Canadian context is the ethics of conducting research that involves Aboriginal, First Nations, Inuit and/or Métis populations. Ball and Janyst (2008) represent many Canadian social science researchers in pointing to the importance of developing mutually negotiated protocols prior to beginning the cycle of research with Aboriginal communities, the need to develop research methods that are inclusive of Aboriginal perspectives, that are conducted with Aboriginal peoples in partnership, that incorporate Aboriginal cultural practices into their research processes, including processes of analysis, knowledge construction and dissemination. "Valid, useful findings and the larger goal of restorative social justice can flow only with partners as active participants in generating and interpreting data and shaping plans for knowledge mobilization" (p. 45). The consequences of doing otherwise, they argue, are to reify the colonial past in which Aboriginal peoples were 'subjects' and 'objects' of inquiry and to maintain systems of marginalization and exclusion. In the context of this study, such observations are incredibly powerful, given the purposes of the AES Network and the legacy of harm that educational systems have had on Aboriginal peoples.

1.2 Telling/sharing stories: Assessing impact in culturally inclusive ways

Given the above, our project design endeavoured to create what we are tentatively describing as a *culturally inclusive impact assessment*. To paraphrase from Halbert and Kaser's (2013) work, we want to incorporate "wise ways" in our research work and represent these in our final study document. This has been accomplished in a number of ways including: creating a research advisory group that included Aboriginal peoples that assisted in the impact assessment design and analysis; by following Aboriginal protocols in terms of respecting and honouring the knowledge of local communities and ensuring resources were attributed to their authors; and thirdly, by incorporating a narrative approach that honoured the tradition of story telling evident in many First Peoples cultures. More will be said about the specific processes of the analysis and methods used in the methodology section. However, acknowledging the centrality of story as a culturally inclusive means of describing impact seemed a powerful and compelling way to meet our goals of reporting on the impacts of the AES Network, and was very much in keeping with the AESN purposes of broadening the knowledge of non-Aboriginal peoples about First Nations histories, cultures and contribution to Canadian society. As a result, the design of our study sought to gather impact stories and this report will weave these stories among other data collected for assessing impact. We have also incorporated a number of visuals including photographs, charts and sample resources to help provide richer detail to support our analyses.

1.3 The structure of the report

As a guide to the reader, we include a summary of the sections of the report that will follow.

Section I will include background information for the study including a more detailed history of the AES Network. Section 2 includes a summary of the literature reviewed in preparation for this report. The literature highlighted was selected based on an analysis of the original research questions so as to have evidence from which to measure impact and effect. The literature review therefore draws upon current thinking in how to best construct or approach Aboriginal education in the K-12 sector in BC; professional development and teacher learning, including professional learning communities and forms of networked learning; and how non- Aboriginal teachers can learn about Aboriginal pedagogy and culturally inclusive teaching practice.

Section 3 provides greater detail about the impact study's methodology; here the approach to data collection, the scope of the research inquiry, research sites and methods of analysis are summarized.

Section 4 will be the first of three sections that summarizes the data collected. Section 4 will discuss the Arrow Lakes school district; Section 5 will discuss the Prince Rupert school district. Section 6 includes an analysis of the inquiry based research projects completed since the Network began in 2009. Section 7 provides thematic analysis of the data from the focus groups and individual interviews conducted.

Section 8 contains an analysis and assessment of those areas of impact that have greatest significance. Section 9 summarizes the report's key findings and implications for policy makers. This is followed by references and several appendices of resources shared by teachers and other members of the Network.

1.4 What is the AESN?

The Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network (AESN) was originally launched in 2009. The AES Network was an outgrowth of the well-established Network of Performance-Based Schools (NPBS) launched in 1999, recently renamed the Network of Inquiry and Innovation (NOII). The NOII currently operates in 16 regional networks across BC that are supported by approximately 50 volunteer leaders and its two lead facilitators, Drs. Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser.

The idea of creating the AESN as a parallel network structure came from the BC Ministry of Education Aboriginal Education Branch; the goal was to involve teachers, principals and Network leaders in a Network structure that specifically focused on Aboriginal student achievement. The principals of the NOII, Drs. Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser, were enthusiastic proponents of the idea, given that they had always promoted Aboriginal ways of knowing as a core "big idea" that helps teachers develop equitable, quality learning strategies that promoted the goal of enhancing student success for all students.

Like its original counterpart, the goal of the AESN is to work with educators around the province to focus teachers and school leaders on the specific goal of enhancing student success; specifically, the success of Aboriginal students. It also utilized the highly successful structure of the NOII, with one important addition: rather than focusing on specific curricular performance standards, it invited participants to focus on the local Aboriginal Enhancement Agreements that were in place for each school district in the province.

The network idea was launched in the spring of 2009 immediately following the annual Network Seminar (May, 2009). At this seminar Debbie Leighton-Stephens, a well known Aboriginal educator

from Prince Rupert, provided a keynote lecture that highlighted the ways in which non-Aboriginal teachers might develop stronger ties with local bands/First Nations as a necessary first step in developing deepened relationships between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal communities that would form a foundation for creating a different approach to working with Aboriginal students. Network participants were also invited to explore the foundational principles of Aboriginal learning and pedagogy, such as:

» Learning ultimately supports the well being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits and the ancestors.

» Learning is holistic, reflexive, experiential and relational - focusing on connectedness, or reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place.

» Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions.

» Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities.

» Learning recognizes the role of Indigenous knowledge.

» Learning is embedded in memory, history and story.

» Learning involves patience and time.

» Learning requires exploration of one's identity.

» Learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations (BC Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 11).

From this point, active Network members were encouraged to consider how they might incorporate these principles/approaches into their specific NOII inquiries; several schools who were experienced in network inquiry and had served as catalysts for action within their school jurisdictions were contacted and asked to consider how they might take a lead role in this initial launch of the AESN. In its initial year, a total of 50 schools were involved in network questions specifically focused on Aboriginal student success. By the 2012-2013 school year, a total of 75 schools have documented inquiries as a part of the AESN.

1.4.1 Network structure

The structure of the AESN is modeled on its successful predecessor, the NOII. Understanding this structure is also important to analyzing the extent of its impact. The Network's central purpose is to shift teacher and/or Network members' thinking from that of teaching and learning in order to sort learners (assessment to compare and rank students) to that of a *learning centered system* (Kaser & Halbert, 2009). The critical tool for shifting thinking is the emphasis on inquiry mindedness and how this enables deeper learning for students; an important parallel focus is that of the teacher as a learning professional. As Lieberman and Miller (2004) suggest: "An inquiry stance is far different from a solution stance. It requires that one ask questions of one's practice rather than look for answers. It places contextual data collection and analysis rather than generalized solutions as the center of improvement efforts" (p. 41).

The Network design is centrally focused on how to engage teachers in moving from solutions towards asking questions informed by their local context and the needs of their learners. It is a team based approach; the Network structure requires members to work with others in their school, including their school principal or vice-principal, in structuring an inquiry question for a year-long effort to improve the success of their students. Ongoing meetings and discussions with colleagues/

partners in the inquiry are encouraged; formal meetings are built into the model (2-3 per year) and at least one regional meeting of inquiry teams from a particular geographical zone is held where investigations can be shared - referred to as a "showcase" where individual teams share their questions and approaches to their inquiry and findings. One large provincial meeting is also scheduled in May of each year in Vancouver. Here again, individual teams selected to represent the diversity of inquiries around the province are invited to share their work and participate in seminars/discussions about current research from exemplary educational scholars. Finally, each team must write up a summary of their case which is submitted to the NOII principals for inclusion on the website and accessible to other Network members to use as a resource for future/current inquiry work. At the end of this process, each team is awarded a small grant; originally these grants were $1000.00 but due to funding have been reduced first to $500.00, and in 2012-13 schools will receive $250.00. Schools use such funds to purchase resources, fund release time, or attend professional conferences.

The AESN follows the process of the NOII to a significant degree, in terms of the structure as described above. One difference however, is the requirement for teachers to access and use their local Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement as the source for its inquiry and investigation of student learning. In other words, while the NOII requires teachers and their inquiry teams to investigate their teaching practice in a range of topics and curricular areas, the AESN structure and investigation model is designed to focus teacher attention on the performance and success of Aboriginal students. In this way it frames the investigation towards a particular outcome.

1.4.2 The inquiry process: Investigating and questioning practice

While the structure provides the framework for the Network, the core work of the school or district teams is to deeply investigate the learning of their students. To assist in this process, inquiry is structured in a cycle that includes the following elements[1]:

1. **Scanning:** This stage requires Network members to ask the question, "What is going on for my/our learners?" This first stage of the inquiry process requires members to examine many different forms of data or information about the learners in their school/classroom. All aspects of learning and student engagement need to be deeply probed, so that social/emotional learning, physical well-being and academic achievement are considered. While student performance indicators can form part of this scanning process, discussions with students as well as personal observations can be central features of this phase. An important scanning practice is to also consider what is known from the study of contemporary educational research. For AESN members, an important consideration is how the principles of Aboriginal pedagogy and cultural knowledge provide important guidance to the analysis of "how" students are doing. Members are also required to review the goals of their local Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement so as to ensure their inquiry meets one of the goals highlighted as important to their district and wider school community.

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1   Taken from J. Halbert & L. Kaser (2013) *Spirals of Inquiry: For equity and quality*. BC Principals and Vice Principals Association: Vancouver, BC CAN.

2. **Focus**: In this stage, members ask the question, "What does our focus need to be?" Informed by their initial look at the needs of their learners through the completed scan, members of the Network begin to craft a question that could be answered through investigating and documenting their own efforts to change practices in their classrooms. Here previous questions can be considered, including questions that have been investigated by other Network members with similar or related inquiries into their learners' successes and needs. Developing a good question for inquiry can take some time, and AESN members are encouraged to continue to revise their initial questions in order to clarify their purposes, foci, and efforts. It is important to note that the inquiry questions can be revised throughout the inquiry cycle in order to better reflect the core purposes of the investigation.

3. **Developing a hunch:** In this stage the core question is "What is creating this situation, and how are we contributing to it?" This question is designed to have team members avoid the 'blame game' where others (such as the students themselves, parents, socio-economic conditions, ethnicity/cultural membership) might act as blocks to more deeply investigating how the school or school system itself is creating conditions that limit student success. This is an important component in all Network inquires, but of particular importance to the AESN members as it provides a context for teams to examine their own dominant or hidden beliefs about the social, cultural and racial assumptions they hold related to Aboriginal student success. Teams are encouraged to reflect beyond their own beliefs and to discuss with others in their school community (students, parents, community members) about how they perceive the forces that are shaping student experiences and success (or lack thereof).

4. **New professional learning:** In this stage the core question becomes "How can we learn what we can do to change the situation that now exists?" While there may be important clues that have become evident in the early stages of the inquiry process, now the focus becomes how to search and assess alternative strategies, approaches, or practices that may be able to effect changes in the context being considered. However it is not so much the "know how" but the "know why" that needs to be examined; this speaks to an equally careful examination of learning theories— Network members are encouraged to draw from multiple sites of information, but careful attention has been given via the formal structure of the Network to highlighting approaches that have been proven to have considerable impact on student learning. What makes this stage in the inquiry particularly powerful is that inquiry teams become immersed in learning together; processes of investigation, knowledge sharing and questioning gives many opportunities for deep reflection and thinking about the 'hows' and 'whys' of particular approaches. Frequently teams bring in or consult with other 'knowers' in the field or the community; this can be an important phase for AESN members, particularly because cultural knowledge may be lacking among non-Aboriginal educators. Seeking knowledgeable community members to provide advice, guidance and be partners in the inquiry can be a significant asset to the learning done by the members in the inquiry.

5. **Taking action:** At this stage of the inquiry cycle the new learning develops into an action plan; members are encouraged to construct their inquiries into short two to three week cycles so they can frequently discuss, report and share observations, and seek support from others who can serve as critical friends—asking questions in order to consider other potential actions, activities or approaches. Evidence is collected, including things like student comments and/or responses to planned lessons or activities. By using this shorter cycle of implementation and reflection, inquiry can be better sustained as dialogue and deeper forms of thinking emerge over time and result in repeated cycles of investigation, reporting and discussion.

6. **Checking:** At this stage of the inquiry, several shorter cycles of action have been completed, and it becomes possible to ask the question "Has our inquiry made a big enough difference?" Here the goal is to measure success of the initiative; sometimes this is best achieved by comparing the early 'scanning' stages of the inquiry with the later outcomes. In the case of AESN member inquiries that can be focused more on social/emotional forms of learning, engagement, self-worth and/or motivation, this can mean more use of less traditional test measures and instead consider student representations of his/her learning. These results can be shared with other members of the community and their interpretation of the results also considered as evidence of success.

7. **What next?** The final stage of the inquiry cycle asks its participants to consider what they might wish to modify, re-investigate, build upon or change for a subsequent question. It reports on what has been learned as well as gaps that have become apparent through the process, both of which lead its participants to continue to grow, learn and take action to respond to specific learner needs. Here it is important to note that the learning being considered and reported is not just student learning, but professional learning; it also illustrates how the inquiry cycle continues—it is a persistent and recursive process, not a one time event.

The AESN participants are encouraged and supported in the use of the cycle of inquiry as a part of the work they do in their AESN investigations. Again, as our earlier summary notes, this parallels the NOII inquiry process, although like the earlier structural description, the focus of the inquiry is always brought back to the goals of the local Enhancement Agreement; in this way the inquiry cycle is continually focused on constructing inquiries which meet the goals of the agreement, particularly in the early "scanning" and "hunch" phases, but also in the "checking" and "what next?" phases of the inquiry process.

1.4.3 Who is involved in the AESN?

As the AESN grew from the original NOII, not surprisingly, there are significant overlaps between participants. In total, about 75 schools and approximately 400 teachers, teacher leaders, and school principals are involved in the AESN. Perhaps more interesting are the numbers of school support professionals (non-teachers) who have also become members of the Network. The team based approach of the Network structure and process has led many teams to recruit the involvement of other school professionals such as Aboriginal Education Workers, Educational Assistants and Special Education

Assistants. Many of the AESN members are also themselves Indigenous; some declare as Status Indians, others as urban Aboriginals, mixed race Aboriginal people or Métis. Individuals from diverse First Nations are represented among the members of the AESN in BC public schools.

1.4.4 Leadership in the network

An important reason for the growth of the Network and its growth since inception has been its ability to both create and sustain opportunities for leadership. When discussing leadership in this context, it is important to distinguish between formal and informal leadership roles; the AESN relies on both in its day-to-day operation. Formal leaders—principals, directors, superintendents and other leaders at the local and district level are involved in Network inquiry work either as members of teams or as informal coaches and supporters to existing and emerging school teams. This is an important aspect of how the Network gains influence and is able to extend its work beyond its current participants. Just as importantly however, it builds opportunities for formal and informal teacher leadership: many current Network leaders are individuals who began as team members and have emerged over time as individuals willing to play more formal roles in the operation of the Network and have taken on additional responsibilities. It is also important to note that the Network principals, Drs. Kaser and Halbert, have emphasized the lateral and non-hierarchical qualities of the Network itself. By this we mean that they emphasize the role that *all* participants play as learners and coaches to one another as they learn together. They also emphasize the purpose of the Network as being centered in creating the conditions for "all learners to walk the stage with dignity, purpose and options" (Halbert & Kaser, 2011, p. 8). This emphasis on shared, equitable educational purpose is designed to create a level playing field for all members, regardless of their status as formal or informal leaders. In creating this culture of shared purpose, inclusivity and knowledge building/mobilization, deep commitments typical of strong learning communities have emerged as a foundational feature of the Network. It is this collegial frame that builds trust among its members. As Stoll, Halbert and Kaser (2012) stated:

> Their roles are diverse – from classroom teachers to superintendents – yet they manage to facilitate the regional Networks with considerable consistency. Network leadership requires a facilitative style with an interesting and unusual blend of qualities. Leaders work well in networked communities when they can be both authoritative and open, when they understand power and can give it up for the sake of a larger community, and when they are curious but defined by purpose (p. 12).

1.4.5 Connecting as learning and learning through connection

As the above summary has revealed, the Network is a powerful tool for shared learning among teachers who have a desire to effect change in their schools and to advance the cause of quality, equitable learning for all learners. That it has many formal and informal leaders who influence others through invitation to get involved, speaks to another element of why and how it works. Yet these structures and processes, regardless of their power, may not, on their own, lead to the level of success the Network experiences. What is also apparent is how the network model has been taken up by formal leaders involved in other professional development and student achievement initiatives at the provincial and district level. For

example, in districts like Prince Rupert, Nanaimo, Gold Trail, and Arrow Lakes, Aboriginal Education leaders (directors, district principals etc.) have formally recognized the value and effectiveness of the AESN, and have drawn upon its members to become engaged in similarly motivated initiatives in their school districts. They have also used their own resources to support the work of Network teams in their districts, by providing release time, professional learning supports, or other resources. In other words, they have exponentially grown the influence of the Network through their endorsation and integration of the AESN into their own district structures and initiatives. In these districts it often becomes more difficult to tease out the specific impacts of the Network given the way one approach seeds the other. Yet having noted this, it speaks to the success this model has had in reaching a diverse population of educators dedicated to improving the success of Aboriginal students.

1.4.6 Network funding

The AESN was initially funded in 2009 by grants from both the Provincial and the Federal government. The province of British Columbia matched the initial funding of $75,000 from Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC). This allowed $500 start-up grants to all participating schools and a further $1000 upon completion of their case studies and inquiry projects. In 2011-2012 AANDC provided a grant specifically to develop short video clips of promising practice in AESN schools that would be posted on the website and available across Canada. In 2011-2012 the province also provided a grant of $75,000 to support Network infrastructure, the creation of case studies of practice and to support the provincial seminar. In 2012-2013, there has been no funding to date from the province, however, AANDC provided a grant of $40,000 specifically targeted at a research study of Network impact.

1.5 Summary

In this section of the report we have provided a description of how the AESN operates; this framework - an inquiry based model, is practiced among a diverse group of educators from across BC. This summary provides some initial clues as to how the Network has spread its impact from its original efforts with 40 educators to more than 400 across the province. The specific ways that participants in the Network describe this impact will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent sections of this report.

§ 2: Literature Review

One of the ways in which impact can be measured is to establish benchmarks that performance can be measured against. In the case of this impact study, one of the important benchmarks is what is known or understood about promising practices in education. While the scope of promising educational practice is very broad, in the case of this impact assessment we have selected scholarship and educational literature that is focused on what we know are promising practices related to Aboriginal education. More specifically, we have selected literature that as much as possible, represents what Canadian scholars and researchers who work in this field have offered in the way of insights into Aboriginal education promising practices.

This section also begins with a short historical look at approaches to Aboriginal education delivery in BC. Drawing attention to this history of how Aboriginal education has been offered in the BC context is important as it gives insights into the ways in which school districts and teachers have designed experiences to meet Aboriginal student needs. This background context provides important foundational information that informs how AESN inquiries are both constructed and interpreted.

Please note that the term Aboriginal is the word we have chosen to use throughout this and other sections of the report. While we recognize that other terms can be used (among them First Nations, First Peoples, Indigenous, Métis, or Inuit) for the sake of consistency we have adopted the use of Aboriginal to stand in for all Aboriginal Peoples.

2.1 Approaches to Aboriginal education in BC schools

We begin by briefly highlighting the ways in which schools and school districts have responded to addressing the specific learning needs of Aboriginal students since the 1960's. The focus on how provincial schools are responding to the needs of Aboriginal learners is critical because close to 80% of Aboriginal students are served by provincial schools (Richards & Scott, 2009). In this section, we rely in large part upon the knowledge of Dr. Lorna Williams, a member of the Lil'Wat First Nation, who has, for most of her career, worked in multiple educational settings in BC. This includes time working with the Mount Currie Indian Band, the BC Ministry of Education, the Vancouver School Board (as an Aboriginal Education district support teacher) and most recently as an Associate Professor and Canada Research Chair of Indigenous Education and Language Revitalization at the University of Victoria. Dr. Williams has also been an active supporter of the AES Network.

2.1.1 Early models of Aboriginal education (1960-2000)

Dr. Lorna Williams (2000) described the ways in which the Vancouver School Board (VSB) developed practices and supports for working with urban Aboriginal students and families. While VSB may not represent all approaches taken by school districts around BC, its position as a progressive force among BC school districts and its size make it a useful place from which to start a review. Williams begins by describing the historical approaches and the political antecedents that shaped the VSB's responses to Aboriginal students. Aboriginal student numbers began to increase in the 1960s as a result of the closure of Residential schools. Beginning with home-school support workers, and later moving to rehabilitation program models, Aboriginal students were served largely through special programs created for them rather than the regular public school classrooms within the district. Resource teachers or itinerant models of resource support became more popular approaches into the 1980s and 1990s; this helped build momentum towards a model of integrating Aboriginal students in regular classrooms. Clusters of Aboriginal populations that moved into particular areas or neighbourhoods helped speed this transition. Importantly, as a result of consultations with Aboriginal community members and governments, both academic and cultural support for Aboriginal students became a priority.

The 1990s also emerged as a time in which a focus was placed on non-Aboriginal school personnel who worked with Aboriginal students, and professional training programs, workshops and resources were developed. Simultaneously, programs were developed district wide in which traditional values, beliefs, and cultural practices might be honoured, profiled and celebrated. Yet despite this, many schools developed what are described as 'pull out programs', meaning Aboriginal students left their regular classes to participate in Aboriginal educational opportunities with and among other Aboriginal students. As Williams (2000) noted, much of the rationale for these approaches was that it enhanced self-esteem while creating a positive acceptance of one's Aboriginal heritage (p. 138), creating a belief among Aboriginal students and families that they could be considered participants in Canadian society with a strong Aboriginal identity. Yet there were tensions created by the special programming model, and periods of declining or static funding from the province meant that non-Aboriginal personnel began to question the 'special status' afforded Aboriginal students over others. The challenges Williams identified included the need to address the diversity of Aboriginal peoples - particularly language and culture, in urban settings where Aboriginal peoples often reside. While specific courses/classes were sometimes offered, the challenge was to integrate "First Nations content into school subjects… with teachers who are willing to take the initiative on their own" (p. 145). She concluded that the strategies used by urban school districts should therefore be flexible and multi faceted, and be the product of collaboration and engagement with Indigenous communities.

2.1.2 The contemporary context (2000- present)

Many challenges face schools who want to enhance the success of Aboriginal students, but two are important in the context of this impact study. First, the role of teachers. As Williams (2000) identified, teachers play a significant role in student success given their autonomy in the classroom. But curriculum is also important; provincial policy makers have understood this, and devoted considerable efforts to creating resources that teachers can use to integrate Aboriginal knowledge across the K-12 curriculum.

They have also created two provincially approved courses at the high school level: *First Peoples English 12* and *First Nations Studies 12*. Despite this, enrolment in these courses remains relatively low, and they are not offered in all school districts. One study, *Learning about Walking in Beauty* (2000-2001) illustrated at least part of the problem when it reported that: "over two-thirds of [Canadian] young adults couldn't recall discussing contemporary Aboriginal issues in elementary or secondary school, while 80 percent were 'dissatisfied or strongly dissatisfied' with existing Aboriginal Studies curriculum". The study went on to suggest that "a pedagogy infused with Aboriginal perspectives will help all students build both a knowledge base and the critical analysis skills relevant to contemporary regional, national and international affairs" (Hyslop, 2012, para 6). More will be said about the importance of Aboriginal pedagogy in the next section of this report.

The BC Ministry of Education provides financial resources to school districts to fund support for Aboriginal education through its funding formula. However, in addition to this it has co-created several policy directions for BC school districts, with an emphasis on enhancing accountability for Aboriginal student achievement. The lack of success of Aboriginal students in the BC (and Canadian) school system was a growing concern for Aboriginal Communities and was becoming a more frequent topic of conversation among educational policy makers at all levels of government. The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) is a notable partner in this discussion; it has been a significant organizational player in its efforts to shape the BC government's directions in Aboriginal Education. An important outcome of their lobbying efforts resulted in the signing of a formal agreement between the government and Aboriginal Community leaders and a Memorandum of Understanding in 1999. One of the directions initiated as a result of this MOU was the requirement for school districts to similarly construct local Aboriginal Education Improvement Agreements as a means of focusing on Aboriginal student success. These later became known as Aboriginal Enhancement Agreements.

The provincial framework for these agreements highlights the need to: enhance Aboriginal voice in education through local consultations; focus on Aboriginal student success; and support the genuine infusion of Aboriginal culture and language throughout the BC curriculum (*New Relationships with Aboriginal Peoples, Annual Report,* 2009, p. 18). Many of these locally developed agreements have set in place specific targets and benchmarks to guide district efforts at effecting change for Aboriginal students. Annual reporting is required. As later sections of this report will document, nearly all school districts in British Columbia in place such agreements, and many are making significant efforts to effect changes in programming and services to Aboriginal students.

Aboriginal education remained a priority area among educational policy makers and Aboriginal communities alike. Evidence of this comes from the decision in 2006 to sign the *Educational Jurisdiction Framework Agreement;* government also legislated the *First Nations Education Act* in 2007. These events signaled an important increase in the priority given to Aboriginal students' education in BC. Other initiatives the Ministry has spearheaded have included the development of several resources to support educators working with Aboriginal students, such as *Shared Learning* (2000/2006), the development and implementation of approved provincial courses for secondary schools, including First Nations 12 and First Peoples English 12, as well as incorporating Aboriginal perspectives into most provincial curriculum documents.

Another important policy antecedent was the adoption by the Ministry of what are called "Principles of Aboriginal Learning". These were initially developed in partnership with the Provincial First Nations Steering Committee in 2008. School district and teachers are encouraged to use these principles in the design of Aboriginal educational programming. The principles are discussed in more detail in other sections of this report, but importantly for this general overview, they illustrate an emphasis on a more holistic and culturally responsive model of education that recognizes the importance of Aboriginal beliefs, culture, and knowledge for all students.

As this brief summary illustrates, there is a history of addressing Aboriginal Education in BC that emerged out of the closure of residential schools in the 1960s, although the last residential did not close in BC until 1986 (Oikawa, 2010). How jurisdictions responded in light of these circumstances has been illustrated by focusing on both the local (as in the case of the Vancouver school board) and provincial through government policy initiatives. This 'to-ing' and 'fro-ing' between these jurisdictional levels helps to illustrate several things: first, that there were common threads of concern around Aboriginal education that developed at different jurisdictional levels, but that the voices of Aboriginal peoples have been a consistent dynamic in demanding changing responses. However it also illustrates the dynamics of how dominant beliefs about Aboriginal peoples have shaped policy and practice provincially and locally.

There have been systemic efforts at effecting change. And while the intention has been to engage local school districts and communities in ways that will focus their efforts on Aboriginal student achievement, their successes have been modest as is evidenced from annual reports produced by the Ministry of Education, Aboriginal Education Branch. Improvements are being traced locally and districts are required to report on an annual basis their work in achieving the goals of their local Enhancement Agreements. This is bringing an increased level of visibility to the goals of bettering Aboriginal student success.

Williams' (2000) observations, as noted above, are important to re-emphasize here because her description of the need for flexibility and locally developed partnership initiatives. This is important in thinking about the affordances and limitations offered by provincially mandated measures. If we take her advice, then it is locally and contextually specific features that work best when Aboriginal learners and Aboriginal communities are genuine partners in the design and implementation of district level agreements. In other words, there is need for a policy bridging tool; a mechanism and approach that can bridge between local contexts and provincial/district mandates. As later sections of this report will emphasize, we see the work of the AESN as such a policy lever through which change is being realized more effectively and comprehensively responding to diverse local needs.

While the above discussion is necessarily brief, another important antecedent to understanding the approach taken by the AES Network comes from scholarship and literature about promising practices in teacher professional development, learning, learning communities and pedagogical approaches to Aboriginal education. In the next section of the report we begin by briefly summarizing Aboriginal educational research drawing from selected Canadian and New Zealand scholars, as these two jurisdictions share a common commitment to enhancing the success of their Indigenous learners.

2.2 Charting a new course: A pedagogical, research informed approach

> The ongoing cycle of First Nations education must be changed. Transformation of schooling and education is not merely a set of strategies related to changing learners' behavior, changing governance, and so forth. Political, economic, and social changes also need to occur in the wider community context. Transformation and how it is attained requires a critical and political understanding, and eventually commitment to act. (Menzies, Archibald & Smith, 2004, p. 1)

2.2.1 Aboriginal pedagogy

Aboriginal approaches to teaching and learning vary from the traditional notion of 'pedagogy' usually described in teaching and learning literature. An Aboriginal view of pedagogy goes beyond strategies, methods or approaches to promising practice and embraces the epistemological and philosophical beliefs of Indigenous peoples that guide cultural practices (Hodgson-Smith, 2000). It seeks to educate the mind, heart and spirit in a holistic manner (Archibald, 2008). And teachers—both Indigenous and non-Indigenous—can be transformed by their immersion in these embodied approaches to the teaching and learning relationship (Tanaka et al, 2007).

2.2.2 Embracing a Relational, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Baskerville's (2009) study of her own efforts to engage Aboriginal learners—in this case New Zealand Maori students—in her drama classes, offers important insights into the work of *relational pedagogy,* largely through the lens of how teachers must engage in and with the protocols of the cultural community. She argued that this approach—one based in cultural immersion—was foundational to her adopting practices that were respectful of the cultural traditions of her students. In particular, this approach created a way in which Maori knowledge and experiences were seen as valued attributes of the students' learning experiences, rather than the more typical deficit way of thinking that she had used when rationalizing why her Aboriginal students were not succeeding.

Tanaka et al (2007), take a similar approach in describing how pre service teachers and Aboriginal community members worked emergently to develop their knowledge of the Coast Salish peoples of British Columbia through a pole-carving course. Pre service teachers' immersion in the cultural protocols of pole carving, taught by local carvers and Elders, provided a pathway into knowing/learning about themselves as culturally responsive teachers and provided a means through which to embrace an Indigenous informed pedagogy. The narratives of the participants provide a rich description of the ways in which dominant paradigms and beliefs were challenged through shared experiences in creating the pole and sharing their stories as a part of a public, ceremonial raising of the pole. Approaches to learning that are emphasized in the article include collaboration within a learning community, shared knowledge creation activities, and the power of having a shared goal or purpose.

The importance of altering teachers' beliefs about Aboriginal students is also identified in Bishop, Berryman, Wearmouth, Peter & Clapham's (2012) case study of a teacher professional development program designed to help teachers better address Maori student learning needs. The learning program

developed and implemented in a series of schools (33) over a six year, two-phased implementation period, emphasized the need to develop alternative discourses that teachers could use to problematize their assumed thinking, as well as offering them experiences that exposed the contradictions/tensions between their pre-existing beliefs and alternative conceptions: a form of *cognitive dissonance*. The goal was to create conditions necessary for teachers to see themselves as change agents, individuals capable of affecting the conditions under which their students might better learn. A primary means of supporting this learning was through the introduction of a local facilitator, someone who could provide support to teachers as they attempted to implement new approaches or practices through their personal inquiries. This was in addition to learning support provided by a team of university researchers knowledgeable about promising practices in Maori relational pedagogy. There were both *formal and informal learning spaces* created for teachers and school leaders to engage in collective and personal questions of inquiry, although a foundational component included the integration of cultural protocols and student stories about their school experiences. Maori student achievement was also tracked and a number of statistical analyses completed, with the researchers concluding that sustained changes in culturally responsive teacher practices led to sustained and significantly higher student performance, particularly in comparison with schools who had not engaged in the Maori informed teacher learning program. At the same time, levels of student engagement as measured by researchers over the course of the project increased considerably beginning in the first year of the program, and were consistently sustained over the six-year period.

Other scholarship is important to highlight here as it relates to the idea of dissonance and discomfort. While the previously referenced scholarship brings to light the importance of teachers engaging in new ideas to transform or shift their practices from 'old' to 'new', there is also a need to acknowledge the colonial histories which embed much western educators thinking about Aboriginal peoples and their ability to succeed in school. Readers will recall the earlier discussion of William's (2000) history of Aboriginal education in Vancouver that highlighted how dominant discourses of 'remediation' were developed and sustained through the special program delivery models used to support Aboriginal student populations. Deconstructing these beliefs is an essential part of what it means to become a culturally responsive pedagogue and an "anti oppressive educator" (Kumashiro, 2000).

Anti oppressive education calls for a way of moving teachers and students into unfamiliar spaces through which one can "unlearn" and "relearn" what it means to include others. Teachers, Kumashiro has argued, "find comfort in the repetition of what is considered to be common sense, despite the fact that commonsensical ideas and practices can be quite oppressive" (p. xxxviii). What are some of these commonsensical ideas? One is that of the "pull out" support program: essentially this approach reinforces a view of Aboriginal students requiring remediation so they can "re-join" the "normal" classroom after intervention. Remedial models essentially measure students as 'deficient' and reiterate the colonial mindset present since the advent of Residential schooling. Alternatively, culturally inclusive, anti oppressive teachers value and respect the diverse and different knowledges that students and their communities offer and suggest that classroom spaces need to be re-constructed to profile the value and contribution of diverse peoples; in the case of this study, the value and contribution of Aboriginal peoples.

In summary, the above literature highlights how teacher's beliefs, practices and approaches to teaching and learning activities are a central feature of shifting towards a culturally responsive pedagogy; the links between student learning and teacher beliefs were also briefly highlighted. This discussion makes evident the importance of teacher learning, an activity the AES Network is designed to support and promote. In the next section we briefly highlight how BC has envisioned putting this approach to the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy into practice with what are described as "principles of Aboriginal learning".

2.2.3 The BC approach to culturally responsive pedagogy

As noted earlier in this literature review, the Ministry of Education promotes what it calls the "Principles of Aboriginal Learning". Initially developed in partnership with an advisory group of Aboriginal scholars and educators who worked with the First Nations Education Steering Committee in 2008, these principles were designed to highlight how an Aboriginal pedagogy can reflect the context of British Columbia's own First Peoples.

> » Learning ultimately supports the well being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits and the ancestors.
>
> » Learning is holistic, reflexive, experiential and relational - focusing on connectedness, or reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place.
>
> » Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions.
>
> » Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities.
>
> » Learning recognizes the role of Indigenous knowledge.
>
> » Learning is embedded in memory, history and story.
>
> » Learning involves patience and time.
>
> » Learning requires exploration of one's identity.
>
> » Learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations (BC Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 11).

In reading this list of principles, it is apparent that they draw from the scholarship of Aboriginal pedagogy and anti-oppressive education. It also puts into relatively plain language the ways in which learning for all students is supported and enhanced through their application to educational settings, to policy and curriculum design. The principles have become an important benchmark that schools, districts and the Ministry now use to measure their efforts in Aboriginal education.

In the final section of this literature review, we highlight the field of teacher learning and professional development. Because of how the Network creates spaces for teacher learning, it is important to examine what we know are the features of 'promising practices' in promoting growth in teacher professional practices: How do field professionals learn best? This knowledge can then be used to assess the impact of the Network on the nature of teacher learning.

2.3 Teacher learning and professional development

School change and improvement literature seems to have reached a common understanding that teachers play an important role in creating better schools (Borko, 2004; Lieberman & Mace, 2010). Therefore it is not surprising that professional development opportunities—spaces for teachers to learn—are systematically created within school jurisdictions with the intention of helping teachers to "enhance their knowledge and develop new instructional practices" (Borko, 2004, p. 3). While professional development opportunities can take different forms, the more typical school in-service or single day convention format common to many jurisdictions in Canada, remains a dominant model despite the fact that such one shot training sessions "are not likely to facilitate teacher learning and change" (Mesler, Parise & Spillaine, 2010, p. 326). Webster-Wright (2009) completed a comprehensive scan of professional development literature and reviewed more than 203 studies; they made an important observation about the nature of most teacher professional development by noting it had a "focus on programs and content rather than learning experiences" (p. 712). This finding reflects the current context and the emphasis of most Canadian educational jurisdictions.

Some scholars are now thinking more about the importance of teacher learning and the importance of examining professional practice. For example, Stoll et al (2006) shared international evidence that "educational reform's progress depends on teachers' *individual and collective [teacher] capacity* and its link with school-wide capacity for promoting pupils' learning" (p 115, emphasis added). Stoll (2009) also detailed how these processes of developing capacity through shared efforts at questioning one's practice can lead to much deepened form of professional sense making, a process she describes as *knowledge animation*: "by surfacing tacit knowledge and challenging existing assumptions… conversations that make presuppositions, ideas, beliefs and feelings explicit and available for exploration helps to promote knowledge creation" (p .3).

Knowledge animation differs significantly from other forms of professional development focused on "best" or "promising practices". An important point here is how such processes of professional inquiry lead to the production of innovative or novel approaches or ideas. It is the 'to-ing and fro-ing' of inquiry, enhanced by dialogue, and questioning intentions and beliefs that brings the discussion or professional idea to life. This goes well beyond knowledge sharing; it is a social and professional learning process *built on trust and a shared commitment to enhancing personal and professional learning* that is central. Levin's (2012) UNESCO report makes a similar finding: he highlighted how *teachers who learn in context and through collaboration* have contributed significantly to recent school improvement efforts in Ontario.

These two authors highlight the shift among professional learning scholars to think more deeply about how teachers learn and apply such learning to their teaching practice. In what follows, I briefly summarize several seminal authors in this more contemporary terrain of professional development *and* teacher learning.

2.3.1 Knowledge in practice: Reflection through inquiry

An earlier but still influential conception of teacher learning stems from Cochran-Smith et al's (1999) study that highlighted the difference between "knowledge of" practice versus "knowledge in" practice. This distinction provides an important entry into this discussion. The authors' efforts to differentiate teacher knowledge from the "old" model of teacher professional development centered on "knowledge-for-practice" - and adopting a "new" model centered on "knowledge-in-practice" and "knowledge-of-practice" signals an important antecedent for subsequent scholarship in teacher learning. Specifically, from the perspective of knowledge-in-practice, teacher learning is based on the idea that "knowledge comes from *reflection and inquiry in and on practice*" (p. 267, emphasis added). In professional development initiatives based on this conception, "facilitators often work with groups of teachers, functioning as supportive outsiders who push others to question their own assumptions and reconsider the bases of actions or beliefs" (p. 271). While Cochran-Smith et al's (1999) work emphasized the importance of context (i.e. the application of learning to specific interests or needs of teachers) and the role that facilitators can play in enhancing such learning, there is an equally important feature: that of deconstructing or reframing existing teacher beliefs and understandings about the nature of teaching, learning and students themselves. This echoes my earlier discussion of the literature on teachers' beliefs as they relate to Aboriginal education. Questioning assumptions provides the catalyst through which learning is enabled, both generally as reported in the field of teacher learning, but also specifically in learning about Aboriginal pedagogies and practices.

Professional development, at least in its "traditional" form, is increasingly challenged and critiqued as an effective means to enhance teacher learning and a "paradigm shift" seems to be gathering momentum. Evidence of this comes from the work of Timperley and her colleagues (Timperley, 2011, Timperley & Alton-Lee, 2008, Timperley, Wilson, Barrar & Fung, 2007). These scholars have helped educators understand that the focus of teacher learning is derived from students' needs and how professional development can help to support this goal. This alternative conceptual framework for professional development features cycles of inquiry and knowledge-building with student outcome in schools as its focus (Timperley, 2011). The effectiveness of this model is evidenced in their empirical study entitled the *Teacher professional and learning development: Best evidence synthesis iteration* (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar & Fung, 2007) and through reports on a nation-wide professional development project in New Zealand (Timperley et al., 2009). While the focus on student achievement is important, Hargreaves (2007) offered an important caveat, arguing that data-driven instruction can drive educators "away from the passion and enthusiasm for rich processes of teaching and learning in classrooms and enriched relationships with children, into a tunnel-vision focus on manipulating and improving test scores" (p. 183). To counter this, Hargreaves (2007) places an important emphasis on creating professional learning communities as these "make deep and broad learning their priority" (p. 192), rather than a narrow emphasis on particular forms of student achievement and concomitantly, testing regimes.

The shift in emphasis from single event, individual teacher learning to collective forms of learning and knowledge building through inquiry is also evidenced in the plethora of research now available on what are called *Professional Learning Communities* (PLCs). This literature posits that a PLC is a community "with the capacity to promote and sustain the learning of all professionals in the school community with the collective purpose of enhancing student learning" (Bolam et al. 2005, as cited in Vescio et al.,

2008, p. 81). Stoll et al. (2006) listed five characteristics of PLCs including: 1) shared values and vision; 2) collective responsibility; 3) reflective professional inquiry; 4) collaboration; and 5) group, as well as individual learning (p. 226-227). In other words, a community is built on a common vision through which the group makes an ongoing commitment to work personally and collectively to enhance the success of his/her learners. This literature helps illustrate the ways in which learning is more effective when it is a shared and collaborative experience.

2.3.2 PLCs or inquiry?

Some authors, such as Timperley and her colleagues, distinguish between PLCs and teacher inquiry (Timperley, 2011, Timperley & Alton-Lee, 2008, Timperley et al., 2009). It may seem unnecessary to tease out the differences between these approaches, yet it is useful to do so. For example, Nelson (2008) completed a comparative case study of three PLCs and argued that where the inquiry was sustained (in one of the three schools) both individual and collective learning were evident; in the other two schools such learning failed to materialize. What is evident in this study is that it is not PLCs per se that are doing the work, but *a student-focused teacher inquiry stance that made the difference*. School change does not happen simply because educators work collaboratively. Engaging in rigorous inquiry into teaching and learning practices helps educators to identify the gaps between students' learning and teachers' teaching practice, provide direction to teacher learning and changing teaching practices accordingly, which consequently leads to improved outcomes for students (Timperley, 2011). An inquiry stance also honours the knowledge teachers bring to PLCs, motivates individual teacher's orientation to change and signifies a new relationship between the work of teachers and their commitment to the act of research/inquiry as central to their work and professional role.

Hipp et al.'s (2008) study also helped to distinguish between the issue of creating *a learning informed culture* and the processes of teacher learning. Their work addressed the dialectic relationship between PLCs and school culture suggesting that effective PLCs contribute to the collective beliefs, values and habits of a school, which are represented by the school culture and that such a collaborative school culture is a necessary component of school success. Just as importantly, productive and positive school cultures can make a significant contribution to creating professional learning communities that sustain momentum for school improvement over time. As schools transform into PLCs, "the conceptualization of the PLC becomes rooted within the school culture and a structure emerges providing both a foundation and a guide for learning goals, strategies and outcomes" (p. 177). Other scholars have actually foregrounded the change in school culture and the larger educational context as the factors that contribute to effective PLCs (Mitchell & Sackney, 2007; Mitchell & Sackney, 2011; Stoll, 2009a).

2.3.3 Networking for inquiry

How are such connections and collaborations realized? The idea of *networking* is closely aligned with the notion of community, the heart of the PLC concept (Stoll et al., 2006). Network theory is also helpful in understanding personal capacity, where both strong and weak ties in personal networks are necessary for professional learning and development (Mitchell & Sackney, 2011; Mitchell & Sackney, 2001). According to Mitchell & Sackney (2011), strong ties in personal networks generally develop among

educators with similar professional belief systems, providing a stable foundation and a safe environment for incremental change. Considering the characteristics of PLCs as described in the previous section, it is likely that such strong ties are typically found in effective PLCs. Weak ties in personal networks, on the other hand, generally develop between educators from diverse backgrounds and professional belief systems and "provide a rich source for new ideas and possibilities as well as a foundation for experiments in practice" (p. 28). Therefore, networks that link educators from different schools and regions hold more potential for these kinds of weak ties to develop and for educators to break away from their "horizon of observation" (Little, 2003, as cited in Vescio et al., 2008, p. 89). In a more contemporary sense, with the help of new media tools, networked professional learning communities enable teachers to get out of isolation by sharing teaching practices (Lieberman & Mace, 2010). With schools "going wider" through networks, lateral capacity building is promoted for improvement and change (Stoll, 2006). International networking experiences enable educators to break boundaries in their own thinking and bring about a generative and dynamic process of learning (Stoll et al., 2007). In this way networking implies a wider and more inclusive community where transformative learning can take place. This has been demonstrated in a recently completed research study completed by Stoll, Halbert and Kaser (2012). Their work demonstrated how deeper forms of school-to-school networking have enabled PLCs based on individual schools to form a wider school-to-school PLC, which is "organic" and "consistent with living system models and notions of complexity" (p. 13). Not only do networks make PLCs wider, they also help them to go deeper by facilitating knowledge animation (Stoll, 2009b) through inquiry and making a difference to learning at all levels—teachers, leaders and students alike.

2.3.4 Deeper forms of networked learning for teachers

Some educators and scholar practitioners—particularly the principals of the AESN and NOII in BC (Halbert and Kaser), have sought to document the ways in which some networks enable deeper forms of learning for their participants. In a recent publication they have written about these differences from the ubiquitous references to 'networks' and 'networked learning' that dominate the scholarly literature on teacher learning and suggest that the deeper forms of networked learning are characterized by:

1. Clarity of purpose through shared focus

2. Collaborative inquiry that stimulates challenging, evidence-informed learning conversations

3. Trusting relationships that build social capital for learning

4. Leadership for learning through formal and informal roles, including skilled facilitation of networking links

5. Evidence seeking about intermediate and end processes and outcomes linked to theories of action

6. Attention to the connection between the network and the individual professional learning community of each participating school (Stoll, Halbert & Kaser, 2012, p. 3).

Finally, what becomes clear in the literature is that successful and sustainable PLCs *operate like an ecosystem or living systems* (Mitchell & Sackney, 2011). Such systems are fluid, flexible, diverse and self-regulated, rather than uniform, controllable or predictable. In a similar vein, educational change and

school improvement are "organic processes" that emerge naturally from the interactions among and deep learning of the partners in a PLC and, like any human process, "educational change is paradoxical, ambiguous, multi-layered, and evolutionary" (p. 150). The messiness of such work is echoed in the findings of Halbert and Kaser (2013) who argued that inquiry processes are essentially recursive spirals that "pay attention to emergent knowledge and new practices by encouraging widespread micro innovations... so we can solve the tough problems involved in creating both high quality and equity [learning environments] for all learners" (p. 13). The emphasis on the application of new learning to emerging contexts also makes evident that inquiry is as much a stance (mindset) as it is an action cycle and a process of investigation.

This brief review has illustrated that effective PLCs and networks are forms of professional development that can enhance both teacher learning and student outcomes; yet building such structures is not easy. There are tensions and dilemmas concerning the question of what constitutes learning, where the inquiry cycle should start, and to what extent the educational structure may have to change or be modified so as to facilitate developing a nurturing culture through which professional learning can be supported and enabled. The current theoretical and empirical literature also holds implications for proliferating local practices with PLCs, networks and teacher inquiry, which can adopt and adapt successful practices from elsewhere to suit their particular contexts. It is also likely that creative local practices with teacher learning will contribute significantly to the body of literature and collective knowledge on professional development and PLCs and ultimately benefit all students in our education system.

2.4 Convergence between and implications of the above discussion

While teasing out the differences between the strands of knowledge and research about teacher learning and Aboriginal pedagogy and teaching is important, it is also imperative that we consider how they might inform one another. There are several common threads that these thematic areas touch upon. These include: the importance of teacher beliefs and values as a catalyst for effecting pedagogical change, the centrality of inquiry or a critical questioning stance, the importance of learning guides or facilitators, as well as the centrality of relational ways of learning in community. After exploring these similarities, I will turn to the implications of the above, particularly in thinking through what kind of support systems may enhance and enable teacher learning about Aboriginal and non Aboriginal students. Before doing so however, it is important to acknowledge that this scholarship serves to demonstrate the complexity of the terrain of teacher learning and how to effect change in schools, school systems and the policy frameworks developed to manage such changes. As the scholars above have highlighted, and this section will reiterate, there are many ways in which teacher learning can be enabled or enhanced, providing what we have learned about deepened forms of teacher learning are integrated into these responses.

2.4.1 Shifting teacher beliefs

One area of commonality in the literature is the need to find ways of shifting teacher beliefs. Aboriginal scholars emphasized cultural immersion and deep questioning of assumptions and 'othering' of Aboriginal peoples. Similarly, professional learning community scholars suggest a focus on inquiry related to student success/ achievement is necessary for sustained teacher pedagogical change. The

discussion does not suggest that such approaches create transformational change, as the Aboriginal scholars suggest, but that sustained inquiry can cause changes to what teachers believe about learning and create a platform from which to continually consider and reconsider the ways in which professional decisions are made. By implication then, we may be able to tentatively suggest that teacher learning models needs to address both approaches: cultural immersion and ongoing inquiry. This is not meant to suggest that a particular structured approach needs to be used; as was stated in the first paragraphs of this summary of implications, the terrain of teacher learning is complex and situated in a range of contexts, with trajectories for action emerging from multiple locations. Both horizontal and vertical ties need to be considered; catalysts come from both locations, as Mitchell and Sackney (2009) document. We want to argue however, that non-Aboriginal teachers will need to have supportive and challenging critical partners in these activities; difficult questions must be asked if colonial mindsets are to be interrupted. Like Williams (2000) who emphasized flexible responses to successful Aboriginal program design, we suggest that the process of teacher learning is necessarily iterative, and that approaches should be flexible and respond to particular needs, contexts, and communities. A relationally based, partnership model provides the best evidence for how Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators can work to achieve a shared common purpose: helping all learners succeed.

2.4.2 Moving beyond performance to student identity

We do believe a focus on student success and achievement is important. Yet we accept the caution highlighted by Hargreaves (2007) that a singular focus on achievement may result in a technical rather than personal approach. This is an important caveat: as the literature in Aboriginal approaches to education reminds us, student success involves more than test scores. It must embrace a wide definition of student success to include self-worth, cultural pride, and community aspirations. Here again the professional learning community literature is critical when it emphasizes the ways in which learning-centered cultures and ongoing relational learning is central to effective PLCs. Sustained efforts in inquiry are built when relationally informed, collaborative knowledge building is enabled, sustained and shared.

Both bodies of literature also emphasize the need for learning to be deeply informed by local circumstances and contexts, but also the value of having learning support systems (such as coaches, mentors or guides) in place in order to enrich and prompt deepened forms of learning. By extension, one could also argue that structural approaches, which facilitate the connection between teachers and communities, such as networks, could also be a tool that facilitates learning.

Finally, and likely most importantly, both bodies of literature emphasize the need to engage *relationally* for deep learning to be manifested. In other words, teachers who are engaged in deep personal and pedagogical learning are aided in this work when their practices and inquiries are collaboratively initiated and, by working with others, create a culture through which such learning is continuously reinforced and enabled. While the term relationally isn't specifically evident in the literature described above, the emphasis on making interpersonal connections with students, community members, colleagues or Aboriginal community members is evident and emphasized by the authors cited.

2.4.3 Constraints on teacher learning

Before ending discussion of the implications of the above literature, we want to draw attention to a potential gap in how these scholarly fields consider professional learning; that is attention to the pre-existing, dominant discourses that teachers bring to his/her practice. Discourses are powerful semiotic markers that allow us to 'see into' how teachers conceptualize and practice their craft, as they serve as frames through which the act of teaching is delivered, enacted and understood. There are many powerful discourses that shape teachers' beliefs and practices; one worth highlighting in the context of the literature reviewed for this study is that of 'deficit thinking', and the inter related beliefs about Aboriginal students.

As the Aboriginal scholarship in particular notes, deficit discourses permeate teachers existing practices and approaches to working with Aboriginal students and communities. As such, they are often naturalized responses that enable the construction of personal and professional narratives that explain the attributes or limitations of particular classes of learners or communities. The tendency to label and categorize students is also reinforced through institutional systems that use categories to construct approaches to teaching and learning. Recall the earlier discussion about how Aboriginal education was initially delivered in school districts through separate programming: such responses are examples of systematic approaches to service delivery targeted to specific populations, in this case, Aboriginal learners. While rationalized as 'support' or 'help' for targeted students, as Williams (2000) points out, such approaches act to ghettoize or isolate learners, and also fail to influence the practices of mainstream teachers. What can be drawn from this scholarship and analysis is the need for approaches to Aboriginal education that dismantle deficit discourses and builds in structures and processes that continually seek to deconstruct naturalized discourses that reinforce professional tendencies or predispositions to approach education through the lens of homogenization; that is, where students are grouped or described as a category of same featured individuals, a feature of the colonizing processes of schooling. In other words, a move from "othering" to "respecting and embracing difference" must be a fundamental feature of teacher approaches for how to create *enabling learning environments*, essentially a strength or asset based approach to thinking about students and their communities.

2.5 Conclusion

This literature is an important backdrop to understanding the notion of the impact of the AESN because it highlights what are known as 'promising practices' in Aboriginal education, how to best effect change in teacher practice, and transforming or altering the conditions for Aboriginal student learning. These ideas will be re-visited and used in conducting an analysis of the data collected for this study so as to consider the degree and scope of impact the Network is having on teachers, schools, districts and the success of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

§ 3: Methodology and Methods of Analysis

Before discussing the details of the data collected for this study, it is important to outline for readers how the data was collected and analyzed so that it becomes clear how the claims of impact have been realized. This section of the report describes this process and the framework used.

As was discussed in the in the introduction to this study, this report summarizes what we are describing as the *impacts* of the AESN. As a result, the design of our study sought to gather how selected participants in the Network describe and illustrate the nature of this impact by sharing their experiences and stories. It is a qualitative approach; that is to say, the methods used have focused on the lived experiences of members of the Network. A focus on the lived experiences draws upon a constructivist, interpretive paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) and creates stories or cases that use thick, deep and rich description as its primary tools of verification. In other words, *trustworthiness* is created through efforts to paint a complete and detailed description of events, approaches and experiences. In particular, this report uses case studies as its primary means of capturing the operation of the Network and its impacts.

3.1 Case study: Intrinsic and Instrumental

Case study is not a method but rather a practice of representation of what has been investigated and learned through a careful examination of data. Both single and collective cases can be studies; in this report, single cases are developed (reporting on the specific bounded examples of Prince Rupert and Arrow Lakes) but the larger case study of the Network itself is also discussed using narratives and content analysis (in the section described as *Impacts of the Network*). Stake (1994) describes cases such as these in several ways, including intrinsic and instrumental (p. 237).

The cases of both Prince Rupert and Arrow Lakes should be considered *intrinsic cases*, because the focus is not on theory per se, but on exploring the details and contexts in which a particular set of events have unfolded. Its purpose is to understand more deeply how the specifics lead to particular outcomes. The later section of the report described as *Impacts of the Network* is an example of the *instrumental case*. Here the focus is on how the details of individuals' reported experiences exemplify the theories and by extension, the implications of these theories to practice. Having said these differences exist, in practice often both theory and deep descriptions of events or stories overlap in the telling of the case or story. A third kind of approach to a case study is evident in the section called *AESN Case Study Assessment*.

In this section we summarize how a group of documents, specifically a set of AESN reports written by members between 2009-2012 constitutes a 'case' for seeing how the impact on student learning has been documented over time.

An important outcome of case study is that it can be seen "as a small step toward grand generalization"(Stake, 1994, p. 238). We believe that the scope and range of cases included in this report provide us with the potential for making at least some tentative generalizations about the impact of the Network.

3.2 Impact assessment

Case study is our primary research approach for demonstrating the impact of the AESN. But what is impact assessment? Recent trends in the social sciences literature document a shift towards impact assessment rather than evaluation measures, particularly for organizations which seek to make social impacts upon its participating community. Such thinking has emerged as organizations have considered how to measure their quality, success and/or the significance or importance of the work to a community or a group, as well as how potential lessons might be derived from the activity of measuring performance. In other words, it is more of a *value driven* exercise than one driven by quantitative, final outcome measures (Stufflebeam, 2007). Marula et al (2003) suggest impact assessment is better described as *"... analogous to a reflective process through which social change actors and advocates articulate their change goals and formulate the criteria with which they will evaluate the successes and failures of change efforts. This in turn guides the actors in rethinking their change efforts, influencing whether and how their further efforts should be modified"* (p. 58 as cited in Lall, 2011, p. 5).

3.3 Culturally responsive assessment practices used in this report

As noted in the introduction, our approach to impact assessment includes what we describe as a "culturally inclusive impact assessment". In saying this, what we are attempting to demonstrate is a respect for and valuing of traditional or "wise ways" (Halbert & Kaser, 2012) through the design and reporting of the AESN assessment.

3.3.1 A culturally inclusive advisory board

The Principals of the AESN, along with their colleagues, Dr. Trish Rosborough and Sarah Cormode of the BC Ministry of Education Aboriginal Education Branch, initiated this study through their application to the federal government. As a part of their proposed assessment of the Network, they invited a group of key leaders from around the province to serve as an advisory group. Members of this group included: Dr. Paige Fisher (Vancouver Island University); Sarah Cormode (BC Ministry of Education, Aboriginal Education Branch); Debbie Leighton-Stephens (District Principal, Prince Rupert School District); Dr. Trish Rosborough (BC Ministry of Education); Gloria Raphael (Surrey School District, Aboriginal Education); Laura Tait (District Principal of Aboriginal Education, Nanaimo); Michelle Miller-Gauthier (Network leader, Vanderhoof); Terry Taylor (District Principal of Learning, Arrow Lakes); Donna Weaving (NOII/AESN program staff); Jo-Anne Chrona (Surrey

School District). The work of these individuals was to guide the study design and to provide support to the primary researcher during the data gathering and analysis stages of the impact assessment.

3.3.2 Respecting ownership, knowledge and community protocols

The primary researcher in this study was asked to ensure that any data collected for this study, including any resources or stories shared, followed local protocols—in other words, the appropriate cultural protocol of acknowledging and recognizing knowledge that were the property of particular individuals or clans be sought and respected. This process was built into all study protocols and documents.

3.3.3 Culturally inclusive measures: Using story to share impact

An approach that acknowledges the centrality of story as a culturally inclusive means of describing impact seemed a powerful and compelling way to meet our goals of reporting on the impacts of the AES Network, and was very much in keeping with the AESN purposes of broadening the knowledge of non-Aboriginal peoples about First Nations histories, cultures and contributions to Canadian society. As a result, the design of our study sought to gather impact stories in a number of different ways. One of these ways was to insert narratives collected from participants and written independent of the researcher observations. These intact narratives are designed to provide exemplary voices that corroborate and extend the observations and analyses of the researchers.

Narratives are also inserted throughout the cases included in the report; these narratives have been extracted from the discussions held with the more than 50 participants in the complete study. As much as possible, we have used the exact words of the participants as this, we believe, is respectful of their voice. However, we also occasionally add in some words to help make stronger connections or provide greater clarity. The oral record is supplemented to enhance meaning making for the reader while ensuring the intentions of the speaker are honoured.

3.4 Timeline for compiling the cases and completing the study

January 16, 2013: The primary researcher Dr. Catherine McGregor and her assistant, Allyson Fleming, met with the AESN advisory board in Vancouver, BC. At this time, the research methods proposed by the researcher were reviewed by the Board. As a researcher employed by the University of Victoria, the U Vic ethics application was used as the appropriate vehicle for approval. During this initial board meeting the overall research plan was approved. This included a description of the type of research to be completed (case study of selected districts, case analysis of selected AESN case studies, interviews, focus groups and literature analysis). The use of appropriate Aboriginal protocols was discussed to provide guidance to the researchers. The Board also considered and then selected two school districts from those involved in the AESN to be used as case studies for an in depth look at impact of the AESN at the school, district and community level.

January 21, 2013: Letters were sent to the two selected school districts, Arrow Lakes and Prince Rupert, seeking permission to conduct the case studies. Approvals were received on January 23 and January 30th respectively.

January 24, 2013: University of Victoria research ethics approval received.

February 2013: Throughout the month of February the researchers visited various communities throughout BC in order to complete the two case studies as well as conduct interviews and focus groups.

February-March, 2013: The researchers wrote the first draft of the report. Intrinsic case studies, once completed, were circulated to those district participants who could review each for accuracy. The full advisory group was also asked to serve as readers and to verify the accuracy of the draft written text. All participants were given the opportunity to read and review the report and as per U Vic ethics, the opportunity to revise, remove or alter their comments, should they wish to do so.

March 2013: The final draft report was sent to Pink Sheep Media to put into publishable form.

3.5 Summary of data collected

In this section we describe the different data collection methods used in this study.

3.5.1 Focus groups

Focus groups were conducted in the two selected school districts. The first focus group was held in Prince Rupert on February 4th. The focus group with the Arrow lakes school district was held on February 26th. Focus groups were also held in: Prince George on February 20th; Vanderhoof on February 18th, and Nanaimo on February 13th. **A total of 43 individuals participated in these focus groups.**

All participants were provided consent forms and the list of possible questions prior to the focus group being held. When each focus group was held, the researcher reviewed the ethics form and provided another copy for participants to sign indicating their willingness to participate. In cases where permission was given to take photographs, these options were completed on the consent forms.

All focus groups were audio taped. The researcher and research assistant both took notes as the focus group was conducted. Each transcript was reviewed by the researcher and assistant individually and then shared to ensure accuracy.

3.5.2 Interviews

The AESN principals sent out a group email to all members of the AESN asking them to consider participating in the research study. This email outlined the various ways in which the participants could participate: write a personal narrative about their involvement in the AESN; participate in an individual interview or participate in a focus group. Those individuals interested in participating sent their contact information to the AESN staff person, Donna Weaving. From the complete list of volunteers, a total of 15 individuals were selected by Drs. Halbert and Kaser to be contacted by the researcher for interviews.

Of the 15 individuals contacted, **a total of 12 interviews were completed;** three individuals did not respond to the request.

Each individual was provided with the suggested questions to be discussed at the interview and a copy of the consent form via email. Mutually convenient times were set up to conduct the interviews; some were conducted face to face, but the majority were conducted via telephone. In each case the researcher confirmed orally that the individual was willing to consent to the interview. All interviews were audio recorded and the interviewer took notes as the interview was held. Interviewees were told that there would not be a transcription of the actual interview produced or circulated due to the time limits of the research. All participants agreed with this protocol.

3.5.3 Written narratives

Members of the AESN were also encouraged to write individual narrative reflections of their involvement in the AESN. They were provided with a list of four possible questions to address, and then asked to limit their comments to approximately 500-750 words. Participants were also asked to ensure that their narratives did not identify others or make references that might reveal specific identities. Written narratives could be provided with names or anonymously. These narratives were forwarded to Donna Weaving at the AESN office. **A total of 11 narratives were received.**

3.6 Data Analysis

All of the written notes from the focus groups and interviews were reviewed for accuracy and then printed for analysis. The analysis had several phases:

3.6.1 Phase 1

The first look at the collected data was conducted at an AESN Advisory meeting in Vancouver, held on February 28th. At this time, members of the advisory group were provided with copies of the focus group data. A total of four groups were created to read and comment on the focus group. Individuals were asked to read and comment upon the focus group notes they had been given and then to discuss in groups the themes or ideas that seemed to be most important. The entire board then reconvened to share their analysis and thinking about the transcripts they had read. Themes were recorded by the researcher on chart paper. After this discussion, AESN advisory members were asked to list what they considered to be the most important or critical themes that the report should address. This list was created on a white board and later photographed as a record of the group's thinking.

3.6.2 Phase 2

After completing focus groups in both Prince Rupert and Arrow Lakes, the researcher and research assistant began the process of putting together case studies to profile in greater detail the activities of the selected school districts involved in the AESN.

District documents and reports were accessed to provide background and demographic data for the school district. Detailed descriptions of the work being done by the district was also extracted from focus group and individual interview notes. General descriptions were followed by analysis of overall impacts of the AESN in the district; these were organized thematically. Where necessary, details were confirmed with two key contacts: Debbie Leighton-Stephens in Prince Rupert and Terry Taylor in Arrow Lakes. After the details of each case were completed, the cases were circulated to the lead contacts in each district to review for accuracy and subsequently edited. As much as possible, no names were used, except where appropriate and with permission.

3.6.3 Phase 3

The researcher and research assistant read individually all of the interview data, coding for dominant themes as they read. They then shared their coding with each other, and created a common set of themes. We combined these themes into the list generated by the AESN advisory board. In total we generated about 44 themes. From this larger list of themes, we created broader headings that represented promising practices in the literature reviewed and that could be used to capture the 44 themes. These broader headings where used to organize our approach to creating the section of the document entitled Network Impact.

3.6.4 Phase 4

The complete draft report was circulated to the AESN advisory board for review. A final edit followed this phase prior to printing and publication.

§ 4: Intrinsic Case Study 1: Arrow Lakes

In this section of the report we include the three case studies completed: Arrow Lakes, Prince Rupert and the AESN Case study assessment. We begin with the intrinsic case of Arrow Lakes.

4.1 General description of the district

A great description of the Arrow Lakes School district was extracted from the *Arrow Lakes Community/District Literacy Plan* found on the district website. Several sections from this report are duplicated below:

> The Arrow Lakes school district is situated in the Kootenay Region of southeastern British Columbia. Geographically, the region covers approximately 8000 km² with an estimated population of 3500.

4.1.1 Demographics

> There has been an Indigenous presence in the Arrow Lakes region for 3000-5000 years – the Shuswap people, the Colville, and the Kutenai are identified as the earliest inhabitants of the area. The Sinixt people – (translated to People living in the Place of the Bull Trout) an interior Salishan band inhabited the area for at least 1500 years. Their numbers were estimated in the tens of thousands prior to European contact, however, in 1956, the Sinixt people were declared "extinct" by the Canadian government. The remaining Sinixt dispersed widely across their traditional territory, and when the Columbia River Treaty (which granted the US water rights on traditional Sinixt territory in exchange for cash to the Canadian government) was signed in 1964, the "extinct" Sinixt people received no compensation. Their lack of official status resulted in a gradual erosion of any knowledge of the existence of the Sinixt people (SD 10 – Arrow Lakes Community/District Literacy Plan, 2012, pp. 8, 10).

The Arrow Lakes school district is comprised of 6 schools with an approximate student population of 543 students – 11.2% are of Aboriginal ancestry. Economically, the region fares worse than the BC provincial average, with annual (2006) family income of $20,712, and approximately 20% of residents living below the cut off designated for low-income status. Educationally, the population is also somewhat marginalized with 23% of the population having less than a grade 12 education. Graduation rates for Indigenous students as in the table below indicate higher completion rates than in many

districts around the province. In 2010-2011 54% of Aboriginal students in the province completed within six years of starting grade 8 as compared to 83% of non-Aboriginal students.

Figure 1: Arrow Lake Graduation Rates

	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
All Grad 95	88	95	93	98	91	87	94	100	95
Aboriginal			100	n/a	100	88	100	100	100
Grad Rate									

As a potential corollary to this, youth unemployment in the region sits at a substantial 40.7% (SD 10 – Arrow Lakes Community/District Literacy Plan, 2012, p.10).

4.2 Vision

Situated within this vast yet sparsely populated area of the province, the Arrow Lakes school district has committed to ensuring that its official vision is reflective of both its population and its location. As its website indicates, the district promises to "provide all students with an equal opportunity to achieve academic excellence to the utmost of their abilities, to learn to manage change, to learn to live and work in harmony with others and their environment and thus to grow into caring, intelligent and productive citizens." The district clearly values both its local context and the role its students will play in the larger world as it aims to deliver "global education in a rural setting."

4.3 Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement

The Arrow Lakes Aboriginal Education Enhancement Council (ALAEEC) was formed in 2007 to determine purpose and vision for an Aboriginal enhancement agreement. The ALAEEC is a partnership between School District #10 staff, the Circle of Aboriginal Women and Friends, the Nakusp and District Museum, community members and interested parents of Aboriginal students. The ALAEEC recognizes that School District #10 falls within the traditional territory of the Sinixt people and as such, has committed to acknowledging Sinixt heritage while embracing the diversity of Indigenous peoples who also inhabit the region.

The ALAEEC has a four-point vision that emphasizes a holistic educational approach for educating all Arrow Lakes students to "improve the knowledge, understanding and awareness of Aboriginal culture throughout the school district" (p. 3). This first vision should be articulated through "educational programs that are broad-based and reach out to all students of Aboriginal ancestry as well as non-Aboriginal students" (p. 3). The ALAEEC sees these programs and services rendered by increasing "Aboriginal cultural content in all sections of study by incorporating cultural content lesson plans to all students to enhance awareness, respect and appreciation of Aboriginal culture" (p. 3). Lastly, the ALAEEC recognizes its responsibility for Aboriginal student success and supports "targeted educational support for at-risk students of Aboriginal ancestry" (p. 3).

The ALAEEC and School District 10 set forth six action steps designed to support the realization of the ALAEEC vision. These concrete steps provided the foundation upon which the initial Aboriginal

Enhancement Agreement (AEA) was built. The AEA for School District #10 has two performance goals and objectives each designed in such a way as to ensure measurable outcomes and increase accountability. The goals of the AEA are a concentration of the six purposes outlined by both the School District and the ALAEEC. The theme of holistic education for all learners can be traced throughout.

» To ensure that all students of Aboriginal ancestry achieve academic and social success.

» To honour and acknowledge the histories of our students and families of Aboriginal ancestry.

» To enhance the sense of belonging of Aboriginal students within their communities through shared knowledge and experiences with all students in their school communities.

» To enhance all students' understanding and appreciation of First Nations culture, history and spirituality.

» To provide an opportunity for healing through understanding and creating a sense of community.

» To be sensitive to the needs of our students and parents of Aboriginal ancestry and embrace the whole child – intellectually, culturally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually, in the context of the greater community. (p. 4).

The purpose of the AEA ties in quite succinctly with the School District's mission statement that emphasizes students learning to live and work in harmony with others and their environment to develop into socially responsible, productive citizens.

The initial AEA was signed in June of 2010. The three-year process of crafting the AEA resulted in two goals, each with specific, measurable indicators of success:

» Goal #1: Enhance the Aboriginal student's sense of belonging and improve self-esteem.

» Goal #2: To improve Aboriginal student achievement.

The rationale for the first goal is intimately tied to the continued realization of Goal #2: "We believe that increased awareness, knowledge, appreciation, and respect for Aboriginal culture and history will improve students' sense of belonging and self-esteem" (p. 5). As is evidenced from data collected from the focus group and interviews conducted with various educators from School District 10 (summarized later in this section of the report), educators strongly attest that student engagement with learning increases substantially when the inclusion of their Aboriginal heritage and ways of knowing are reflected in the pedagogical structure and content of their educational programming. More will be said about this observation later in this case report.

An examination of annual reports produced by the school district show that Aboriginal learners in School District 10 achieve at a rate that exceeds many other Aboriginal students in districts across the province. This can be attributed to the continued vigilance of both the ALAEEC and School District officials who have devoted significant human and financial resources to realizing the goals of their AEA for all students of Aboriginal ancestry within the Arrow Lakes School District, ensuring they will have the opportunity to graduate from the public school system with "dignity, purpose, and options" (Halbert & Kaser, 2013).

4.4 The role of the AES Network in School District 10

Arrow Lakes School District has had an affiliation with the Network originating back to 2005 when they became a part of the inquiry-focused Network of Performance Based Schools (NPBS) now called the Network of Innovation and Inquiry (NOII). A three-year inquiry into the impact of Online Literature Circles (which included Aboriginal authors and texts) on student performance in Reading and Writing segued in 2011 into incorporating Aboriginal Literature Circles and Information Circles in First Nations 12, English Language Arts, and Social Studies classes at both the elementary and secondary level. During the 2010-2011 school year, educators in School District 10 were involved with seven NOII, AESN, and Healthy Schools projects across four of the five schools in the district. Additionally in 2010-2011, seven teachers based in four of the five schools were involved in district-based Aboriginal Education learning projects where Aboriginal education was woven into a wide range of curricula and across grade levels. In 2011-2012, 7 of 35 teachers in the district were involved in four NOII and AESN projects which showed improved student learning and engagement as evidenced through the application of the BC Ministry of Education Social Responsibility Performance Standards as well as the use of School District 68's (Nanaimo) Aboriginal Understandings Learning Progression rubric. In May of 2012, 4 Arrow Lakes district teachers partnered with 6 schools/teachers in School District 51 (Boundary) to pilot an online Aboriginal Information Circles project – the success of which has called for expansion and research into its impact in the 2012-2013 school year. Three AESN projects in 2012-13 are connected to the Online Aboriginal Issues and Culture Information Circle.

Figure 2: AESN Projects in Arrow Lake School District

Year	Projects	Teachers involved
2007-2008 2008-2009 2009-2010	Online Literature Circles (NPBS) which included Aboriginal texts	1 teacher in SD 10 partnering with teachers in SD 8, SD 41, and SD 20
2010-2011	Aboriginal Issues and Cultures Documentary Film Project	2 teachers (SD 10)
2011-2012	4 AESN, NOII projects including archery, ethno-botany, & Aboriginal film project	7 teachers
2012-2013	3 AESN projects, 3 NOII: Online Aboriginal education circles (circle of courage) Ethno-botany (continued) Archery (expanded to additional school) Aboriginal carving	7 SD 10 teachers plus 19 other teachers in Boundary, Haida Gwai and Gold Trail districts 3 in 2 schools 3 in 3 schools 2 in 2 schools

Terry Taylor holds the positions of Arrow Lakes School District Literacy and Aboriginal Education Coordinator as well as District Principal of Learning. She described the seamlessness between Network based inquiry projects and inquiry based projects at the district level. In essence, the structural components of the AESN have been taken up by district personnel and woven into the work the district is doing around Aboriginal Education. As such, there "*aren't dividing lines, silos, between Network questions and the rest of the work, so what is evolving, is the links and crossovers and segues and bridges in between.*"

As the above descriptions and summary of the projects taken on in Arrow Lakes illustrate, the AESN has been embraced in a big way by this small but dynamic school district, under the leadership of its Superintendent, Denise Perry and Terry Taylor, the district principal. This is made even more remarkable by the small size of the district level support staff; in a district with a small student population, district personnel must take up multiple roles and are stretched in many directions. For example, the Superintendent also serves as the Secretary Treasurer, and their District Principal of Learning, Terry Taylor, coordinates Aboriginal Education, Online and Distributed Learning, Professional Learning, Literacy, and Special Education. In addition to this she also was a .6 classroom teacher and school counselor up until January 2013.

Despite these pressures, what we learned during our visit to this school district was how closely knit and committed this small group of professionals are. In the sections that follow, we highlight some of the key themes that emerged during our focus group with AES Network members (5 individuals), our observation of their work during a Network meeting in which they shared their current inquiry work, as well as through individual interviews with the Superintendent, two school principals and the District Principal of Learning. These themes include: shifting community and school mindsets; experiential learning; cross-curricular integration; the importance of leadership; and catalysts for educational change.

4.5 Shifting school and community mindsets

As the earlier discussion of the demographics and Aboriginal history of the Kootenays makes clear, this is a region of the province where Aboriginal peoples once lived in abundance, but their history and presence is at best, minimally acknowledged. Despite this, in our discussions with district personnel, we learned that there are quite a number of Aboriginal/Metis peoples who in live in the region; it became equally clear that many students with Aboriginal heritage or ancestry do not choose to self-identify. Teachers, principals, vice principals and district leaders all suggested that this is a shifting dynamic, and that more students are beginning to self-identify, largely as a result of the deliberate focus on Aboriginal histories, cultures and knowledges being integrated into both elementary and secondary programs offered at the district level. They suggested that the work of the school district—including the work of the teachers and leaders involved in the AESN—with their concomitant recognition of Aboriginal peoples contributions to Canada and the region were shifting the culture of the school and the culture of the community. This could be characterized as a movement from tolerance for difference to an acceptance and inclusion of diversity.

There were also general impressions shared about the level and nature of acceptance of Aboriginal peoples in the community. While there were no openly negative discussions about the community, participants expressed that the community at large generally lacked knowledge about Aboriginal peoples in BC, and in their region in particular. This expression of a 'lack of knowledge' often serves as a polite way of acknowledging racist or marginalizing practices in the area. While we certainly heard no overt anecdotes of racism, the stories of how students were beginning to openly identify themselves or family members as Aboriginal/Metis/ or First Nations suggested that self- identification was becoming more acceptable and less of risk. As one teacher said:

"This collaborative thing [the AESN], makes the entire topic [of Aboriginal education] presentable in a way where we can start mending the racism, the discrimination, the pictures we have had in our heads and [about the] culture, about Aboriginal people. If we can keep going and being positive and trying to heal the wrongs, there is a huge thing that will… solve some serious issues."

Other teachers affirmed this statement, nodding in agreement.

Teachers also expressed their own need to learn more about Aboriginal histories and cultural knowledge. They spoke about the need to engage in collaborative ventures with local Indigenous knowledge holders to more accurately include Aboriginal knowledge/perspectives. They spoke about their efforts to learn more about aspects of Indigenous culture that had application to their own teaching areas and they discussed their own learning at some length, openly describing their efforts to learn as their students were learning.

During our visit to this community, one teacher openly self-identified as a person of Aboriginal ancestry from Quebec; this self-disclosure and subsequent discussion with his inquiry colleagues about the commonalities between Indigenous peoples from across Canada, struck us as providing even more evidence of the willingness and openness on the part of this small group of teachers to embrace their own status as learners within the context of Aboriginal education and to include Aboriginal knowledge as a part of their professional repertoire and teacher identity. This story illustrates another feature of this school district; that its teachers seem willing to take professional and personal risks and become vulnerable in acknowledging that they too are learners. One could possibly attribute this willingness, at least in part, to an increased acknowledgement of the validity of Indigenous ways of knowing and being. It could also be a sign of shifting beliefs: a move away from the more dominant, historically situated Eurocentric discourse where Aboriginal Peoples were deficit, to one that accepts the values, life stories and contributions of culturally different others.

In sum, although this district could be described as having a largely homogeneous teaching population there is considerable good will and desire to effect changes in teacher practice to reflect the diversity found in other locales throughout the province. In other words, there was a general readiness among the professional staff to embrace new approaches to teaching their students and a willingness to engage in practices that would extend to the community at large. This desire to shift local mindsets was evident throughout our interviews and conversations and is worthy of additional discussion.

4.6 Education beyond the classroom walls

After examining the cases and listening to teachers and other members describe their experiences within the AESN, we noted how several of their projects had included what were described as "community showcases" or knowledge sharing events. While celebrating the achievements and learning of the students could be assumed to be the primary focus of these events, it was also evident from teacher conversations that this also served as a means of educating families and the broader community. For example, one project profiled during our visit was a cross-curricular English 8/9/10, Socials 8/9/10 and First Nations 12 class where students were asked to produce documentary films. Because of

the focus on local Aboriginal histories and events, several of these films addressed the historical and contemporary contexts for the Sinixt peoples of the area. One film focused on the historical actions of the Federal Government who declared the Sinixt people extinct; another profiled the form, function and purposes of pit homes typically constructed by the Sinixt peoples. The films provide a snapshot of how students were engaging critically with stories from both past and present that had a goal of re-educating themselves, their classmates and community. Participants in our focus group reported on student responses to the film project. The sponsoring teacher described it thusly: *"My kids were so inspired by that experience… the recognition of the use of the lands by Aboriginal peoples… the kids' inquiries were thoughtful and deep."* She also reported on how her student's reflected on the significance of the inquiry projects they had completed. One student said: *"This is the best thing I have ever done in my entire education."* A second publically acknowledged his Aboriginal ancestry, and stated: *"I am Indian and I'm proud of it."* In summarizing her comments, this teacher shared her belief that these projects had led to profound, deep and significant learning that she described as *"life altering".*

 We viewed each video and saw that students were engaged in inquiry questions that sought to unpack stereotypes and to "right" what they saw as historical injustices. On their own, these films demonstrate the impact of introducing Aboriginal themes into the English, Social Studies and First Nations 12 classes and how beliefs among student populations can be shifted when the local context is used to make connections to student experiences and understandings. The combination of personal engagement is also better enabled through the application of new learning technologies: the use of documentary film provides a powerful medium through which to tell these new stories. In sum, it is clear that the learning of these students was significant and made even more impactful as a result of the efforts to link learning to local contexts, the use of inquiry methods and the use of engaging pedagogical methods such as film production.

4.6.1 Extending the impact

However, there are other impacts of this particular inquiry project as described to us by the teachers and leaders of Arrow Lakes during our site visit. The teachers and students involved in creating these films ended their study by hosting a community film festival for family and community members in the Silverton Gallery. A second event was held in Nakusp at the Bonnington Arts Centre, where a different group of students' films were shown and traditional foods served. Teachers and district staff alike commented on the impact the showing of these films had on parents and community members. They described how parents expressed great interest and in some cases, surprise about their own local histories. They suggested that this event served as an important catalyst, one that is creating the conditions necessary for greater acceptance and inclusion in the community. As the District Principal of Learning, Terry Taylor expressed: *"I was sitting in the audience, being amazed at the respectful engagement that people in the community demonstrated; it was such a contrast to the racist attitudes that had been present."* These observations about a shift in community thinking to one that was more culturally inclusive of Aboriginal peoples was also substantiated during an interview with a newly hired school principal who described what she saw as a notable and tangible "shift" in the attitudes, beliefs and acceptance towards Aboriginal peoples since her arrival in the community three years earlier.

What is evident from the examples included here is how the efforts of the district are extending well beyond the classroom and are having impacts upon their student population and the broader community at large. While the stories provided here are anecdotal in nature, they add to the overall evidence of how the work of the AESN and Aboriginal education initiatives are enabling broader cultural and community acceptance of Aboriginal peoples and making their community a safer and more inclusive space for diverse cultural identities.

4.6.2 Experiential learning

An important theme that emerged during our study of this school district was the emphasis placed on experiential and place based learning. As was noted in the literature review in this report, experiential learning (that is, learning by doing/enactment) and cultural immersion experiences are foundational ways in which dominant paradigms and beliefs can be challenged through shared, enacted experiences. In this next section we highlight the ways in which the AESN projects in Arrow Lakes have emphasized experiential and place-based learning as a primary means through which to integrate Aboriginal content into the school curriculum through SD 10 inquiry projects. We describe three AESN projects that have this focus: the Ethno-botany inquiry project, the Archery inquiry, and Aboriginal woodcarving.

4.6.3 The ethno-botany inquiry project

As in many rural districts across British Columbia, teachers in the Arrow Lakes School District are responsible for teaching multiple grades and multiple subjects. This provides a dynamic opportunity for teachers and Network members to explore cross-curricular/cross-discipline teaching and learning in an effort to enhance student engagement and success. Experiential, hands-on learning is a key component of the work teachers are doing in School District 10: students are actively engaged in exploring connections between their prescribed curricula and Aboriginal ways of knowing and being.

A teacher involved with the AES Network since 2010 has incorporated Aboriginal pedagogy into both her junior and senior Science classes as well as her Social Studies 10 course work. Situated at a local high school, this teacher collaborated with local elementary school teachers as well as a local Metis woman to develop a unit that explored ethno-botany – in this case, an Indigenous connection to the land. Students engaged in foraging and harvesting local plants, learned of their various uses, and processed their harvest into rose hip tea, syrup and elderberry jam. The unit culminated in the creation of a cookbook that highlighted recipes - both traditional Aboriginal and contemporary, derived from locally accessible plants. The teacher underscored the benefit to students of getting outside and developing not only an appreciation of what was available to them, but also an appreciation of how much work was involved in the traditional Aboriginal modes of collecting and preparing food. For her Aboriginal students, the connections to their heritage – to participating in activities their ancestors had engaged in only served to increase their sense of pride and belonging as noted by this teacher: *"Any of the projects where the students have learned traditional Aboriginal knowledge and non-Aboriginal students see and appreciate this, it really shows value for traditional knowledge, this builds self-esteem among Aboriginal students. The Aboriginal learners have a personal investment and this improves student achievement..."* There are plans to continue this project in the spring of 2013 as *"students appreciated this opportunity to get*

outside, beyond the traditional classroom. They were more engaged. When they made the personal connections the engagement was huge." The opportunities provided for students to engage with their learning outside the four walls of the classroom are mirrored by this particular teacher's experience with the AESN: she perceives the Network as providing not only an opportunity to work with other people and to see what others are doing in their classrooms – to make connections and contacts, but also as an opportunity to bring more community members into the school and to explore new methods of reaching all students through her own pedagogy: *"The collaborative aspects, the stuff that comes to the teachers and what it offers our students. It's professional development, the best professional learning."*

This marriage of curricula and culture reflects explicitly both goals of the District's Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement; as noted by this teacher, student achievement increased as a result of understanding that their Aboriginal culture and heritage were being validated and honoured through the formal, prescribed learning outcomes.

While the fieldwork for this particular inquiry project was completed prior to the onset of winter, the school-based component was carried on through another AESN inquiry project, the online Aboriginal Information Circles, an exemplar of the potential for innovation in teaching and learning for 21st century education within a rural context as described by the District's motto: "Global learning in a rural setting."

4.6.4 Aboriginal art & woodcarving

Another AESN initiative was undertaken by a teacher who wanted to incorporate Aboriginal art and culture into his woodworking class. Although he has wanted to bring Aboriginal elements into his teaching for a number of years, he expressed the view that the support of the AESN has helped to bring his ideas to fruition. His students have engaged in a unit that blends the symbolism and meanings of Haida art with hands-on woodcarving. He researched and collated resources that explained the process and purpose of Haida carving and shared those with his students who were encouraged to make personal meaning for themselves based on the symbolism inherent in Haida culture. We heard about a Metis carver scheduled to visit the school two days after our focus group was held. The Metis carver was to share his knowledge and skill with this particular teacher and his students as well as with another teacher and his students at another school. A key component of this teacher's inquiry centered on creating opportunities for Aboriginal students to make personal connections to their own heritage as well as for non-Aboriginal students to grow to understand and appreciate Aboriginal culture. As the teacher noted:

> "I am always looking for ways to enhance what students are doing in my shop and to [create student projects] that make it meaningful to self. What do you need? What can you make that means something to you? How can you personalize it to make it meaningful for you? A couple of examples, where students put some of the (Haida) images right on their (carving) projects; it really personalized it for them".

It was very obvious that teacher learning also played a significant role in undertaking this inquiry project: *"For me, I didn't know much about the art or anything, so I am learning. It's a big learning experience for me, and as far as teaching is concerned, I am learning there too."*

The Network connection and inquiry focus has allowed both teacher and student learning and understanding to flourish as teachers use the Aboriginal Information Circle (which will be described in greater detail in a subsequent section of this report) to share knowledge and resources across and beyond School District #10. Again, this carving/wood shop teacher speaks to this:

> "I put some ideas on how to carve (on the Aboriginal Information Circle) but I will be getting some real insights from the carver who is coming, I need to learn it as I hear and watch him too. The texts (used as resources) are being put online, and students who might not normally work online use this as a resource too."

The parallelism between teacher and student learning is important to highlight here. As this teacher has eloquently expressed, both teachers and students are learners through the inquiry approach, and each can, through shared experiences led by community mentors and Aboriginal knowledge holders, develop an appreciation for and deeper knowledge of traditional Aboriginal practices.

As for the structure of his AESN project, the teacher commented on the significance of inquiry to the process of learning: *"Inquiry itself is like planting a seed and seeing what is happening...how can you say this is the result you want? It's about exposure, and seeing how the students take to it..."* This is an important characteristic of inquiry; investigations can go in different directions and this accommodates diverse student interests and needs. It also provides a space in which culturally diverse students—in this case local Aboriginal students—can explore topics that enable them to feel connected to the school curriculum as their traditional practices are seen as having value and relevance for themselves and others. As has been noted in earlier discussions about the Arrow Lakes context, these approaches seem to have created a safer space in which Aboriginal students, who had previously remained silent about their ancestry, to feel able to self-identify. In the case of the carving study described here, the teacher discussed with us how some of his students have similarly responded by more openly self-identifying with their ancestry. It provides evidence again of how the goals of their Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement, specifically that which identifies "increased awareness, knowledge, appreciation, and respect for Aboriginal culture and history will improve students' sense of belonging and self-esteem" is being realized for many of their students.

4.6.5 Archery – Outdoor Education

A blended NOII/AESN collaborative inquiry project undertaken by two teachers at different schools highlights and underscores the potentiality of experiential learning in awakening and deepening students' understanding of Aboriginal culture and history. The joint inquiry project centered on an archery unit that focused on both sport and skill and provided a stepping-stone for understanding First Nation culture through "doing." The six goals of the project hinged on enhancing student self-esteem and participation while also providing opportunities for students to assume leadership/mentorship roles in peer tutoring both adults and other students. We were quite taken with the summary provided

by one of its sponsoring teachers who suggested the inquiry was designed to *"Increase student self-esteem, one arrow at a time."*

At the core of the unit is the notion of connectedness: connecting elementary and secondary students and teachers to others and connecting all to an appreciation for and practice of traditional Aboriginal practices. As a part of their inquiry process, the originating AESN members shared their project with others in the district. This resulted in connecting their high school students involved in the Outdoor Education class/Archery club with grade 5 students at the elementary school as archery coaches/peer-tutors. This particular project has important and meaningful carry over and spin-off effects: due to its popularity and success in improving student engagement and self-esteem, it will expand in the spring of 2013 to involve grade 6 and 7 students and teachers. An equally important spin-off is realized in the cross-curricular integration that is possible in small districts such as Arrow Lakes: students in shop classes are designing and building archery equipment storage boxes to maintain the integrity and longevity of the equipment. While students engaged in the archery project have come to recognize it as both a skill and a sport, students are also very aware of the historical significance of traditional Aboriginal use of bow and arrow as a means of survival. As one of the teachers involved put it:

> "playing with others in competition [allowed students] to gel on a similar skill set – it translates to more than just the obvious [it leads to] the collaborative encouragement for the individual and the group. Two hundred years ago the better you got the more food you put on the table. This contributes to school culture; an understanding of First Nations culture in the past, the present and possibly the future."

This is an important feature to highlight: while studying traditional practices may build appreciative knowledge of past cultural accomplishments, it is when the historical is linked to the current context that learning is most meaningful and helps illustrate the continued contributions of Aboriginal peoples to communities.

According to the other teacher involved in the inquiry, students in the Outdoor Education class have developed a growing appreciation of the challenges faced by Aboriginals in the past who worked with handmade tools in order to create the stuff of survival. Students are taught the art of "knapping" – chipping rocks to make arrowheads - a skill the teacher himself had to learn before teaching his students. As the teacher explained: *"We give them antler and bones and use rocks and sticks so they can make an awl to sew or make an arrow...we give them a piece of buffalo hide, tanned by Aboriginal people in our community. They have to use the bone awls to make a pair of snowshoes..."* This teacher goes onto credit the AESN for his involvement in integrating Aboriginal elements into his Outdoor Education course indicating that he wouldn't likely have done so without the nudge from the Network. What was obvious from our meeting is that the initial exposure to Aboriginal ways of knowing and being, the support of and accountability to the Network, and the success in meeting the goals of the district's Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement, have translated into a heightened enthusiasm amongst educators to continue pursuing increased integration of Aboriginal content and learning into daily teaching practice. As another interviewed teacher stated: *"There is a pretty broad thing happening here. Moving the Aboriginal focus from unconsciously to consciously aware: awareness, appreciation, self-esteem, becoming a valued member of the community – the relationship between the teacher and students...it's all about relationships."*

4.6.6 Online Aboriginal literature/information circles: Technologically mediated Aboriginal learning

While our study has shown that there are many engaging projects and inquiries designed to enhance students' knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal ways of knowing, one of the most interesting and unique projects is the Online Aboriginal Issues and Culture Information Circles and Online Aboriginal Literature Circles co-created by a team of AESN members in the Arrow Lakes school district in collaboration with their colleagues in three other school districts. As was noted earlier in this case summary, this district has made online and blended learning a core component of their approach to educational service delivery. Teachers in the district began pioneering Online Literature Circles using Moodle discussion forums in 2005, and partnered students and teachers between SD 10 and a range of urban and rural districts throughout BC. This project, initiated originally by the District Principal of Learning, Terry Taylor, is an excellent example of how innovative practices grow from personal inquiry. This project's genesis came from earlier efforts at online-literacy circles, and was then modified to meet the goal of better engaging Aboriginal students. It draws on a range of differentiated texts—including Aboriginal texts—to meet the diverse needs of a broad range of students from k-12 in 26 classrooms across 4 school districts (Arrow Lakes, Boundary, Haida Gwai and Gold Trail). More than 450 students "learn from one another" with up to 26 teachers working as a professional learning community engaged in deepening their own learning. The scope of the project is considerable; the online features of this project enable a much broader and potentially richer setting in which many schools and teachers can be brought into discussions about how to support their Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student learners. For example, in our discussions with one Arrow Lakes teacher, we know that the circle was used to enhance knowledge sharing in a related project, the Carving inquiry. As far as we are aware, this is one of only a few AESN projects in which online technologies are being used as the primary means through which to engage students in discussions about Aboriginal knowledges, histories, and contributions of local Aboriginal peoples to the region.

To illustrate how the Online Information Circle operates, we focus on one of the themes that has been added to a 2012-2013 AESN inquiry: The Circle of Courage. This project draws from the work of Drs. Larry Brendtro, Martin Brokenleg, and Steve Van Bockern who developed a program they call "The Circle of Courage". The philosophy of the program is described thusly on its website:

> "Each quadrant of the circle of courage stands for a central value - belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity - of an environment that can claim and reclaim all youth. It represents the "cultural birthright for all the world's children."

> "The Circle of Courage is a philosophy that integrates the best of Western educational thought with the wisdom of Indigenous cultures and emerging research on positive youth development… The central theme of this model is that a set of shared values must exist in any community to create environments that ultimately benefit all" (Circle of Courage website, n.d., Para 1-3).

The two teachers who have worked on this inquiry project within the Online Information Circle sought to answer the question "*will our students engage in a deeper level of inquiry if we create a culturally inclusive, accessible way to engage students in learning?*" The online discussion format sought to apply the

principles of the Circle of Courage (with an emphasis initially on the power of generosity) and focus their students in critical discussions about the current Canadian context for Aboriginal peoples. This discussion was initiated by the inclusion of an online video created by well known Canadian Aboriginal rap artist and activist, Wab Kinew, of the Ojibway of Onigaming First Nation in Northwestern Ontario. The video served as a critical catalyst that engaged teachers and students alike in powerful reflections on the contemporary relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. In the words of Kinew, his goal is to create a dialogue so as to construct a new relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, one built on peace and friendship. A review of the video makes clear the purpose of including it was to challenge status quo thinking and commonly held assumptions about Aboriginal peoples that consistently constructs Aboriginal peoples as "deficit" and requiring charity from non-Aboriginal others. Students were asked to respond to a series of questions and to deeply examine their own biases and misconceptions around Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

One of the teachers involved in this project attended our focus group and spoke eloquently about the deep learning both she and her students had engaged in through this approach to thinking about relationship building between diverse cultures. The AES Network and this inquiry had an important impact on her practice: *"The Network has given me the courage to focus on something new. If I didn't have the support… I might not follow it as diligently. The Network gives you more of an onus to actually work on it."* This teacher also made an important observation about the ways in which this project created what she called *"a critical coupling"* between technology and experiential learning. Her comments suggest that the technological component provides an important catalyst or spark through which students in a range of diverse community settings can be enabled to explore personal inquiries into their own local contexts. The district principal, Terry Taylor, described this as an approach designed to holistically engage students in inquiry mindedness: that is, it focuses not solely on content knowledge, but making personal connections by deeply examining beliefs, understandings and stereotypes. This, she argued, is central to 21st century learning, ensuring students are equipped to engage in understanding their place in an interconnected world. This is fitting in a district that has as its vision "Global learning in a rural setting".

We also know however, based on the comments from one teacher who participated in the Online Aboriginal Information Circles project, that such critical conversations are not easy. Discussions that challenge dominant forms of thinking and/or prejudices that have been maintained in public and personal discourses can be difficult, as is evidenced in the email from one of the project participants from another school district:

> "It was great to see the enthusiasm that many of our students showed when engaging with the Moodle site and the questions. While there are very few written answers, the Moodle site was a weekly lesson which often did not move beyond the discussion phase. These discussions were lively and telling. It is interesting to note that those students who were the most engaged are confident, happy, healthy First Nations students with supportive families and quiet pride in their heritage. It was also interesting to see reluctance and resistance to the topic itself from some students who, in my opinion, were speaking words not their own, but comments and attitudes that seemed to have been learned outside of the school system. Tensions immediately accompanied the lessons and the division that I remember so clearly from growing up as a

teenager in this community entered into our discussions. That is one reason why we did not post as I had planned. The resistance from some, even after lots of talking, was too strong. This was not what I expected and it changed my plans to have each student post a weekly response.

If anything, I learned many things about my students, for example, that prejudice and discrimination are seated deeply in some, while pride and an eagerness to share about one's culture is ready to burst forth. The discussions we had were very powerful and raw at times."

As this example shows, it is not easy to disrupt racist views; nor should any single event, lesson or discussion be expected to do so. As many anti-racist educators have documented, shifting to more inclusive forms of engagement and thinking require consistent and repeated engagement in dialogues designed to challenge thinking. Yet as this AESN project also demonstrates, some new 'seeds' of thinking have been planted and have the potential to root in an environment where inclusion and difference are becoming increasingly valued. This is, in our view, a critically important impact of the Network: it provides a safe, supported space from which teachers can work with supportive others to transform their own thinking and that of their students/community members.

4.7 Key features of the AESN in Arrow Lakes

In this section we summarize the critical features of the AESN we observed in the Arrow Lakes School District.

4.7.1 A focus on building self-esteem and self-acceptance amongst Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students

In our visit to the Arrow Lakes we were repeatedly struck by the ways in which teachers and district staff were able to able to provide evidence of how students (and staff) in their district were becoming comfortable with self-identifying as Aboriginal peoples. This parallels the stories of local Aboriginal people in the Arrow Lakes area, known by members of the community to have hidden their Sinixt ancestry for safety in previous periods where racism was more widespread. While some might question the veracity of such claims, there is well-documented research evidence that many Aboriginal peoples deliberately hide their identities and ancestry as a means of survival. Christine Welsh, a Métis filmmaker, is one of many people of Aboriginal ancestry who have sought to document and explore this phenomenon. In her film, *Women in the Shadows* (1990) she explores her efforts to know herself and her family as she re-visits communities and places of her childhood in order to reconstruct family and personal histories. In writing about this experience Welsh says: "The film records my struggle to understand the choices my grandmothers made—to recognize that, for many Native people, denial of their Native heritage and assimilation to the "white ideal" was largely a matter of survival" (1995, p. 28). Welsh also reflects on how the film making process was central to coming to these understandings; in other words, her attempts to story or give meaning to her family's experiences was a critical feature of coming to know herself.

Welsh's work helps to illustrate how creating safe spaces for exploring personal identity and finding value in one's own cultural ancestry is a powerful tool for dismantling the assimilative culture that has

persisted in Canada, including the Kootenay valley. In this School District, through the work of the AESN and the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement, teachers, district leaders, community members and students are all engaged in processes of inquiry designed to dismantle the fear, prejudice, and stigma attached to "being Aboriginal". They are also incorporating many of the First Peoples learning principles (BC Ministry of Education, 2012) that were referenced in an earlier section of this report. While we do not suggest that their efforts have always met with complete success, the work they are doing is having a significant impact on the social, political and cultural contexts which enable (or constrain) the ability of students' of Aboriginal ancestry to see and understand themselves as successful, valued, and contributing members of their communities. The efforts of this district, through their AESN work, are noteworthy in terms of the impact they are having on community beliefs and understandings; they are altering the conditions in the community that has made it acceptable to ignore or silence Aboriginal voices, identities and histories. They have done this by making spaces for different conversations to occur, ones that can permit a more inclusive and accepting stance towards Aboriginal peoples and their cultural perspectives.

As notable however, is the impact the AESN work is having on the Arrow Lakes school district teaching population: this too is key to effecting change for Aboriginal students, as the literature review completed earlier in this study noted. Teachers who themselves have engaged in cultural immersion experiences, or who have sought ways to dismantle bias or deficit ways of thinking about culturally diverse children and youth, and adopt culturally inclusive ways of teaching are most likely to effect changes in student success. We saw teachers profoundly interested in how their inquiry and integration of culturally responsive teaching practices were making an important difference to their students, and who were eagerly exploring ways in which they could extend these experiences in order to more fully accommodate the diverse needs and interests of their students. In this district we saw evidence of how these approaches are altering historical trajectories that had created different classes of individuals on the basis of their conformity with dominate "white" social norms. This is a powerful impact of the AESN.

4.7.2 Emergent evidence of nested, interconnected learning systems

In exploring how the AES Network operates in Arrow Lakes what becomes clear is how the Network is nested within and amongst parallel systems of support for teachers and district personnel involved in educating youth in this diverse region of the province. While their history of involvement in the Network is relatively short, it is also evident that the notion of culturally inclusive practice has been embraced and incorporated into the diverse, yet connected forms of inquiry these teachers are choosing to participate in. A large number of existing teachers are participating in either Network activity or initiatives supported by their Aboriginal Learning Principal and other district leaders; the numbers of teachers currently involved is estimated to be about 30%. The success of these teachers' AESN projects, the evidence of increased student engagement as a result of their efforts to incorporate Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives in their approaches to curriculum, and how this work has broadly impacted their community is clearly motivating for these teachers, and this is creating interest among others who are not yet involved as deeply. The district has also made clear that it values these teachers' efforts, by providing resources and professional support for them as they engage in this work.

Taken together, these provide evidence that the Network will continue to operate successfully in this district. While we cannot assume that such practices will necessarily continue over the longer haul, the level of passion shared by these teachers and district leaders as well as the level of engagement among a range of teachers of non-Aboriginal ancestry, suggest it is a district that will be transformed into a more culturally inclusive space that will nurture and deepen understandings of Aboriginal peoples in their region and in BC and Canada, while enhancing the successes of their students.

4.7.3 Innovative approaches to culturally inclusive education

As noted earlier, we were impressed by the scope and interconnectedness between the AESN inquiries we heard about. There is a strong sense of community in this small district. Partly as a result of its size and partly because of its desire to breathe life to the district motto: "global learning in a rural setting," the district has cultivated partnership with others in neighbouring schools/districts. In this way, they have found support and continued to develop approaches that work for their student population and extend the walls of their classrooms. We also saw however, that this district is using technologically innovative approaches to inquiry and culturally responsive teaching methods in ways not evident in other parts of the provincial AES Network. We know some of this comes of necessity, as many of the students in this district participate in online study due to limitations of course offerings. Yet it is also clear that these teachers are using creative and inventive content that is critically engaging students in ways that challenge status quo ways of thinking about Aboriginal peoples for both themselves and their students and to extend the limits of more traditional pedagogy and practice. Is it possible to say that the Network created this work? Perhaps not, but it is, we believe, possible to attribute the Network with creating the *conditions* necessary for such work and helping grow the work. By conditions we refer specifically to the goals of inquiry such as: puzzling through new approaches and ideas, acting on hunches, taking risks, doing research, sharing ideas with others in the Network, trying out ideas, and being unafraid of failure because it will help determine a path towards a more successful approach. The Network, and the district staff that support and embraces its work, has provided a space for teachers to broaden their scope of thinking, take risks and engage in inquiries designed to challenge their thinking in order to enhance their students' success. As one teacher noted*:*

> "The most important thing is how the collaborative process breathes life into the content we are bringing to the classroom. The energy and excitement and conversation helps us to move beyond the prescribed learning outcomes, into a realm of deeper learning. The conversations really enrich and expand our capacity in Aboriginal education."

This is an important impact of the AESN: it creates the conditions that enable innovation and context specific approaches that work for teachers so they can focus on the deep learning of all learners.

4.7.4 Leadership

As this case has made clear, this is a district where learning centered leadership is a core belief and practice; their small size suggests that there are challenges they face, particularly related to resources, but its size has also provided opportunities for innovation and creativity. We saw plenty of both in this

school district. As the case above has outlined, the teachers in this district are using a wide variety of experiential, online and site based approaches to integrating Aboriginal content in their curriculum. The district and its community have successfully created a local Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement that is well on its way to being implemented throughout the district. Although senior leaders within the district acknowledged to us during our site visit the need to more explicitly link their AEA with the work teachers and formal leaders were doing to more fully incorporate Aboriginal understandings into their approaches to working with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth in their district, we certainly heard during our conversations that most district staff understood the goals of enhancing student success—for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners—implicit within that agreement. We also heard how the district has begun to develop important regional and local partnerships with Indigenous peoples and organizations and are actively sharing their learning with other teachers beyond their own borders and with the greater community: both of these are important indicators of how the Network has provided this district with important tools to effect broader scope changes. And as the Superintendent, Denise Perry points out, the district is embracing planning and resource allocation processes that put collaborative inquiry at the core of how they work to establish professional goals for principals and teachers alike, ensuring inquiry becomes embedded into their core activities.

It was also apparent that the leadership of District Principal, Terry Taylor, has had a central effect on change in this district; teachers and district leaders repeatedly mentioned her personal commitment to effecting change in the district's approach to ensuring all students' school success, how she modeled new approaches to working with Aboriginal knowledge and cultural practices, and gave teachers opportunities and resources to explore their own interests and passions related to Aboriginal education through the auspices of her district support role. In sum, while the Network itself enables much innovation, it requires district leadership to expand and extend such initiatives. Therefore supportive leadership at all levels is an important condition for effecting systemic change within a district.

4.8 Summary of AESN impacts

We have attempted to provide rich detail about how the Network operates in the Arrow Lakes school district. When considering overall impact, we thought it could be useful to try and represent impact using a basic scale. For the purposes of our summary then, we consider impact in three categories: as **sustained**, **initiated**, and as **potential**.

Figure 3: Summary of Impacts, Arrow Lakes School District

Impact Category	**Potential**: the AESN has provided an **inviting pathway** through which to consider change	**Initiated**: the frequency of engagement is **shifting** context, process or practice	**Sustained**: the AESN has **transformed** the context, process, or practice
Leadership			✔
Culturally inclusive education		✔	
Nested, inter connecting learning systems		✔	
Integration of AEA into school & district practices	✔		
Building self-esteem & self acceptance among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students			✔

§ 5: Intrinsic Case Study 2: Prince Rupert School District

In this section of the report we provide a detailed case study of the AESN in the second school district selected for analysis, Prince Rupert.

5.1 General description of the district

The school district website provides an excellent overview of the school district:

> School District 52 (Prince Rupert) is located on the rugged northern coast of British Columbia, Canada and is situated in the traditional territories of the Ts'msyen people. The district serves families in Prince Rupert, Port Edward, Metlakatla, Gitxaala, Hartley Bay, Lax Kw'alaams, Dodge Cove, and Gingolx (Kincolith). We are situated on a 22.5 kilometre long harbour that is one of the deepest, natural, ice-free harbours in the world. The population, including the surrounding villages, is approximately 12,500 (Census Canada 2011)... School District 52 (Prince Rupert) has 2233 students attending 9 public schools with the latest in technological and learning resources. Our Aboriginal student population is approximately 60%. The district has recently reconfigured and now has elementary schools for students in kindergarten through grade 5; middle school for students in grades 6 – 8; and high school for students in grades 9 – 12. We also have Pacific Coast School that provides students and adult students with alternative styles of education including on-line learning. (summary taken from **http://www.sd52.bc.ca/sd52root/content/welcome-school-district-no-52-prince-rupert)**

As the above description makes evident, this district has a significant number of Aboriginal/Indigenous students, served primarily in the communities of Prince Rupert, Port Edward and Hartley Bay. Other independent schools exist in the region including a school in the village of Lax Kw'alaams operated by the Coast Tsimshian Academy; Lach Klan School in Gitxaala is a band operated school; finally there is a Catholic Annunciation School in Prince Rupert.

There is a significant history in the Prince Rupert school district of working on addressing the needs and interests of its diverse communities; it has had a First Nations Education Council in place for a considerable time. Founded in the fall of 1989 as the Indian Education Advisory Council, this organization has had at the core of its work the mission of "creating a community of young people and adults who value First Nations culture, knowledge, and people as an integral part of the education system" (Wilson, 2007, p. 1).

In a written history of the work of the Aboriginal Education Council in Prince Rupert by Elizabeth Wilson (2007) the spirit of this work is captured by the words of its founding members:

> "We want children to want to go to school, to have a sense of belonging, to see themselves in our schools. We wanted all of the things stated in "The Indian Control of Indian Education"… that First Nations people will have a clear say in what is important, what is success in school, and how all this ties to life experiences in the community, so that the First Nations worldview is reflected in the education system. We didn't want these to be separate worlds… We want to focus on a curriculum that embodies First Nations culture and to bring it into the classrooms, to help First Nations students and also for other students to gain an appreciation of First Nations culture" (p. 1).

Documenting the full scope of this organization's visionary work goes beyond the scope of this short case study. However, it is important to acknowledge that this group has acted as an advocate for First Nations children and the community at large, and that their persistent efforts can be attributed to creating a culture in which both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples have become connected to a common core purpose.

This core purpose is evident in many different ways, but firstly in the representation of its vision statement: "Sagayt Suwilaawksa Galts'ap", which translates as "A community of learners". More recently, the opening of the Wap Sigatgyet in 2006 has offered a visible symbol that realizes this vision by creating a physical space and the primary location for Aboriginal Education. Wap Sigatgyet means "House of Building Strength" and this site has indeed become the center of Aboriginal Education in the district. It houses all of the program staff who work in the district and resources to support the work of staff and teachers. It has become a shared space where collaborative activities are hosted and all educators and community members are welcome as they collectively seek to enhance the strength of their diverse community. The focus on community is no accident as is evident by the approaches the district supports and mandates within its schools. A primary means of realizing this vision is evident from the work being done by its Aboriginal Education programming, and governance measures such as the Aboriginal Education Council, The Aboriginal Education Committee and Aboriginal Education Partnership Agreement. Brief descriptions of these structures and programs follow.

5.2 Aboriginal Education Partnership Agreement

While many school districts around the province have created joint agreements under the Provincial Government's mandate to create local/regional Aboriginal Education Enhancement agreements, Prince Rupert is unique in that its community insisted on it being described and realized as a *partnership*

agreement. They did so with the intention of conveying the importance of the shared responsibility between the school district, its staff and the Aboriginal communities it serves.

The first *Aboriginal Education Partnership Agreement* was signed on October 29, 2001. The mission statement of the *Aboriginal Education Partnership Agreement* stated—

> Our school system is dedicated to creating a community of young people and adults who value Aboriginal Language, Culture, Knowledge, and People as an integral part of the education system.

With the signing of the Agreement, the Aboriginal Education Council and the Board of Education, as well as community and school partners entered into a partnership designed to:

» Acknowledge the lack of success of Aboriginal learners

» Focus on increasing the academic success of Aboriginal learners

» Acknowledge the language, culture, and history of Aboriginal people whose traditional territories were served by the school district

» Report annually on progress towards specific student performance goals

Since this original agreement annual reports have been created to mark the progress of the district and its partners in achieving their shared goals for improving the "school success of all First Nations learners in Prince Rupert School District"(2001, p. 1). A renewed partnership agreement was signed on November 30, 2010, which will run until 2016. The renewed agreement clarifies the goals of the Partnership Agreement, and draws attention to the need to enhance the success of Aboriginal students through what it calls "Culturally responsive programs" (2012, p. 7). There are some important amendments made to the original agreement that include:

» A focus on *school success* "by providing engaging, relevant curriculum"

» A focus on enhancing "*life opportunities* of all Aboriginal learners"

» A focus on "the *engagement of families* in their children's education"

» A focus on "*greater community understanding* of Aboriginal culture and history" (2012, p. 7)

The words italicized above shows the shift in thinking that has occurred over the years since the original Partnership Agreement was signed. In later parts of this report this change in thinking about Aboriginal education—a shift from thinking of Aboriginal education as a type of correctional program for a specific class of learners, i.e. Aboriginal students—to being a concern for *all* learners and the broader community, will be explored in greater detail. Suffice it to say that these carefully crafted words signal a fairly significant shift in thinking about Aboriginal students, from a deficit/corrective model to a more inclusive way of thinking about Aboriginal knowledges and culture as valued components of school learning.

5.3 Aboriginal education programming

Debbie Leighton-Stephens is the District Principal of Aboriginal Education in Prince Rupert. She works with a small number of professional staff—both teachers and educational assistants/resource personnel—in supporting the goals of the Aboriginal Enhancement/Partnership Agreement and the

success of its Aboriginal student population. Given the high percentage of Aboriginal students in the district, it isn't surprising that there are a considerable number of Aboriginal education programs offered in the district. As their website notes:

> Aboriginal Education Services is committed to building understanding of Aboriginal history and culture throughout the school district as a way to develop positive relationships among all students and staff.

> Aboriginal Education Services continues to plan and implement successful initiatives, programs, and materials including the Sm'algyax Language Program, the LUCID Research Partnership, First Nations Cross-Curricular Units, the Role Model Program, Family Resource Workers, Full/All Day Kindergarten, PALS (Parents as Literacy Supporters), POPS (Parents of Primary Learners), Helping Our Children Learn family workshops, Summer Read and Play, and other programs (Aboriginal Education Website, n.d. ¶1).

5.3.1 Aboriginal Education Council

The Aboriginal education council was originally formed in Prince Rupert in 1989. Its goals include:

» providing Aboriginal people an effective voice in determining relevant educational programs and services for learners of Aboriginal ancestry and,

» increasing all learners' knowledge, awareness, understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal people and their history and cultures (Aboriginal Education Council webpage, n.d.)

The Aboriginal Education Council includes a broad membership of community members as well as school district personnel. It provides the overall direction to the work of the school district as it relates to Aboriginal Education. The Council also has a working committee, called the *Aboriginal Education Committee*. The members of this committee include the school superintendent, Lynn Hauptman, as well as the District Principal of Aboriginal Education, Debbie Leighton-Stephens. Other teachers and support workers are represented in this working group. The Aboriginal Education Committee provides a primary mechanism through which the work of the Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network (AESN) in Prince Rupert is coordinated and supported.

During the site visit to this district, the degree of cooperation and coordination among all of the district staff became readily apparent, as did the degree to which there is a strong commitment to improving the life chances of all students, but particularly for its Aboriginal student population. A description of all of the tools the district uses to support its Aboriginal learners goes beyond the scope of this report; in the next section I have summarized how district personnel and Network members describe their involvement in the AESN and how it is supported in the school district.

5.4 The role of the AESN in the Prince Rupert School District

The AESN has been operating in the Prince Rupert school district since the Network's inception in 2009; as noted in the introduction to this report, Prince Rupert teachers, and in particular, its District Principal of Aboriginal Education, Debbie Leighton-Stephens, have been foundational players in the

design, development and early launch of the AESN. We also became aware of the lead role several prominent educators have played in this district, among them Lynn Hauptman, School Superintendent, Judy Zacharias, Principal, Elizabeth Wilson (former Network regional leader, now retired but still actively supporting Aboriginal Education initiatives), and Christine Franes, District Helping Teacher, and current NOII/AESN Co-ordinator.

A review of the case studies underway or completed and filed with the AESN principals and/or the District Principal of Aboriginal Education reveals the following:

Figure 4: AESN Projects in Prince Rupert School District

Conrad Street Elementary	#52 Prince Rupert	AESN	Reading	2008-09	4
Roosevelt Park Elementary	#52 Prince Rupert	AESN	Reading	2008-09	4
Conrad Street Elementary	#52 Prince Rupert	AESN	Reading	2009-10	4
Hartley Bay School	#52 Prince Rupert	AESN	Aboriginal Culture and Traditions	2009-10	5
Pineridge Elementary	#52 Prince Rupert	AESN	Aboriginal Art and Reading Comprehension	2009-10	4
Roosevelt Park Elementary	#52 Prince Rupert	AESN	Reading	2009-10	4
Conrad Elementary	#52 Prince Rupert	AESN	Reading comprehension	2010-11	4
Hartley Bay School	#52 Prince Rupert	AESN	Building upon last year's inquiry - Aboriginal Culture and Traditions	2010-11	7
Pineridge Elementary	#52 Prince Rupert	AESN	Year two of Inquiry - Aboriginal Art and Reading Comprehension	2010-11	3
Roosevelt Park Elementary	#52 Prince Rupert	AESN	Reading	2010-11	4
			No inquiries completed due to job action; however many inquiries launched in 2010 were continued without formal reporting.	2011-2012	
Charles Hays Secondary		NOII*	Students Owning Their Own Learning (partnered with Hartley Bay School) (using strategies such as Aboriginal cognitive tools & differentiated instruction)		2
Conrad Elementary		NOII*	Integration of Aboriginal literature (year three of original inquiry)		4
Hartley Bay School		AESN	Building upon last 2 years inquiry – Aboriginal Culture and Traditions (year 3)		7
Pineridge Elementary		NOII*	Integrating Aboriginal Knowledge into Science and Social Studies.		2
Prince Rupert Middle School		AESN	Integrating Aboriginal Knowledge into Gr. 8 SS		4
Roosevelt Park Middle School		AESN	Integrating philosophy of Restitution		4
Pacific Coast School		AESN	Project based learning to improve achievement for Aboriginal students		4

* In these cases, the inquiries were begun under the auspices of NOII, although they were primarily concerned with Aboriginal student success and are therefore included here.

In interviews and focus groups with the teachers involved in the AESN, it was also reported that teachers participated in the formal structural components of the Network, including participation in school, district and regional meetings. As part of their Network activity, these teachers reported on some of the ways in which they became more aware of the Network activity of colleagues in the region via the formal year-end 'showcase'. A former regional Network leader interviewed for this study estimated that approximately 50 teachers from the region meet at the end of each school year to discuss their inquiry questions and share their learning and results. This process generates intensely focused discussions among participants about both how goals were achieved and pathways/routes to future inquiries. Earlier in the document, the notion of developing "hunches", "new professional learning" and "checking" as a part of the process of inquiry were described; conversations with AESN members who attended these showcases highlight how these processes become integral to the showcase process of sharing inquiry results. And, in keeping with effective professional learning literature, AESN members frequently report the ways in which their inquiry questions led to deeper and more frequent forms of collaboration, professionally focused, learning centered conversations, and in deeply engaged reflection on one's own teaching practice.

Christine Franes, the district's Literacy Support teacher, has been involved in the AESN since its inception. During the site visit to Prince Rupert, she was able to provide detailed evidence of the degree of teacher involvement in the Network. After reviewing the summary of inquiry reports, she was able to document that 55 teachers have been active in the Network in Prince Rupert. In a total teaching population of 150, this is a significant number of teachers—more than 30%-- who have become, or are currently members involved in inquiry work.

5.4.1 Exploring one school's inquiry journey: Conrad School

As an exemplar of the work of AESN members, we interviewed the teachers and school principal involved in one of the Prince Rupert inquiry questions. Conrad school's inquiry began in 2007, prior to the official launch of the AESN. However, as has been described in this case, Prince Rupert was a lead district in initiating the AESN as a subset of educators within NOII, so documenting their initial work provides strong evidence of the emergence of the Network, while also illustrating critical components of the AESN process that would become central to the thinking of the wider AESN community.

Conrad elementary school enrolls approximately 300 students from kindergarten to grade 7. About 75% of the students enrolled in this school have Aboriginal heritage/ancestry. The school also serves about 25 students from the village of Metlakatla, a small community on the coast of Prince Rupert. Other initiatives this school engages in that support its Aboriginal student population include: StrongStart (a provincial early childhood education initiative), Sm'algyax Language Programming, and all day kindergarten programming.

The Conrad staff chose to investigate the question "*Will using Aboriginal content literature improve reading comprehension for Aboriginal students*"? Their case study documentation as well as their interview transcripts describe an organic, emergent process through which the AESN participants came to narrow their focus from that of reading comprehension to making connections, questioning and visualizing as tools for enhancing comprehension of texts. They spent considerable time compiling and testing

different local and regional Aboriginal literature sources as a part of their inquiry. The teacher team worked with different age groups of students in the school; and while it was clear that their original work was focused more on the resources they had gathered, they soon started to understand that it was in effort to establish deeper connections with their students as they read these texts that they became more aware of the ways in which Aboriginal content could and did transform their students' learning experiences. At this point in our conversation one teacher said simply: *"Content isn't enough, we want to make this [inquiry] bigger."* There were enthusiastic nods all round. This need to re-define, deepen and engage with their own approach to working with their Aboriginal and non Aboriginal students might be described as a kind of turning point. It is certainly clear from the conversations we held that they had a great enthusiasm and eagerness to share what they had learned. But it also demonstrated the ways in which working together had provided them with scaffolded learning opportunities, opportunities to develop skills in learning focused leadership, and strong inter personal and professional relationships created, as they built an inquiry together around a common purpose. We also heard these teachers describe the ways in which they used the Wap Sigatgyet education center as a physical site for their ongoing work. As its name suggests, they used this site to "build strength" together: they held not only AESN planning meetings here, but actually shifted one of their regularly scheduled staff meetings to this site in order to become more aware of how they might integrate the resources from the Wap Sigatgyet into their current and future work. The school has plans to continue this process of using the Center as a site to enable their continued learning. Finally we noted that these individuals were all non-Aboriginal teachers; it was particularly interesting to hear how they characterized their shifting understandings about the relationship between Aboriginal content, culturally responsive teaching practice, and their own beliefs about their role as educators.

As a result of this turning point in their inquiry, the team decided to trace their continued efforts and go more deeply into exploring their question by extending their study. They created a cohort of students and sought to refine and re-develop their question over the subsequent two years. Their report was reviewed for this case study; this report also emphasized their efforts to collect pre and post data about their students' levels of comprehension, which were reported to have increased substantially over the course of their inquiry. Yet while their written report suggests that teachers were significant learners throughout their process of inquiry, it was the deeper oral reflections on their learning journey that captured the ways in which the inquiry process altered their trajectories as teachers, learners and learning centered leaders.

In the next section of this case study I want to elaborate on five observations identified within the Conrad Elementary school case study described above in order to tease out how the Network provides the context for engaging teachers in deeper learning. This includes: inquiry as a mindset, the role of leadership, shifting teacher beliefs about Aboriginal learners, networked teacher learning, and the role of conceptual/big picture thinking.

5.4.2 An inquiry mindset

Four of the members involved in this inquiry were interviewed; they included two classroom teachers, the school librarian and the school principal. Each described in different ways how critical the concept of an inquiry and learning centered mindset was to their work and approaches to enhancing student

success. For example, one teacher described the more typical way of doing curriculum in her class was to *"just get through it"* but that through her focus on this inquiry, she was able to realize the importance of *'walking slowly'*. "Hagwil yaan" is the Ts'msyen word for 'walking slowly'; it brings attention to the importance of patience, taking time for relationships and engaging in collaborative work. This teacher said that by focusing on "Hagwil yaan" as she worked with her colleagues and her students she could focus in more fully on *"how can we make this [teaching and learning] better?"* To use this language signals a way of conceptualizing practice differently: to become less oriented to immediate results, and more engaged in caring, thoughtful and mindful relationship building with their students.

Another interviewee talked about how working with colleagues on a shared inquiry created the opportunity to learn more deeply and get new ideas; the inquiry process provided the means through which to "get more comfortable with being able to ask questions". In other words, inquiry provides a very necessary professional learning space for teachers themselves in which to move from the role of "expert knowledge holder" to "inquirer". This might seem like a relatively simple statement, but more typical teacher professional development activities put teachers, not student learning, at the center of their efforts. Throughout the interview with these teachers, their comments illustrated that they had moved significantly away from this conception of the teaching and learning relationship; collaboration, cooperation, questioning and investigation into how students are experiencing their efforts has replaced their earlier emphasis on lesson content and teacher delivery. The school principal summarizes this point well in her description of how her involvement in the Network has evolved over time. *"Inquiry"* she said, *"has changed the way I do things."* It has clearly changed the way these teachers work together and focuses on how to better engage students in relevant and engaging learning opportunities.

5.4.3 Leadership

The topic of leadership was exemplified throughout my interview with the teachers involved in the Conrad inquiry question. First, the idea of emergent leadership through shared engagement was strongly evidenced by the conversations between these professionals. At various times in the conversation teachers referred to the lead role an individual might play as the inquiry unfolded; one teacher might lead on making connections to Aboriginal community members; another might take a lead role in data collection; another in assessing resources to be used. Yet it was not just the distribution of tasks that seemed central to their description of their work; rather their role as shared leaders was exemplified in how they described the contributions that others had made to their emerging learning and how such leadership built a committed team of inquirers. In other words, the shared nature of the work helped scaffold teacher learning and deepen it.

The role of formal leaders in supporting and deepening the inquiry process was also an important idea that was evidenced through these teachers' reflections on their inquiry. The school principal Judy Zacharias described how the inquiry approach gave her inroads into new conversations that widened teachers understanding of the multiple contexts in which their learners were situated, and how these contexts needed to be addressed in order to deepen their engagement with literacy texts. This school leader described how she sought to have teachers engage through these ongoing professional conversations, with their own values, beliefs and assumptions. And as these conversations were recursively cycled through subsequent iterations of their questions, the inquiry moved from one focused

solely on cognitive performance to one that embraced students' cultural knowledges and experiences. While not explicit in this leader's words, there is clearly a level of trust that has developed among the AESN members and this leader. As a lead learner, this leader provided a powerful, safe support system for continued cycles of inquiry and learning as is evidenced by the increasingly more focused efforts to re-structure their inquiry over a three-year period.

5.5 Shifting teacher beliefs about Aboriginal learners

As is evidenced in the Prince Rupert Partnership Agreement, culturally responsive teaching is understood to be a powerful pedagogy through which teachers should engage their students in deepened forms of learning that acknowledge the significant contributions Aboriginal peoples have made to Canada, BC, and the Prince Rupert region. This is particularly important in the context of school districts that have largely non-Aboriginal educators working with Aboriginal learners. Dismantling pre-existing beliefs, including those that characterize Aboriginal learners as "deficit", is a central purpose of the AES Network. Throughout my interviews with teachers from Conrad school, there were references to thinking about their students differently—more positively and with an emphasis on care and understanding—as well as references to their own need to uncover and learn more about the historical past of residential schooling and its impacts on Aboriginal communities. Repeated references to the "richness" of Aboriginal literature, the historical contributions of the Ts'msyen nation as part of "our story", the importance of connecting with community members, leaders and Elders in shared knowledge creation; and how connecting to Aboriginal knowledge and culture provided a means of their students' "connecting to a bigger story" permeated our conversation. While overt references to the colonial history of schooling were absent from their conversations, it was evident that these teachers were becoming engaged with and responsive to the goal of creating culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogy in their everyday practice. In this school, Aboriginal education is not an add on: it is widely integrated into how educators think about their role as teachers and learners.

5.6 Networked teacher learning

Another theme that became evident was that these teachers wanted to develop ties with other schools, regions or districts around the province to share what they had learned and to learn more from others. There was an intensity to descriptions of their work and how much value they placed on the opportunity to share with and learn from others. For example, references were specifically made to partnerships they had made with two teachers attempting to use culturally responsive practices in their own school but who had little in the way of professional learning support. Sharing was also credited for their renewed focus on their inquiry question; they used AESN case studies completed by other teachers in other schools to consider how they might incorporate more hands-on or experiential learning components to their subsequent inquiry. Again, the theme of scaffolding and laddering learning is evident here; yet the point is not that one group helps another learn, but rather how networked learning can alter trajectories, create alternative pathways for thinking, and accelerate learning in shorter cycles. And as one would expect, as the network grows, new connections and even more collaborative professional learning activities occur, there is a growth in both enthusiasm and interpersonal relationships. Such activity naturally attracts other teachers or participants, as teachers in Prince Rupert identified in the

focus group discussion. This theme of enhanced relationality and building a learning centered culture exemplifies the ways in which networked learning empowers and amplifies the magnitude of change.

5.7 The role of conceptual/big picture thinking

A caution among some who examine inquiry-based learning is that the specificity of the inquiry can focus on the particularity of a case or situation or reinforce folk theories (personal learning theories based in beliefs) about why certain interventions work or fail. In other words, a focus on the singular case may preclude consideration of how larger contexts or ideas might inform teacher and student learning.

Yet an examination of the experiences of the AESN members at Conrad school illustrate they have engaged in a matrix of learning experiences that focus closely on their specific inquiry question supplemented by regional or local discussions with other teachers in the wider district AES Network, but that they also seek out other types of professional learning opportunities related to their inquiry. For example, one teacher described attendance at a provincial conference on literacy development; another described how they were working with professionals in their Aboriginal Education department who supported their learning more about culturally responsive pedagogy; a third member described attending provincial symposiums where big ideas about teaching and learning were discussed. This "to-ing and fro-ing" between the micro context of inquiry and the macro context which informs the inquiry seems an important observation for those organizations who seek to deepen teachers' professional learning.

5.8 Key features of the AESN in Prince Rupert

As reported in the methodology section of this report, three focus groups were conducted in Prince Rupert; one was conducted with a mixed group of Network members. The second focus group was with Network leaders—both those who have formal roles within the AESN and other district staff who support the work of the AESN. The third focus group was among the AESN team at Conrad Elementary school (discussed above). Interviews with key leaders, including the District Principal of Aboriginal Education and the Superintendent of Schools were also conducted. In this next section of the case study, I summarize the key themes emerging from these interviews and discussions.

5.8.1 Nested, interconnected learning systems

In exploring how the AES Network operates in Prince Rupert what becomes clear is how the Network is nested within and amongst pre-existing and parallel systems of support for teachers and district personnel involved in educating Prince Rupert youth. Inquiry is ubiquitous: there is a seamlessness to the ways in which the Network members work within existing district initiatives, and members are able to draw from and among different initiatives and resources to enable a rich and deep engagement in their classroom or school inquiries. This can be described clearly using the metaphor of the Network as "a flexible container, not a constrainer". In other words, the Network serves as an enabling tool that can be drawn upon and used to advantage in all district level planning, resource development and/or program implementation.

Interviews with the District Principal of Aboriginal Education, Debbie Leighton-Stephens and the school Superintendent Lynn Hauptman, made clear that this commitment to nesting the AESN within the district infrastructure is a priority. For example, district funds are provided to AESN members to support their inquiry work both within their school and for travel to regional/provincial Network meetings. District meetings incorporate reporting from AESN leaders and members on a regular and ongoing basis. Discussions in this district among inquiry teams emphasize the interrelated nature of local and provincial programming initiatives (such as the Early Reader project or their POPS and PALS programs), as well as other partner groups (such as the LUCID program partnership with Simon Fraser University). There is also an important emphasis on leadership: Network leaders are publicly recognized as change agents within their district. As a result, one strong impact the Network is having is to create *strong levels of coherence, coordination and purpose.*

As earlier sections of this report documented, inquiry now informs many of the ways in which teachers and district leaders organize their other programs and professional learning initiatives. For example, the District Principal of Aboriginal Education described in some detail the ways in which inquiry is being used with Aboriginal Education support workers she supervises. Modeled after the AES Network, each individual support worker is being encouraged to take on his/her own inquiry as a part of the work they do in the schools in which they work. Each is encouraged to work with other members of their school—including the formal school leader or community members—to design and investigate inquiry questions. In other words, they form learning teams that amplify the effectiveness of the work they have been assigned to do as a part of their work supporting Aboriginal learners.

Inquiry is also a part of the language of the governance structures within the school district. Earlier the work of the Aboriginal Education Council and Committee was highlighted; here references to inquiry is focused at a strategic level, and is used to frame the ways in which this way of thinking should be used to consider how progress towards achieving the goals of their Aboriginal education initiatives can be both measured and reported publically. As the Superintendent stated, "*the inquiry approach is more widely understood [in our district] including by the Board. They are very used to hearing about inquiries and how it raises achievement levels, particularly of our Aboriginal learners*". Inquiry, as stated by Debbie Leighton-Stephens, is simply *"our way of being."*

This way of seeing and describing the work of their school district, as centered in student success, inquiry and learning for all, is clearly evidence of what is meant by a *learning centered culture*. As the literature review produced for this report emphasizes, this is an important enabling feature or characteristic of successful learning organizations. It also speaks to a significant impact of the AESN.

5.8.2 Partnerships with community

Another important observation about how the AESN operates in Prince Rupert is how it encourages collaborative practices with members of its wider community, particularly Aboriginal communities. This work was well underway in Prince Rupert prior to the start of the AES Network, as the description of the Aboriginal Education Partnership Agreement makes clear. Community leaders are regularly and routinely involved with the planning, monitoring and assessment of Aboriginal education activities. The work of inquiry teams however, has helped highlight a shift in how teachers can engage local

community members, Elders and others, in their learning plans in order to highlight how educative partnerships nurture and grow the scope of talents and successes of their Aboriginal student population. This work centers on a strength based approach, while also emphasizing the holistic ways in which Aboriginal ways of learning/knowing can be represented as part of the school experience. In other words, the school classroom and the work of the teacher now share the responsibility for creating success for all learners. The work of the Hartley Bay School inquiry team is an exemplar of this approach. Hartley Bay is a very small school of approximately 25 learners, approximately 90 miles south of Prince Rupert that is only accessible by boat or float plane.

The inquiry question at this school sought to ask *"When using traditional First Nations methods of teaching and learning, will providing opportunities for students to teach their skills to others have a positive academic, social and personal impact upon achievement levels?"* As part of this inquiry, teachers and students alike focused on traditional Ts'msyen teaching methods including observing, imitating, mastering and teaching. As the case study produced by this inquiry team summarized, the students "internalized success criteria and were able to connect their learning to real life situations". Formative assessment strategies, coaching, metacognitive and self-regulated learning strategies, and experiential, place based learning were emphasized throughout.

The Hartley Bay inquiry relied extensively on the engagement and involvement of local Elders and community members. Students were immersed in opportunities to learn traditional practices and then share them with their younger peers. As the result of this work, student engagement among the Elementary/Junior secondary school was enhanced; the Hartley Bay inquiry team traced improvements both in school attendance and late arrivals. Students were reported to express higher degrees of satisfaction and interest in school experiences because of the connections made to their local culture and histories.

During the collection of data for this study, many references were made to how this team of teachers has shared their inquiry and experiences with many other teachers in regional and provincial AESN seminars and showcases. And while the importance of teacher learning and efforts at enhancing student engagement were not underestimated, it was the engagement with First Nations community members, the learning of local protocols, and making a commitment to Aboriginal ways of knowing and being that became of greatest interest to the other teachers who participated in their presentations. The creation of an Aboriginal Role model program was a core component of their approach. And as is evidenced by the number of times this inquiry project has been cited by teachers from around the province (including interviewees from Arrow Lakes, Nanaimo, and Vanderhoof) this inquiry has become a primary means through which non-Aboriginal teachers have learned about how to approach and engage First Nations community members in their own inquiries. These models and exemplars of place based and community engaged learning which are prominent in Prince Rupert are now being used in other school districts around the province. This speaks to another impact of the AES Network: its work amplifies that of exemplary teaching professionals and effectively operates a mechanism which scales up the implementation of culturally responsive teaching practices while simultaneously shifting conversations from deficit to strength based models.

5.8.3 Leadership

There is no doubt that leadership has been a key component of the work done in the Prince Rupert School District. The work of key personnel—including the School Superintendent and District Principal of Aboriginal Education have been key components of how change has been initiated and sustained in Prince Rupert. There is evidence that funding has been targeted to the Network and related inquiry initiatives; yet it is not funding alone that provides the means through which to sustain positive change. It is the persistent voices of these leaders, exemplifying a passion for and shared commitment to the work of enhancing student success that seems to be critical. These voices have created a space in which other teacher leaders can embrace and be supported in their efforts towards change. It is a case of "walking the talk", listening carefully and deeply to the concerns and issues raised by the community and/or its teachers, as well as inclusive practices of building a collaborative culture. As contemporary educational leadership literature has demonstrated, leadership practices that support learning are foundational to effecting local and systemic change. In this district, there is strong evidence that these conditions exist. The sheer number of teachers and leaders involved in the AES Network suggest a tipping point has been reached and that the changes initiated are likely to persist. Therefore another deep impact of the Network has been to create opportunities for purposefully centered educational leadership to emerge.

5.8.4 Aboriginal pedagogies: culturally inclusive practice

Teachers, Network leaders and members all describe the ways that the AESN has enhanced their ability to incorporate and promote culturally inclusive practices among all teachers in the district. It accomplishes this in several ways; first, the Network builds and supports the creation of professionally focused relationships both within the district and outside of it. It also provides a powerful venue through which Aboriginal/Indigenous educators can profile their approaches to working with Aboriginal students, Aboriginal communities, and share Aboriginal ways of knowing/teaching with their non-Aboriginal colleagues interested in incorporating culturally responsive teaching practices into their own work. One good example of how this work has engaged non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal teachers in shared resource development is the "Canoe Journey for Resilience" (Resource Appendix) developed by three AESN team members who are counselors at a Prince Rupert Middle School. This same resource also shows evidence of how "big idea" conceptual understandings offered by Network leaders (through its annual provincial conference) are being integrated into approaches to working with Aboriginal students. In the case of the "Canoe Journey" student planning document, the references to resiliency and self-regulation are most in evidence. This echoes the themes of self-regulation and social-emotional learning that have been a focus of the Network provincial seminar over the last 3-4 years.

As this review has illustrated, one powerful impact of the Network has been to lever, nurture and support deepened teacher learning in culturally responsive teaching practices. By recognizing and documenting the work of its members, it provides exemplars and models that teachers and leaders have used to create new pathways and strategies, suited to their local context, to emerge.

5.8.5 Perseverance and grit

An important context that readers should understand is that this learning centered, inquiry based culture was constructed upon a pre-existing commitment and long history of being concerned with Aboriginal student success. One Network leader, in reflecting back over her career in the district, described what she understood as a 20 plus year history of working on effecting change to benefit Aboriginal learners in the school district. She described the district culture as *"appreciative… This region is our home. We offer hospitality and show genuine interest in one another… We want to take care of each other. We are relationally situated and motivated."*

The work has taken perseverance and time. But it has also taken grit. It hasn't been easy work; the historical racism and framing of Aboriginal peoples as deficit, needing rescue or as dependent peoples relying on government handouts has been a dominant discourse in this region of the province that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leaders in the district have had to address on an ongoing basis. Teachers were not cognizant of settler biases or the marginalizing impact of traditional Western schooling practices and so district leaders have had to struggle with how to make visible the biases that were naturalized in discourses and approaches to education, among them, beliefs about how to deliver Aboriginal education—in discrete, pull out programs rather than systemic approaches that would benefit all learners. The education system remains a colonial artifact that continues to shape its operation and discourses. Throughout the interviews and focus groups, there was an implicit recognition among the AESN members in Prince Rupert that this must change if success for Aboriginal students is to be achieved. There is also a well-articulated acknowledgement that culturally responsive teaching practice is the means through which all student learning can be enhanced.

One should not conclude that it is solely the AES Network that has achieved this goal; there are a series of interrelated factors that have accelerated an interest in the Network in this school district that have been nurtured and supported through the work of district and community leaders. The Network's priority and focus on Aboriginal ways of knowing has built upon the emerging local and political contexts in which changes to public discourse are occurring. Events such as the Federal government's public apology for residential schooling and increased funding for Aboriginal education are also critical events that have added momentum to support this culture of change. Yet it is the voices of lead teachers, Aboriginal community members and district personnel in Prince Rupert who have created the conditions necessary to support and nurture this shift within the public schooling system in this region of the province. Together they have built powerful connections between local Aboriginal education programming and enriched the services they offer to all students, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal.

The AES Network has, however, also created a persistent culture in which change to teacher practice—with a shift to learning centered thinking—can effect change in particular local contexts. Building from these micro investigations, the Network has created new ways of thinking about and conceptualizing the ways in which deeper teacher learning is supported. Changing the everyday practices of teachers is a critical component of systemic change. A review of the Prince Rupert school district illustrates how ongoing, coordinated, and nested forms of inquiry can alter practices in both micro (classroom and school) and macro (district) settings. Such work has led to enhanced learning and success for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in this district.

5.9 Summary of AESN impacts

We have attempted to provide rich detail about how the Network operates in the Prince Rupert school district. When considering overall impact, we thought it could be useful to try and represent impact using a basic scale. For the purposes of our summary then, we consider impact in three categories: as **sustained**, **initiated**, and as **potential**.

Figure 5: Summary of Impacts, Prince Rupert School District

Impact Category	Potential: the AESN has provided an inviting pathway through which to consider change	Initiated: the frequency of engagement is shifting context, process or practice	Sustained: the AESN has transformed the context, process or practice.
Leadership			✔
Culturally inclusive education		✔	
Nested, inter connecting learning systems			✔
Partnerships with community			✔
Perseverance & Grit			✔

§ 6: Case 3: The AESN Case Study Assessment

We have strived to make our students visible by developing their voice. Success depends so much on language skills - vocabulary, cadence, tone – when speaking – vocabulary and ability to make sense when writing. Ability to manipulate language often defines how our students succeed at school. In all of the AESN inquiries I have been involved in we have sought to make our students visible by developing their voices in the learning community. We have worked to build language skills, social emotional learning (sense of self) and a connection to the "big ideas" in traditional Aboriginal knowledge. We have seen measurable improvements in reading and writing skills, and we have observed the building of self confidence when we have participated in an inquiry that focuses all members of the learning community, students and adults. We wanted our students to be heard, and listened to with respect.

In this third case study Debbie Koehn, one of the research assistants for this study, completed a detailed analysis of AESN cases from across British Columbia. The purpose of this third case is to more specifically identity how *student learning* has been impacted by the AESN. Given that the primary goal of the Network is to enhance student learning, this is an important foundation of our analysis of impact.

 The cases that were reviewed were provided by the AESN principals, Drs. Kaser and Halbert. They were grouped into three data sets: AESN inquiries completed in 2009/10, AESN inquiries completed in 2010-11 and AESN inquiries completed 2011-12. A total of 56 AESN case studies were reviewed and are summarized below into categories on the basis of the content of their inquiry, as well as the degree to which the inquiries resulted in impacts both within or beyond the boundaries of the school site itself. In each case the name of the school and school district is provided, and as often as possible, the measured outcomes or impact of their inquiry on student achievement are provided. Within these categories the inquiries are sorted by the year of completion. Other specific categories on the basis of

their unique approaches were also identified; these include the use of technology, the creation of new rubrics to measure outcomes/achievements, or the use of local Aboriginal languages. At the end of the AESN content assessment, Koehn summarizes the thematic patterns she believes are most evident from her analysis.

6.1 Successful impacts and outcomes of AESN focused on academic performance standards

A number of schools, from K to 12, demonstrated significant improvement in academic achievement in **literacy, social studies, and mathematics.** For ease of reference, the inquiries reviewed are categorized by year they were completed.

2009-2010

Brechin Elementary, Nanaimo. *Will the use of Aboriginal content improve reading for primary Aboriginal students as measured by the PM Benchmarks?* AFL strategy implementation-84% of the grade 2's were approaching, meeting or exceeding expectations – an increase of 31%

Conrad Elementary, Prince Rupert. *Will using Aboriginal content literature improve reading comprehension for Aboriginal students?* Differentiated instruction, Self assessment and setting goals, peer assessment – improvement in reading comprehension from not yet meeting at 43% Fall to Not Yet meeting in Spring 16%, Meeting rose from 59% to 84% over the same period.

Eighth Avenue Elementary, Alberni. *Will working in small group, focusing on a specific writing program, benefit primary Aboriginal students* –focus on grade three personal writing standards – AFL strategies – in the Fall 100% not meeting, in the Spring 12% not meeting

George M Dawson secondary, Haida Gwaii. *Will a focus or oral storytelling positively impact student performance in reading, writing and understanding?* Use BC Performance Standards, SMART Reading, First Nations BCFNS 12 curriculum – students demonstrated increased capacity for discussion and collaboration in classes

Ladysmith Primary School, Nanaimo, Ladysmith. – *Will the participation of Aboriginal students in a formal guided reading program led to improved levels according to BC Performance Standards?* AFL strategies, criteria, self, peer assessment – results moved from Fall not yet meeting 42% to Spring NYN 21%

Mouse Mountain Elementary, Nechako Lakes. *Will reading comprehension improve for our grade three Aboriginal students with the explicit use of AFL strategies ?* Use of AFL strategies, exemplars, use of nonfiction text features- improved levels of performance

North Oyster Elementary, Nanaimo Ladysmith. *Will small group mathematics instruction with an emphasis on scaffolding skills help build intermediate students; confidence in themselves as mathematicians and improve their numeracy scores?* AFL strategies and real word practice, metacognitive learning, - results – moved from 11 students not meeting in the Fall to 4 not meeting in the Spring – plans to meet with the Aboriginal community

Princess Margaret Secondary, Okanagan Skaha. *How does the use of culturally relevant reading materials at the secondary level (English 9 & 10) effect Aboriginal students sense of belonging, visibility and engagement in schools?* Use of AFL strategies and novels to improve sense of Aboriginal identity – results – six student – at beginning 3 not meeting, at end all 6 were meeting according to English performance standards

Ripple Rock Elementary, Campbell River. *Will the development of English oral language skills through legends stories of the local Aboriginal people make a significant difference in the learning and pride of our Aboriginal students?* AFL strategies and embedded learning about Aboriginal knowledge. Use of AFL strategies and participation from the Aboriginal communities – results Fall Not yet meeting 56%, O% Not Yet Meeting, approaching 44% in Spring

South Nelson Elementary, Nelson. *Will providing a one-to-one literacy program with a focus on adding detail and sequencing ideas improve the students' ability to express himself more clearly and fully, both orally and in writing, as measured by the BC performance standards in writing and oral language?* One student working with support of Aboriginal worker – student increased his performance in each of the targeted areas, developed self confidence

West Bench Elementary, Okanagan. *How does using the SMART Learning Process within Native content impact the written output of Frist Nations learners, especially in regards to the visualization strategies and tools?* focus on metacognitive skill development, in Fall 2009 69% not meeting, in Spring 7% not meeting

BX Elementary, Vernon. *Will the use of technology based learning with Aboriginal content enhance the grade 3/4/5 students' reading and writing knowledge of Aboriginal culture?* Students use a variety of multi-media technology, in Fall 60% were not meeting and 40% approaching whereas in 0% were not meeting, 17% approaching and 33% were exceeding using Social Studies Performance Standards

2010-2011

Lakes District Secondary, Nechako Lakes. *Will the introduction of daily student support, a pyramid of interventions, SMART goals and weekly teacher collaboration time improve the academic success of Aboriginal students in grades 8 – 10?* focus on weekly collaboration, relationship building by staff to ensure students are reaching learning targets – result - percentage of students not successful in at least one course fell by 20% from 2008/2009

Springvalley Middle School, Okanagan. *Will our Aboriginal students become more successful in their reading and writing when they experience an increased sense of connection to their heritage through literature circles?* Aboriginal students performance and engagement around use of AFL strategies – results – more teachers became involved with acquiring more Aboriginal resources and student talked more openly about heritages

Sunset Elementary, Vancouver Island North. *In what ways will student impromptu when using performance standards written by students into a checklist used for self and peer assessing?* AFL strategies – peer coaching and assessing – results – Fall not yet meeting 21%, Spring 0% for grade 3,

Grade 5/6 not yet meeting 0% Spring 5% but significantly more in meeting 57% compared to 4% in the Fall

2011 – 2012

Aspen Elementary and Arden Elementary, Comox Valley. *How will the use of student-friendly oral language lessons, inquiry, and formative assessment strategies increase the oral language skills of our students?* literacy skills, AFL strategies, results 30 not meeting in Fall, 10 not meeting in the Spring

Bayview Elementary, Nanaimo. *Will Using Talking Tables Kindergarten oral language program increase kindergarten and at risk grade one students' phonological awareness in segmenting sounds, rhyme, blending of sounds and auditory perception?* intensive intervention around oral language development – results – noticeable increase in oral language fluency

Cedar Community Secondary, Nanaimo Ladysmith. *Do the school-wide Northern Games at Cedar develop and support a sense of belonging to the school community for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and for our school staff? Do the games enhance student and staff understanding of Aboriginal history and culture, especially when situated in a contemporary context* –participation in games may enough of an impact that students felt a stronger connection to the Cedar community – results – a high percentage of students valued participating in the games

Dr. D.A. Perley Elementary, Boundary. *Will the active participation of parents engaged in reading with their children during the after school tutoring program improve Aboriginal student performance as determine by the fall/spring SMART reading assessment?* Parents were coached to participate in students' literacy learning – results – more students were approaching and meeting in Spring 2011 than in Fall 2010

John A Hutton, Boundary. *Will the active participation of parents engaged in reading with their children during the after school tutoring program improve Aboriginal student performance as determine by the fall/spring SMART reading assessment?* Parents were coached to participate in students' literacy learning – results – more students were approaching and meeting in Spring 2011 than in Fall 2010

Kildala Elementary, Coast Mountains School District. *By using culturally relevant stories, and by delivering the stories in ways that mirror cultural presentation practices, will First Nations students demonstrate higher levels of comprehension as indicated by the performance standards?* Use of metacognitive strategies

Lillooet Secondary, Gold Trail. *Will using daily math problem solving questions with a local Aboriginal flavor, help Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students gain a better understanding of local First Nations culture* – connection established between local culture and problem solving – results a slight shift from approaching to meeting 2% to 12%

Parkway Elementary Okanagan. *Will using the social responsibility performance standards (contributing to others and solving problems in peaceful ways) and student friendly self assessment*

improve student behavior in the classroom and on the playground? focus on self assessment and regulation – results – steady improvement form 11% not yet meeting in 2008 to 3% not yet meeting in Spring 2012

Skeena Junior Secondary, Coast Mountains School District. *To what extent will the direct teaching of literacy skills help First Nations' students improve information retention as measured with the Reading for Information performance standards?* AFL and reading performance standards – Fall read 485 not meeting Jan read 5% not meeting

WL McLeod Elementary, Nechako Lakes. *How will a volunteer reading program that engages Aboriginal parents in reading with students (coaching) once a week for 9 weeks improve relationships between Aboriginal communities and WL McLeod Elementary?* Relationship building as parents are taught AFL strategies-results-5 adult learners in the beginning, 3 at the end, 2 participants went on to enroll in an Aboriginal Early childhood program

6.2 Other inquiry categories

There were a number of other types of inquiries completed by AESN participants. In this next section inquiries are grouped thematically by the nature of the inquiry.

6.2.01 Inquiries involving Social Responsibility Performance Standards, social emotional learning, building relationships and purposeful connections to the Aboriginal community

2009-2010

Canyon Lister Elementary, Kootenay Lake. *Will the inclusion of local/national Aboriginal Role Models enhance students pride in their own heritage?* Importance of increasing awareness of Aboriginal culture within the school – results – a growth from 40 to 60% in students identifying positive feelings about their Aboriginal ancestry

Glenview Elementary School, Prince George. *Will researching our Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student heritage without grade one and two students create an awareness, pride and strong identity for students?* Improve the sense of connectedness to place, self and Aboriginal community – According to Social Responsibility scale findings self respect was increased

Hartley Bay School, Prince Rupert. *Will utilizing traditional Tsimshian methods of teaching, within the school setting, result in greater student engagement and subsequent academic and personal growth?* Using AFL strategies students became learning/teaching resources for each other, based on traditional Tsimshian teaching/learning methods – results – involvement and engagement of students was higher during lessons using traditional teaching methods – in Fall participation in DPA was 38%, Spring 100%

Heritage Park Secondary, Mission. *Will using fiction, non-fiction, media and guest speakers in socials studies classrooms enhance students' understanding of Aboriginal culture and issues facing*

Aboriginal people today? Introduction of an Aboriginal alder to explain traditional Native Life Cycle and discuss current issues – results- significant improvement in knowledge and awareness of Aboriginal culture by grade 10

Kinnard Elementary, Kootenay. *During the grade 3 Science Unit on plants, will featuring the contributions made by the First Nations People in the use of Indigenous flora and fauna improve the appreciation of Aboriginal culture in our community?* Members of the Aboriginal community shared knowledge of traditional uses- results – school made an increased effort to integrate Aboriginal knowledge and history into curriculum

Lillooet Secondary School, Gold Trail. *Will visiting local bands for a graduation information session and meal encourage parents to feel more comfortable in visiting the secondary school during parent/teacher conferences?* Use of criteria for success, students and parents understood how to plan for graduation – results 97% of parents and community members indicated visits were of value

Nala'atsi School, Comox Valley. *What will be the effect on the Nala'atsi students' attendance if they plan an active role in the creation of the Indigenous Food and Plant project with 20 members from the Comox Valley Aboriginal Community?* use of AFL – results – students attendance increased from 40% to 76% - positive comments from students and guests

Randerson Ridge Elementary School, Nanaimo Ladysmith. *Will the development and implementation of Aboriginal picture book lesson sequences, support students connecting classroom and family values to Aboriginal values, with the intent to strengthen a foundation of a community of learners within our classrooms and community?* Use of literature students focused on how to apply the West coast Aboriginal values to their classroom vision of a community of learners and improved their levels of social responsibility – results common language and explicit teaching of values and code

Skaha Lake Middle School, Okanagan. *As Aboriginal students experience an increased sense of belonging and cultural identity at our school, will we see improved academic achievement and student attendance?* A Penticton Aboriginal Elder comes to Skaha Lake four times a week for four hours each day to work with Aboriginal youth in classrooms – results – Indigenous understandings embedded in daily routines

WL Seaton Secondary, Vernon. *Will a focus question centering on the successful strategies of Aboriginal students completing their grade twelve year help gather data to direct a systems change that will have a positive impact on the academic success rate of Aboriginal students in grade 8 – 12?* Adults in school worked to improve school and learning experiences for Aboriginal students – staff moved forward by learning the importance of communication and contact with the Aboriginal community, inviting them into classrooms to participate and contribute whenever possible

Dr. D.A. Perley, Boundary. *Will the inclusion of daily physical activity and a healthy snack offered to Aboriginal students being tutored in an after school program improve their reading and writing performance scores as determined by The SMART reads and writes in the Fall and Spring?* Tutors work with students on a daily basis for 40 minutes after the regular school day – results – Aboriginal elders will be invited in to support the students during tutoring sessions

2010-2011

Fairview Community, Nanaimo-Ladysmith. *How does learning about Aboriginal perspectives in a collaborative inquiry based environment affect our Fairview Community attitudes towards Aboriginal peoples?* AFL strategies focus on technology, environment, culture and governance, cross grade learning – results – in winter knowledge of Aboriginal Peoples History was 25% not meeting – in spring 3% was not meeting, no interest in learning was 24% had no interest in learning 3% no interest in spring

Glenview Elementary, Prince George. *How can we create a sense of connectedness in learning, belonging and social emotional health for our Aboriginal students?* Oral stories told by Elders, shard Aboriginal craft stories and drumming and dancing, students used Skype to communicate learning with other students. Elders led daily classroom learning – results – students showed significant improvement on the Social Responsibility performance standards around valuing diversity and defending human rights

Hartley Bay School, Prince Rupert. *When using traditional First Nations methods of teaching and learning, will providing opportunities for students to teach their skills to others have a positive academic, social and personal impact upon achievement levels?* This focused on using students as peer coaches, practicing learning in traditional ways in order raise self efficacy – results – change from 11.1% absences in to10 to 7.85% absences in 2011

Hatzic Elementary, Mission. *Will researching the 100 year old history of Aboriginal peoples and/ or Aboriginal education in Hatzic help to increase students' sense of belonging and pride in their Aboriginal culture when they showcase these findings at the centennial celebration?* Elders were an important part of the inquiry as staff wanted celebration to be respectful, informed and guided by the wishes of the elders and current Aboriginal families – increased learning about Aboriginal traditional ways – results – students showed a definite improvement in their attitudes towards traditional ways and showed they wanted to learn more about their culture

Kitwanga Elementary Coast Mountain. *Will the integration of traditional Gitksan and First Nationas resources and activities across curriculum areas result in an improvement in the social responsibility and self-regulation of students?* Students were learning/teaching resources alongside of Elders and members of the Aboriginal community – the Gitksan way is learning by being watchful – students demonstrated an improvement in Social Responsibility scales in K,2,4,5, and 7.

Nala'atsi, Comox Valley. *Will combining a mask making project with Who A I storytelling deepen the involvement of the Aboriginal participants and improve the Nala'atsi students' attendance?* Members from the Aboriginal community met with students once or twice a week and worked on projects that promoted cultural awareness- result – students attendance increased, interest in educators sharing project in district

WL McLeod Elementary, Nechako Lakes. *Will learning about Aboriginal culture help students to gain a better understanding of social and political injustices in relation to First Nations people in Canada?* focus on social justice issues as they relate to First Nations – letter writing campaign to

Chief Jackie Thomas – results – staff became more aware of underlying racial prejudices that exist in the outlying community of Vanderhoof

2011-2012

George M. Dawson, Haida Gwaii. *How do informal learning activities containing multidisciplinary content and taking advantage of local places impact relationships and learning?* Connecting learning to a variety of local events – students defending a way of life that is threatened by government and oil money – results – students added their voices to the Joint Review panel on the proposed Enbridge pipeline

Glenview Elementary, Prince George. *How will deepening student understanding of local Indigenous knowledge, people and history increase student awareness and improve academic achievement of our Aboriginal students?* Nurturing relationships with Aboriginal students, families and Elders through the sharing of Indigenous knowledge and teaching by the elders – results – student responses were sincere, honest and evident of growth in terms of their understandings and Elders expressed that they fell respected and valued

Grand Forks, Boundary. *Will the development of an activity based lunch time program led by elders within our community improve the Aboriginal graduation rate for 2012?* Elders and artists from the Aboriginal community visited the school and interacted regularly with students to create artifacts – results – graduation rate improved from 85 to 93%

Kitwanga, Coast Mountains. *Will 90% of our student be meeting or exceeding expectations in Social Responsibility by the final term when traditional season Gitksan practices are taught to help all students understand the cultural rhythm of the year in a meaningful way?* Elders were invited into the school and worked side-by-side with the language and culture teacher to plan circle story telling, learning, and integrating traditional activities – results – there was a decreased performance in social responsibility – it went from 24% not meeting to 34% not meeting

Nala'ats Comox. *Same question as previous year*

Pleasant Valley Elementary, Nanaimo Ladysmith. *Will the inclusion of Aboriginal content, culture, and perspective in school-based activities increase a sense of belonging for Aboriginal students and their families at Pleasant Valley School? Will the presence of Aboriginal culture, language, and perspective in the whole school setting increase Aboriginal awareness amongst all students?* led by Elder Jerry Brown – students participated in four clan groups – worked with VIU students and local author – results moved from DART not yet meeting 69% in the Fall to 35% not yet meeting in the spring. School Wide Write 41% not yet meeting to 11% not yet meeting

Spencer Middle, Sooke. *What will increase awareness and understanding of Aboriginal ways of knowing throughout the school?* Students participated in an exploratory block of Aboriginal Studies that all students in grade 7 attended. Students participated in learning traditional ways, historical perspectives and understandings – results- before participating in the exploratory course 47/114 students rated themselves as emerging and afterward 2 were rated as emerging. Staff view this class as an invaluable tool to move learning deeper

Thornhill Elementary, Coast Mountains School. *To what extent can classroom teachers embed Aboriginal learning into day-to-day curricular, rather than having learning about Aboriginal World Views as an event?* Strong first Nations involvement with Elders and community members providing support for classroom teachers – results – students moved from 45% approaching exercising democratic rights and responsibilities in the Fall to 5% approaching in the Spring

6.2.02 Social Responsibility outcomes without connecting to Aboriginal community (not necessarily involving members of the Aboriginal community)

2011-2012

Prince George Secondary, Prince George. *Will weekly Aboriginal culture classes, post-secondary tours, cultural tours, dialogue, mentorship through Elders, guest speakers, peer-tutors, leadership opportunities and school wide participation in Aboriginal awareness activities increase instructional effectiveness and help students to appreciate and celebrate diversity as measured by achievement, attendance and survey questions?* results – many attended the Second Annual feast of the Forest, traditional drum blessing ceremony and Smudge Ceremony

Ecole Puntledge Park Elementary, Comox Valley. *How does the use of talking circle rooted in the traditional values of listening, mutual respect, speaking from the heart and kindness and cooperation effect students' learning relationships and academic achievement in my classroom?* Use of talking circles in developing a respectful learning community for Aboriginal students – results – students are feeling safer and more comfortable according to parent and student narratives – establishing a community of learners build on relational trust

Randerson Fidge Elementary, Nanaimo Ladysmith. *How will enhancing our community of learners' understanding from an Aboriginal perspective, both in historical and contemporary context, work toward building success for all students?* Further develop the community of learners – result – sharing circle at the opening and closing was a way to integrate AFL throughout the school year. Emphasizing the Salish traditional value of knowing yourself

Sinkut View Elementary, Nechako Lakes. *Will journaling help students improve their communication skills? Will journaling improve literacy for Aboriginal students and subsequent dogwood completion?* Working with animal parts (hide, etc) and developing Aboriginal protocols – if we work with a hide, we need to be respectful to the animal that offered the hide to us-results-Learning took its own direction, and students moving towards areas of social responsibility criteria, with journaling being strong evidence of social responsibility learning

Stanley Humphries Secondary, Kootenay. *How do relationships with Aboriginal students effect their engagement in the school setting and translate into success?* Aboriginal learning must be social and the learning environment must encourage well-organized, cooperative learning. Invited members of the Aboriginal community into the process – results – adults focused effort in class and outside to

build positive relationships, focused on the whole child and understood the importance of Aboriginal community members involvement in the school

West Heights Community, Mission. *Will the co-creation of an Aboriginal yoga unit, involving all primary classes K-3, allow for students to have a richer understanding of the Aboriginal culture and foster positive attitudes towards a healthy lifestyle?* Integrate Aboriginal culture by appealing to student multiple intelligences, within physical fitness classes – results- students were owners of own learning – students went from 60% not meeting to 0% not meeting

6.2.03 Schools that have used Aboriginal community members to develop inquiry

2009-2010

Canyon Lister Elementary, Thornhill Elementary School, Heritage Park Secondary, Kinnaird Elementary, Nala'atsi School, Randerson Ridge Elementary, Ripple Rock Elementary, South Nelson Elementary, WL Seaton Secondary School.

2010-2011

Dr. D.A. Perley Elementary, Glenview Elementary, Fairview Community School, Hatzic Elementary, Kitwanga Elementary, Nala'atsi, WL McLeod Elementary,

2011-2012

Bayview Elementary, Cedar Community Secondary, George M Dawson Secondary, Glenview Elementary, Grand Forks Elementary, John A. Hutton, Kitwanga Elementary, Nala'atsi, Prince George Secondary, Randerson Ridge, Sinkut View Elementary, Spencer Middle School, Thornhill Elementary.

6.2.04 Inquiries that have included self-developed rubrics/ assessment tools

2009-2010

Princess Margaret Secondary

2011-2012

Spencer Middle School

2011-2012

Stanley Humphries Secondary School

6.2.05 Inquiries that have included strong authentic Aboriginal culture/language

2009-2010

Brechin Elementary, George M Dawson, Hartley Bay, Kinnaird Elementary, Nala'atsi, Randerson Ridge, Ripple Rock Elementary, Skaha Lake Middle.

2010-2011

Fairview Community School, Hartley Bay, Hatzic Elementary, Kitwanga Elementary, Nala'atsi.

2011-2012

Aspen Elementary and Arden Elementary, Cedar Community School, Grand Forks Secondary, Kitwanga Elementary, Nala'atsi, Pleasant Valley Elementary, Randerson Ridge, Stanley Humphries.

6.2.06 Inquiries that have included digital technology

2010-2011 BX Elementary

2010-2011 Glenview

6.2.07 Inquiries that have included Aboriginal role models

2009-2010

Canyon Lister Elementary, George M, Dawson, Heritage Park Secondary, Glenview Elementary, Heritage Park, Lillooet Secondary School, Mouse Mountain, Nala'asti , Ripple Rock, Hatzic Elementary School

2010-2011

Kitwanga Elementary, Nala'atsi, WL McLeod

2011-2012

Thornhill Elementary, Fairview Community School, Glenview Elementary

6.2.08 Inquiries that have led to off-site educational opportunities

2009-2010

Lillooet Secondary, Nala'atsi,, Glenview Elementary

2011-2012

George M. Dawson, Glenview Elementary, Kitwanga Elementary, Spencer Middle School, Thornhill Elementary School, Prince George Secondary, Sinkut View

6.2.09 Inquiries that allowed for student input

2010-2011

Hatzic Elementary

6.2.10 After school programs /programs involving parents

2010-2011

D.A. Perley, John A. Hutton Elementary, WL McLeod,

2011-2012

Dr. D. A. Perley, Grand Forks Secondary, John A. Hutton, Kitwanga.

6.2.11 Inquiries that include student comments

2009 – 2010

Ripple Rock Elementary, Skaha Lake Middle School,

2011-2012

Nala'atsi, Prince George Secondary, Ecole Puntledge Park, Spencer Middle School, Stanley Humphries

6.2.12 Ways of linking to school district enhancement agreements

Figure 6: Summary of Enhancement Agreement Goals by category

Academic Success	Meeting Social/ Emotional Needs	History, languages and Culture	Life Opportunities/Sense of Belonging	Enhancement of Learning Environment	Self as learner	Parents participation
27	2	24	16	1	1	2

6.3 Summary of the case

Members of the Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network (AESN) have strived to make Aboriginal students visible by helping them develop their voice and by following the precept of the two provincial leaders, Drs. Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser, that "each student will cross the graduation stage with

dignity, purpose and options" (2013). By focusing on that strong moral purpose, members of the Network have developed many unique, contextually based approaches to improve the learning opportunities for Aboriginal students.

By participating in AESN inquiry activities, the educators described here have committed to improving their own learning by focusing on the learning needs of Aboriginal students. In the first years, educators focused inquiries around academic development, inclusion of Aboriginal content in curriculum, and creating culturally relevant learning experiences.

While the focus was on enhancing Aboriginal student performance, the case studies make clear that educators recognized the need to develop their own learning before they would be able to understand their Aboriginal students' learning needs. A common theme was that their own engagement as teachers was necessary if they were to be successful in working with Aboriginal learners. This learning appears to follow a stepped process.

6.3.1 The first step

The first step to improving Aboriginal student success was a move to integrate Aboriginal literature content, legends and stories, fiction and nonfiction text written by Aboriginal authors into a range of curricula, as well as consistent use of the six Assessment for Learning (AFL) strategies and four big ideas identified by Halbert and Kaser, 2009. It is important to discuss AFL because this was the entry point for many of these teacher's explorations of Aboriginal learning initiatives. Schools such as Mouse Mountain in Nechako Lakes, Conrad Elementary in Prince Rupert and Brechin Elementary in Nanaimo-Ladysmith reported their learning centered on the use of the Assessment for Learning strategies that led to educators building knowledge around the importance of addressing individual learners' needs. Addressing individual learner needs is a foundational shift in teacher thinking that acted as a catalyst to their emerging thinking about working in more culturally inclusive ways. As well, educators became aware of the importance of whole staff sharing of students' successes, challenges, and how they were approaching their inquiry questions.

While exploring the Aboriginal literature, adult learners became more aware of local culture, traditional ways and worldviews. For many of the members of the AESN this learning journey enabled them to connect more deeply with the communities in which they lived. There is also evidence to suggest that their students benefitted greatly. Their literacy, numeracy and social responsibility skills improved, and all learners discovered the power of using the BC Performance Standards to gauge achievement and progress. In some cases, educators overcame reluctance to bring new content into the classroom and students become more confident in their academic skill levels. Both students and teachers became increasingly aware of the need to recognize how learning was taking place and why. Engagement increased for both student and adult learners.

6.3.2 The second step

The following year many of the AESN inquiries focused on ways to combine the AFL strategies and the BC Performance Standards, but many included a more sophisticated layer of inquiry that included

members of their Aboriginal communities. Importantly, these inquiries also demonstrated a shift: educators started to address other student learning needs, such as social emotional needs centered on a sense of belonging. Honouring the strengths of the invited members of the Aboriginal community helped students and teachers recognize that learning is life long, authenticity and connectedness to school content are important, and that learning is represented in many different ways in the real world beyond the school.

Comments provided by members of the AESN indicated that they understood that relationships needed to be carefully cultivated and that they needed to be very respectful as they invited First Nations' members of the community into their buildings to help support student learning in a variety of ways. For example, educators from Lillooet Secondary School in the Gold Trail District, visited the local Band, made personal contacts and invited parents into the school. A room in the school was set-aside for Elders to use when visiting the school and an office for the Band Education Coordinator was established. At Caledonia Secondary in Terrace, a team of school staff went to the Reserve to discuss subject choices, the graduation program and ways to ensure that Aboriginal students were on track for graduation. These early efforts of community engagement became models that other school inquiry teams would use in subsequent years.

6.3.3 The third step

In order to build a sense of community and common purpose with their Aboriginal partners, other AESN educators made concerted efforts to include Aboriginal community members as part of their school teams. For example, at Smithers Secondary School, educators sought opportunities to increase their social contact with Aboriginal students, believing that appropriate, respectful personal relationships would facilitate improved student comfort at school and help to build confidence to succeed. At Kitwanga Elementary School in Coast Mountains School District educators focused on using culturally relevant materials that mirrored oral and other traditional ways of learning. This learning was supported by participation by members of the community.

As this brief summary illustrates, AESN educators' efforts towards developing authentic, inclusive and respectful learning environments were rewarded as evidenced by students' deeper engagement with school, improved attendance and greater academic success. It also demonstrates a type of progression of thinking among AESN inquiry teams as they became more immersed in learning about Aboriginal cultures, protocols and knowledges that would inform their continued work with Aboriginal students.

6.4 Emerging thinking about community involvement

For many of the members of the AESN, there was a renewed focus on successful practices, but some educators were aware that although change had been realized both at the classroom and school-wide level, in some cases, their inquiries still lacked elements that represented deep and meaningful learning among their Aboriginal students. The cases reviewed for this report show that in recognizing this gap, some educators understood the need to engage members of their Aboriginal communities in the *planning stages of their inquiries*. For example, at George M. Dawson Secondary in Haida Gwaii staff

welcomed the external expertise of the community and developed new partnerships with local Elders and community members. In this case, the use of traditional story sticks was important to sharing and bonding experiences. At Dr. A. Perley Elementary and John A. Hutton Elementary in Boundary School District, school staff connected with parents and students by meeting in a daily after school program. Parents attended alongside students and this process of inclusion strengthened the commitment by all parties to become involved in creating and celebrating Aboriginal student success. All members of the families involved – grandparents, siblings, and parents – were invited to participate in students' learning. Inquiries were reflecting the need to include First Nations partners in the planning stages. As this summary indicates, AESN members were exploring new ways of thinking about the many "teachers" who could contribute to the learning of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

6.5 Deconstructing colonial mindsets

Simultaneously, AESN inquiries show evidence of how teachers began exploring their own learning around the impact of the residential school system and the trust that has been lost with the public school system. Along with others, AESN members at Skaha Lake Middle School in the Okanagan Skaha District recognized the need to acknowledge the historical impacts of colonialism and First Nations perspectives as they explored changes to their approaches as to what contributes to student success. These members sought to examine their previously held mindsets around the achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and took steps to correct misconceptions by examining Aboriginal perspectives of both BC's and Canada's history. Educators were confronting their own prejudices as they examined historical events with students. While there is not sufficient evidence to suggest that all non-Aboriginal teachers in the AESN are engaged in interrogating their own biases, the above cases represent a burgeoning awareness that will be discussed at greater length in other sections of this report.

6.6 An important catalyst for change: The First Peoples Principles of Learning and culturally responsive pedagogies

Of particular interest in the evolution of AESN members' thinking about Aboriginal learning, was the impact of the publication of the *First Peoples Principles of Learning* (FNESC, 2012). Many AESN members noted how they became increasingly aware that the use of Aboriginal content, topics and literature, and the involvement of community members but also recognized the need to organize their own learning around the "big ideas" included in the *First Peoples Principles of Learning* which significantly reframed learning as a culturally inclusive, holistic phenomena. These principles included:

» Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits and the ancestors.

» Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).

» Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions.

» Learning recognizes the role of Indigenous knowledge.

» Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.

> » Learning involves patience and time.
> » Learning requires exploration of one's identity.
> » Learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/ or in certain situations (FNESC, 2012)

AESN inquiries in the later years began to reflect this understanding of the interconnected, holistic nature of the *First Peoples Principles of Learning.* As a result of their application to practice, students developed a deeper understanding of themselves as learners and a clearer idea of what they were learning and why it was important to their learner identities. Aboriginal students were eagerly engaging with culturally relevant materials while educators indicated they were becoming more aware of some of the processes that were leading to greater success – scaffolding learning to meet student needs, making learning relevant to the learner by connecting to the community, and becoming more engaged themselves as members of the learning community. This provides more evidence of a shifting mind set.

For example, at Glenview Elementary in Prince George students began visiting the Shelley Reserve, to learn about Aboriginal ways of preserving the land. Students learned the traditional names and uses of plants, and ways of thanking Mother Earth for her gifts. On Haida Gwaii, students at George M. Dawson went to the Enbridge hearing and presented arguments against the installation of the pipeline, arguing to support Mother Earth. At Sinkut View Elementary School in Nechako Lakes staff and students participated in authentic learning around Mother Earth by participating in fishing camp experiences. At all three of these schools the learning took place outside the classroom walls, led by Aboriginal community members. At Hazelton Secondary School students participated in traditional practices of food gathering and preparation. These examples show how teachers were becoming more adept at addressing the First Peoples Principles of Learning and integrating them as core practices to enrich the learning of all their students.

6.7 Conclusion

AESN inquiries have served as a powerful tool for both adult and student learning in British Columbia. Developing an inquiry, participating in constant evaluation, questioning, reading relevant research and participating in examining the parallel between adult learning and student learning has enabled educators to own their learning and model what learning looks like for their students. Participating in the AESN allows educators to borrow each other's strategies, but more importantly to more deeply examine their goals and visions for Aboriginal student success. The AESN has created a learning community for both adult and student learners in BC that honours the diversity, uniqueness and complexity of the Aboriginal peoples of our province.

§ 7: Network Impacts

I became involved in the Network of Performance Based Schools about nine years ago. I was inspired by the passion and knowledge of the presenters and by the dedication and curiosity of the others participating in the Network. My level of involvement changed over the years, sometimes increasing and sometimes decreasing depending upon available time and resources, but I continue to be inspired and challenged by the leaders and participants of the Network. I get some really clear messages from the Network; we (teachers) CAN do a better job, we MUST work together and we MUST learn from each other.

It was through my participation with the Network that I became aware of and learned to apply Assessment for Learning (AFL). Although I was a seasoned teacher AFL took my practise to a new refined level. My participation also taught me that I wasn't alone in challenging current believes and attitudes and thus gave me the courage to continue to ask important questions and explore "better" ways of doing things. As I grew in my understanding of inquiry, unknowingly I was bringing some of my colleagues along with me. Through informal conversations they were witnessing my practise and inspired to examine their own. We were no longer evaluating methods or approaches as good or bad but instead were wondering, tweaking, applying, revising, sharing and wondering some more.

In this section of the report, we summarize the evidence presented to us through the multiple focus groups and interviews we completed for this impact study. As was noted in the methodology section of this report, we visited a range of school districts and communities and conducted interviews with a number of individuals and groups asking them to describe their work as members of the AESN, and to consider how they would characterize the features or activities of the Network, with particular attention to tracing the impact the Network has had on their work, their students/learners, their school districts and communities. The AESN advisory group and the researchers conducted an initial thematic analysis

of the data collated from focus groups; additional analysis was conducted by the researcher McGregor and research assistant Fleming in a subsequent phase of the research process. The emergent themes from both processes mirrored closely those themes extracted from the literature review and will be elucidated in detail here.

Each section will be introduced using a story or narrative; the goal is to illustrate how impact is perceived and described through the stories members have told about the AESN. Subsequent data is selectively included as a way of providing detailed evidence of the scope, depth or breadth of impact; where appropriate, promising practice evidence from the literature review is provided to bootstrap or reinforce the claims being made by research participants.

7.1 Network features

"It's a place of gathering, the personal and emotional connection. It's unconditional support. There is no competition; no question is better than another, no hierarchy. It feels so powerful, trusting and not judgmental at all—it's about improving student learning, that's the key… What other body or entity is allowing and supporting people to talk about our work? It's respectful of our vulnerability, and allowing teachers to wrestle with these questions safely. I don't know where Aboriginal education has a spot for this… it has brought us together. There was no venue before this structure to bring us together, to push our thinking forwards. We are moving away from silos and isolation and instead of [the work] falling to only those who are funded through Aboriginal funding tools, it is allowing us to take up this work among the broader community. It gives us the ability to ask our colleagues the question, "What are you doing to make a difference for our kids?" And it is really growing."

This introductory quote captures the passion and commitment many AESN members expressed about the value, importance and opportunities the Network provides for many of its members. It encapsulates what will be discussed in greater detail later in this section, including the issues of purposeful inquiry, the value of collaborating and shared learning, and how this effects change in professional practice. Perhaps most notable however, are the ways in which the Network creates a *safe and accepting* environment for members to do their work. How is this accomplished?

This is not a simple matter to trace, however we believe one component that assists in this is the *structure of the Network itself*. By structures, we are making reference to the basic protocols that members are required to comply with if they wish to participate in an AESN inquiry. As outlined earlier in this report, this includes: creating a team of inquirers, including a formal school leader; requiring conscious links to the AEA in their district; a willingness to hold and participate in multiple school team and scheduled district meetings; to ask questions that get behind the 'why' and 'how' of the inquiry; to collect data to show how change in student learning has been effected; and to write a summary report that can be shared. The structure has been described by some participants as "a 'flexible container'", implying that its structure gives a framework that keeps people on track and focused, but doesn't restrict what may be accomplished because it is open enough to permit wide ranging, teacher directed and initiated inquiry. As another participant said, *"I value the meeting structure, its flexible. It keeps us on*

task, so we don't forget to focus on what we are doing." A third described it in this way: *"The strength of the Network is being flexible and structured all at the same time."*

One of the most important impacts of my participation in the Network has been the many opportunities to collaborate and network with colleagues from various areas of BC. I feel our rich conversations, their skillful insight and perceptions are a fantastic support system and provide me with the confidence to continue creating my own learnings as I engage in my teacher inquiries. My Network colleagues are my anchor throughout my teacher research. Listening to colleagues' suggestions authentically empowered me to determine what I was relating to and perhaps what I was not. I find the colleagues at the Network continually challenge my thinking, fill me with knowledge and provide the necessary guidance as I continue on my roller coaster learning journey. The new ideas I gain from our meetings help sustain me on a daily basis in my teaching and give me the courage to continue learning about myself both personally and professionally.

7.1.1 Telling a story with data

Yet it is more than creating a structure for meeting and reporting, the Network has credibility because it integrates into the structured meeting schedule tools that have value for helping teachers to 'see' progress. We liked how one participant reported on this phenomena: *"I might really connect to the story personally and emotionally but if I add in the quantitative data, I can draw in others to this story… A habit of formally reporting will get us into the habit of thinking and reflecting and following up on the cycle of inquiry."* Her description of reporting data inquiry as a 'story' struck us as an important way of illustrating how teachers in the Network have learned to construct and share 'learning stories' as ways of verifying their claims of success. This could also be described as "showing your work"—a form of accountability that is structured into the Network—and a primary means through which impact on student learning can be demonstrated and measured.

Data collection is important and is built into the Network inquiry process described earlier in this report; but it is the case study summaries teams are required to complete that provide written documented evidence of change. In another section of this study we summarize selected cases of AESN inquiries completed, and showed extensive examples of how learning was measured and reported. However, it is not simply the data from each inquiry completed that can be used to 'show impact' of an individual inquiry. Case studies were also being used to amplify their effect. How is this accomplished?

We heard throughout the study that Network members disseminate and share information all the time. They do this at the structured events of the Network (such as the regional showcases) but they also use each other's completed work as ladders or levers through which to advance thinking in related ways. So

what goes on in one district or school is often drawn upon and read by other members of the Network, and this sparks new conversations driven by the questions "Could that work here?" or "Could we apply parts of that approach to our inquiry?" As one AESN leader suggested in her discussion of how cases are used as catalysts for deepening their own inquiries, *"Our focus might be on reading performance of Aboriginal students; in other districts, their focus might be completely different, and it is a way of drawing in those ideas that could inform what we are doing. What better way to pull in exemplars that work with different groups?"* In this way the effect of one inquiry amplifies, builds on, or creates a new space through which to innovate and apply new ideas to existing practices. In the literature review, this type of network connectivity was described as having weak ties; by drawing across diverse approaches teacher learning is enriched and extended. This builds on the already strong ties that exist locally as information is shared among inquiry teams and between linked schools. Mitchell and Sackney (2009) argue that successful networked organizations need to have elements of each if effects are to be amplified or extended. The network structure, and the sharing of cases in particular, provides a means of supporting both types of knowledge sharing so that the activities of members in the Network can effect greater change.

The world has narrowed due to technology, but I believe that the face-to-face meetings allow us to examine our thinking thoughtfully, slowly, and create connections both in learning and community. I think that we need to create more opportunities for people to meet, talk, share – and grow as learners. There is abiding and deep respect for Judy and Linda. They create a sense of accountability in each of the members of the Network. It is hard to explain – it is not a personal sense of accountability to them, it is a sense of accountability to the Network and the learning that takes place in the Network. It is a sense of urgency, of importance, that this is work that needs to happen. They make you feel the need to create change for the students. When I walk away from a Network meeting my mind is churning – what can I take from this and implement? what do I need to think further about? what is going to create the best opportunities for my students to learn? Being with like minded people is a gift. I talk about giving voice to our students, I believe that the Network is giving voice to the members. I have been in the Network for 10 years. It was the first time that I thought I was hearing an authentic message about learning. Not what someone wanted me to hear, but a real assessment by members immersed in this learning community.

7.1.2 The Network supports and enables

We heard many different individuals talk about the opportunities the Network provided to help them extend their thinking and take risks they would not have otherwise taken. This was true of districts

where there were large numbers of Network members as well as in districts where there were smaller numbers. For example, we heard from one participant from Vancouver island who talked about how she didn't have much support in the beginning of her involvement in the AESN, but described how *"the Network became my support. It gave me contact with other like-minded people; it helped me work through professional issues… I have a lot of support here [in the Network]; I am not just sticking myself on a limb."* The literature reviewed for this study highlighted how professionally focused learning is enhanced through collective, rather than only individual effort. The Network, in this example, adds additional voices that enhances or deepens individual teacher inquiry and concomitantly, their learning through the process of inquiry.

Risk taking isn't only about finding others who can help you work your way through an inquiry and serve as a critical friend or as a supporter to someone working in isolation, it's also about giving teachers a space to explore their desires to effect changes in educational settings so their Aboriginal students can succeed. As one teacher said *"The AESN gave me the vehicle and a place to do the work that was near and dear to my heart, it kept me going. You need a place to be validated where you work… I am motivated because the AESN validates me in a way that I haven't been validated in my own district."* A similar comment was made by a teacher in a more northern school district who said *"The Network has given people permission to learn about Aboriginal education; it wasn't in our sight lines prior to this."* And a third participant who said that through the Network *"I found an extended family… It doesn't matter that we are in different sites, we can support each other. I've got my team, my sisters… It's really grounded me."* We found it particularly striking that the issue of validation was raised most consistently by Aboriginal educators in the AESN. We surmised, based on the data we collected for this study, that many Aboriginal educators have felt marginalized in the work they have been doing to support Aboriginal learners, and have found both voice and strength of purpose through their work with the AESN. We also saw how these educators used the Network as a lever for taking leadership in Aboriginal education. We will return to this topic later in this discussion.

Throughout all the inquiries we have used performance standards and AFL [assessment for learning] strategies. Inquiry based learning has allowed us to remove the boundaries from our learning. Participating in the AESN has allowed us to think not only about what we are teaching, but why, how, where, when and most importantly WHO we are teaching. The importance of knowing our students, and helping them find their voice has increased each year.

The Network has helped me see and hear my students.

My own learning has been:

-the importance of using AFL strategies

-importance of social-emotional learning and students feeling safe and secure in their learning environment

-research and theory – having new ideas available that I can adapt

-relying on the work of others to influence what I am doing – I often read or hear about the work of co-members that I immediately adapt and adopt and use

-being able to share with others the borrowings I do

-the importance of community. I have strong connections with other members of the Network. I communicate at least monthly with a number of Network members. We share ideas, problems, solutions, laughter – we have built a community of learners.

-that there must be change in Education. What is happening in most classrooms around the province is not meeting the needs of the learners. We must examine, on a daily basis, how our learners are doing – do they know where they are going with their learning – how are they going to get there – how will they know that they have learned what they needed?

-innovative and creative initiatives need to be examined by all – not necessarily adopted, but we need to know what is being thought of

7.1.3 Permission to be a learner

> "Looking at what the student needs, how are we going to meet their needs? The Network made me ask for each child, "Who are you as a learner?" It made me understand who I am as a learner. It was an 'aha' moment. "Wow, I don't even know how I learn". That emphasis on the learner and learning is critical. That changed me, I was always a good teacher, but we moved from being good to excellent. That's because we focused on who that learner is in each child… [so it's a shift] from knowledge holder to learner."

We learned a great deal from our participants about how the Network enables a shift to thinking about themselves as learners. In another Network interview a participant said *"The inquiry process lends itself to learning…* [it focuses on] *the evidence base for learning: how do I know what they know?"* Following threads of evidence leads teachers into knowing more deeply what will make a difference for learners. Another teacher said:

> "If we are going to be professional, and thoughtful teachers, then we have to ask, challenge, and question: How do we do this better, make it better for kids? In our discussions, we've also come to understand that what is good for aboriginal students is good for everyone… but it took all of us challenging the status quo to finally figure it out."

In these comments we can hear reflected how teachers themselves learned throughout the inquiry, but had to struggle with unpacking their own beliefs, approaches or ways of teaching that had been built

on assumptions that all learners were the same, or that singular approaches work for all students. This is the hard work of inquiry, particularly for non-Aboriginal teachers who have lived and worked their entire lives in the Eurocentric world of education. But it doesn't lay the blame with others—it centers their efforts on how they, as the teaching professional, need to approach their work differently. Another northern teacher put it thusly: *"Inquiry brings it back to what am "I" doing—not just the data—which makes it more student focused,* [but to] *always keep coming back to "What am I doing to effect changes in student learning?"*

We often heard participants use the term "inquiry mindset" and we think the comments here encapsulate what Network members and leaders mean when they use that term. It is at the center of how they approach their work with students in schools. Having an inquiry mindset is an important and powerful shift as the discussion above indicates. But how does the AESN structure enable this? It flows from the idea that the AESN is a Network devoted to asking personally and contextually situated questions that emerge from AESN members thinking about and examining the successes and failures of their own students. It seeks to answer the question *"How can I/we better support student success?"* While seemingly simple in its approach, it works well because it frames the effort of the Network as focused on the everyday work of teachers who have as their core purpose the engagement of students in practices of learning. It simultaneously places the teacher as an expert in learning facilitation, while constructing their primary work as an investigator and researcher rather than content or pedagogical knowledge expert. There is a strong appeal to this approach; as our interviews with teachers during our impact study made evident, teachers see this as a 'natural activity' they engage in all the time, everyday. It is also non-threatening because it does not ask teachers to investigate others' promising practices or questions; it asks them to think about their own efforts as a teacher, but through the eyes/experiences of their learners. In other words, it moves the focus from thinking about teaching and the teacher, to thinking about learning and the learner. It feels natural and normal, because, at the heart of every teacher's work is the task of bringing success to their learners. It also focuses on the incremental or the possible—with a focus on a single question—rather than on programmatic or systemic level changes that can often seem large, complex or difficult to implement.

From the perspective of the educational scholars reviewed earlier in this study, putting the learning of one's learners at the center of one's efforts to improve practice will enable deeper, more sustained learning among teachers who collaboratively engage through "reflection in and on practice" (Cochran-Smith et al, 1999, p. 276). The focus on context specific questions forces a way of considering how practices work as they emerge in classroom applications, rather than thinking about strategies others have generated that might be applied to a classroom situation (an example of knowledge *of* practice). When added to the cycle of meeting to talk about and reflect upon progress during their inquiry, it becomes more apparent how the Network structure impacts these teachers' efforts at reforming and innovating in their classrooms.

My big learning – as long as the adults are engaged in learning in a supportive, deep, rich environment – as long as adult learners are given support student learners can move forward. The Network has led my

learning. Before my involvement I was a good teacher – I am still a good teacher but I am a better person in the classroom because I have a deeper understanding about learning. Each day I am learning, and I am thinking about what I am learning. Experiencing metacognition makes me more tolerant of my fellow learners, whether young or old! I am more connected to my students.

Teachers need to know the current research and theories. We need to be able to be trusted to take that knowledge and turn it into practice, that works for us, in our classrooms. Belonging to the Network has not told me how to teach - it has expanded my thinking around teaching. The best part of being a member of the Network is that what I need to know is not sifted by the school district personnel. Having current knowledge around education practices, theories, research, etc. allows me to be a better teacher. I need the space and time to develop my understanding.

7.1.4 Catalyst for change

Another theme identified in our review of the data collected was how the Network served as a catalyst for change. Earlier discussions about how the Network enables the sharing across and between school districts and how such sharing scales up change initiatives is one part of this conversation. So too are the comments shared earlier about how the Network enabled risk taking because it provided support to teachers who were interested in pursuing personal passions for effecting change for aboriginal learners. In what other ways does the Network structure act as a catalyst for change? One aspect of AESN activity we heard both members and school principals discuss is the pressure to respond because of the ways in which the Network provides a more public profile of its members and the work they are doing. For example, one Network member from an interior school district described how the Network inspired him into thinking more deeply about his own teaching and how to work with Aboriginal learners in his mathematics class. Working with both another teacher and the aboriginal support worker in his school, he re-designed a series of math problems to more directly show how mathematical concepts (such as surface area or fractions) could inform and be used to access local Aboriginal cultural knowledge. He spoke about the ways in which his learning had been developed as a result of his participation in the Network, much like other AESN participants described in this report. But he also emphasized that involvement in the Network can act as a form of positive peer pressure:

> "When you are in the Network with people who are passionate about what they do, they really 'up' your game. So I need to respond in kind: it forces you to be a better teacher. It brings you up to the next level… to crank it up a notch. If you don't bring your 'A' game, you stand out like a sore thumb. I'm competitive, and I take this as a positive thing. The Network has forced me to do more with what I've learned. I've presented at the BC association of math teachers. And at UBC with a conference of aboriginal educators. It's given me permission to blow my

own horn, people need to know about it. But I have also sweat buckets before presenting in front of people."

So his engagement in the AESN was driven not just by his own desire to learn and enhance the learning of his students, but as a result of his own desire to be measured as a 'good' and 'successful' teacher like his similarly minded peers.

We heard a similar thread from a school principal, who expressed some concern for teachers who are busy and may feel too overwhelmed to become part of a Network question, particularly when they are confronted with many other competing demands. For example this individual said:

> "The Network gives focus and accountability, but it also puts pressure on teachers. Some teachers say I can't do it this year, even if they are already doing inquiry in their classes… We shouldn't do good work just because of the Network; we need to do it in a way that makes more sense for us… They all want to do a better job, but its still pressure."

The Network is a voluntary model so there clearly is no requirement for any teacher to participate. But it appears from a reading of this principal's comments that the work of the Network is sometimes understood as an "add on" to the regular work of teachers. The value and benefit of the work is still acknowledged, but there is a belief that the Network adds to workload, and is an external stressor rather than an enabling process through which one's work as a teacher benefits.

7.1.5 Parallel and/or competing structures

We also learned, as our study progressed, about how the structure of the Network (providing time for teachers to meet and collaborate on inquiry questions, providing small financial incentives for teachers who completed and filed written reports about their final inquiry projects, hosting of regional or district showcases) inspired several school districts to embrace the framework of the AESN and apply it to related district efforts. This approach is best captured in the two case studies included in this report: in both Prince Rupert and Arrow Lakes, district leaders lend additional district supports to teachers who are involved in AESN activities and inquiries by providing small incentives such as release time, sharing time, or travel grants to attend Network events in the region or at the provincial conference. In these districts, leaders talk about the way in which recognizing this work fits within their own district philosophies of inquiry based learning and in particular, support their goals for enhancing the success of Aboriginal Learners. They believe these approaches will effectively amplify the impact of efforts for improving the success of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners. We describe these districts as having inquiry "embedded and nested within" their district culture. Our findings, on the basis of an intense look at these two school districts, is that there is far more innovation and successful efforts at broad scale impact at the district level overall when the district takes up a parallel structure for its work. It also helps, we contend, with the concerns raised by the principal who was concerned with teacher overload. When district initiatives have common conceptual threads—such as inquiry for enhancing student success—then all efforts whether they deal with literacy, numeracy, social responsibility, or student engagement—feel connected and one serves the other. The agendas don't compete; they complement one another. Connections between ideas are naturally enhanced, and teachers don't distinguish between

whether an activity is related to the AESN or their other district learning programs. They simply focus on "how do we make learning better for our students?"

This common moral purpose proved to be a uniting force among district staff and school leaders, teachers, non-teaching support staff, and community members alike. While we may not be able to credit the AESN itself with enabling such district wide learning centered cultures, it was certainly a model that leaders understood as having a powerful effect through which to implement change, and they have modified and adapted the structure as a means to achieving system wide change. In other words it is having a lasted and embedded impact on practice.

Conversely, we also saw evidence of what happens when a school district culture is not particularly supportive of the work of the AESN. In one northern district in particular, we heard evidence from Network members and leaders that the district structure sought to limit the scope of Network activity in their school district. In this case, the Network membership has been reduced over the last two-three years as the district has put in place policies that have promoted individual school initiatives that meet established district priorities; these activities follow a district developed program model that does not emphasize inquiry based learning. In this district a Network leader described it as a power struggle: *"The Network was perceived as a threat [by senior district leaders]… Quite clearly at the board office the message is: we don't need the Network, we are doing this work for ourselves, district level only. So there isn't going to be any promotion or support of the Network."*

Despite this, members of the AESN in this district have done some excellent work that is highly regarded by other Network participants around the province. We infer from the descriptions provided to us that the work of the Network has succeeded because of the status enjoyed by the teachers or principals who initially participated in the Network in this district. However, we also believe that the sustainability of these initiatives is in jeopardy as the involved teachers retire or leave the district. Given this, the AESN inquiries we heard about from this team of AESN members—which were important and significant ways in which to better enable non-Aboriginal educators to work with on Reserve and community members as educational partners—will have only limited, site specific effects.

In summary, what this discussion about district culture has made clear is that there can be both enabling and constraining features of local contexts where AESN members work. While there are ways in which connectivity is enhanced because of the design of the Network as a provincial initiative and its emphasis on sharing across jurisdictions, it operates more coherently, and has greater impact, in some regions or districts than in others. It highlights how context can be a significant factor in measuring impact.

I started working with the Network when a friend asked me to collaborate on a new writing technique to see if it would enhance the learning of children in my early primary class; specifically the aboriginal learners. Once I began this challenge in 2007 I realized it wasn't just professional growth I was experiencing but for more importantly I really began a new chapter of personal growth.

Despite course work in special education I have mainly taught in main stream public education settings. I separated the person (half Cree raised in the North) I grew up as, from my professional self. Professionally I thought this was how things were done. But something was missing from my teaching – being genuine and honest with myself and my class and school community. As soon as I started really opening up and sharing, and really enjoying this interaction I could feel my teaching start to really blossom. Even though I am isolated from other Aboriginal teaching staff at my own school, this link, this camaraderie that started with one project gave me a whole new network and staff to work with. I sit in on staff meetings at our school district Aboriginal Education department and work directly with a small team on literature projects, theme based work not only to support Aboriginal learning outcomes but also our district's Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement. I feel have an added voice and share the learnings of my childhood on a northern reserve but also the aboriginal ways of knowing of the Cree and prairie peoples (my district is very good about honouring the protocols of the local first nations and now I feel I have a role in educating fellow educators about other First Nations perspectives.) My proudest moment was when I was introduced as a champion of Aboriginal Education for my district.

I am part of a core team of three which often expands as we bring other people in on our projects. I feel like part of the three musketeers. With advanced communications and technology we all work at different sites but communicate very effectively and work to bring about change in our fellow mainstream teachers. We help them understand how to interweave Aboriginal learning outcomes and ways of teaching into every subject area by asking the deep questions, looking for the big ideas. Working with Network and district based professional partnership grants is a way we can challenge our own thinking and teaching and model for others how to think more deeply about the learnings of our most fragile learners.

As a teacher with over 20 years experience I feel motivated to get to school each day and keep on trying new things (I have piloted Smartboards and tablets in my classroom and currently am leading our district into creating outdoor classrooms). I feel supported by my AESN team and enjoy the challenges we see in getting Aboriginal teachings incorporated into everyone's everyday teaching style.

My colleagues at my own school see a confident teacher who strives to do her best and help them with "tricky" curriculum – really it is about de-mystifying Aboriginal cultures. Since I am able to share my personal self and my journey from small "rez girl" I feel fulfilled and peaceful about my heritage. I also feel I am far more able to reach out and support struggling Aboriginal families and help de-mystify the education system for them, or at least offer support with groceries and school supplies. Although I have added a whole new layer of meetings and staff responsibilities by attaching myself honourarily to the Aboriginal education department I feel have gained so much personally. Professionally, I am impacting the knowledge base of my district by adding a voice of other First Nations beliefs, teachings and protocols. Working with the Network on improving Aboriginal student learning and awareness of our district's Enhancement Agreement has led me to rich personal growth.

7.2 Leadership

In earlier discussions, the notion of leadership was introduced; we noted how Aboriginal teachers in particular, have used the AESN structure as a tool for enabling their own efforts to lead within the field of Aboriginal education and in creating an enhanced focus on effecting change to better support Aboriginal learners. The focus on Aboriginal student success and inquiry as a means of effecting change both locally and provincially has created an important new space through which Network members—both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal—have had their work and leadership recognized and valued. Certainly the mandate to create, adopt and implement Aboriginal Enhancement Agreements in each school district has been an important lever through which both the AESN and other Aboriginal education initiatives have been given priority attention. However, the Network structure itself also encourages and nurtures leadership among its members. Identifying innovation and creative, impactful AESN inquiries and members who have led or supported these inquiries has been a deliberate activity of the Network principals, Drs. Halbert and Kaser. Using Network structures and mechanisms—such as its website and its annual provincial networking event—the work of different teacher leaders have been profiled. Specific cases are highlighted on the website; regional leaders are encouraged to highlight these in their local and/or regional meetings with other teachers. In other words, promising practices are shared and individuals who have developed personal and professional knowledge related to their inquiries are invited to share these in public forums with other members of the Network.

In many cases, these individuals have been promoted into district leadership positions; for example, during our focus group on Vancouver Island we saw evidence of the career progression of some AESN members who had been teachers within the Network and who are now serving as formal district support leaders. In their new roles as district leaders they have been able to use their inquiry-based mindset to extend inquiry approaches into district initiatives in Aboriginal Education more seamlessly, while

broadening their capacity to effect change and influence among an even larger pool of educational personnel. We will share two specific examples to illustrate how this growth has been afforded by focusing on two AESN leaders: Debbie Leighton-Stephens and Laura Tait.

I have been working at a Vancouver Island high school since 2001 and at an elementary school for the same amount of years too. I have worked as an Aboriginal support worker with my name changing but the same problems continue to exist mostly. My main goal over the years was to help Aboriginal students achieve cultural, academic , and personal achievements. Also to help increase the self-esteem of vulnerable Aboriginal students.

I have always asked myself how can I help students to connect to themselves and feel proud of their Aboriginal ancestry when society has mostly looked down on Aboriginals. Lots of youth want to be anything but Aboriginal and avoid anything that looks like Aboriginal culture at school. I know when things are working by how many Aboriginal youth say where they are from and the ancestry they are. I try to do things that help all students feel proud of who they all are and where they all are from.

By me talking about who I am and the Elders that have given me teachings I try to teach all students that we all have important teachings passed down to us. Every year for the last 7 years I have a celebration of who you are at the elementary school with Aboriginal cultural games with 100 students. Every student brings one small favourite family dish of their favourite food each student likes the most. Every student feels like they have contributed to that day and has helped make the celebration successful. Students ask me all year "are we going to have our celebration this year?" and "what day are we going to have it on?" I try to help all students I work with to become a leader. I play a lot of leadership games with all students.

I have a leadership group of secondary students that I bring to the elementary school every week to work with all the grade 7 students. This is my older students helping with grade 7 transition to grade 8. Older students model how to be successful using their life experiences how to work with teachers they do not like, how to navigate the hallways respectfully and how to be successful with older students' own codes of

conduct at school and how to behave with older students respectfully. This will help grade 7 students have a better experience here at the high school by not getting older students angry about their behavior. I try to teach them the importance of being a life long learner and always asking yourself "what can I learn from others at school?"

Students that are spoiled come to school thinking they already know everything and are entitled to do what they want to do with no respect for the teacher. Students that think they are entitled disregard the things teachers and staff try to teach students about. Students that think they are entitled are not open to any new learning because they know everything. A lot of the time students that act like they are entitled to do what they want look a lot like defiant disrespectful students only doing what they want to do.

I try to help address entitled students by learning about how to be respectful and the importance of learning to respect the position adults represent in their professional roles in the community. I talk about how life can get harder on them when they do not show respect to people they do not like that are teachers, R.C.M.P or any other professional adult they may come across in their life. I work a lot on helping students make better choices for themselves. I teach students to look at where they are now, where do they want to be and what things do they need to do to get to where they want to be. Set goals for themselves they can do.

The earlier case study of Prince Rupert provided substantial evidence of how Debbie Leighton-Stephens has taken on a role of leading with Aboriginal communities to enhance opportunities for Aboriginal student success. In the case we describe how she is using the inquiry-based model with all district support staff, including work with teachers (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) as well as non-teaching support staff. We described her work as essential to the learning centered culture that is strongly evident in the district. We also referenced how her work has been profiled at Network seminar events: her thoughtful and respectful modeling of Aboriginal principles of learning including how to "walk slowly" has become an important touchstone for the BC educational community as they learn how to enact inclusive and engaging practices which give Aboriginal students a way to connect to their schooling experiences.

We also want to profile the work of Laura Tait, District Principal of Aboriginal Learning in Nanaimo. She is taking a strong leadership role in her district's efforts to negotiate a third Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement in her district; she is modeling it following the inquiry cycle she learned as a member of the AESN. She described for us, during her interview, the importance of this shift in thinking about how one could develop a more effective and inclusive and respectful agreement between Aboriginal community members and the district. She stated:

"We want to frame the big ideas [about Aboriginal student success] into rich inquiry questions that have some depth, rigour, and with no easy answers…[In taking this approach] I hope our intention is communicated thusly: No, we don't know the answers for you, but we are hoping that this approach will invite you to consider these questions in your context… A big piece of the intention is to grow healthy inquiry work and to approach these big ideas in Aboriginal education and society in a way that is more curious, respectful, and less judgmental. Inquiry by nature is curiosity and opening ourselves up to vulnerability… it's a more respectful and curious approach."

In other words, the AEA won't necessarily list or name the ways in which outcomes will be achieved for students or communities; nor will it state the problem in terms that construct Aboriginal students, their families or communities as deficit, or needing to be 'supported' or 'helped'. Instead it will emphasize the ways in which the educational partners can inquire together in order to learn and implement new, locally situated approaches and methods that work with and for Aboriginal students.

We saw this approach to the negotiation of a renewed Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement as an exciting impact of the AES Network: it has pushed the model of inquiry well beyond that of the classroom to a place that shifts the approach of the entire community towards one of problem solving and shared, collaborative knowledge building. We believe that this approach is one that will be modeled in other districts as this particular agreement will lay out a constructive and inclusive approach that others will want to follow. In the same way as the Network itself operates to connect innovators with like minded leaders and innovators in other jurisdictions, this leader and the broader Aboriginal community with whom she works will influence and shift the focus of policy makers, school districts and provincial authorities alike. Again, returning to the thoughts and expressions of Laura Tait:

"If [inquiry mindedness] doesn't impact leaders, it won't have staying power. You can look at this both horizontally and vertically. Horizontal growth is important, but it has to reach up to those in formal leadership roles."

She also expresses why this work is a moral imperative for her and for educational leaders across Canada:

"If you look at the pain and anguish Aboriginal people have experienced in this country, and what [the Network] is doing to change those conditions, this [inquiry model] should be valued for its contribution and the model it provides. A lot of this comes down to the work of Judy and Linda, they are all about truth and reconciliation."

We find these words incredibly profound; it captures the essential work of the AESN and its participants as a decolonizing event. By decolonizing we mean that it seeks to reveal the truths about the experiences of Aboriginal learners in schools while it dismantles old belief systems about the deficits or deficiencies of Aboriginal communities and makes visible their strengths. It gives voice to Aboriginal teachers—both traditional community teachers and teachers within the formal school system—both of whom are legitimate knowledge holders and have important perspectives that will enrich approaches to working with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. It recognizes their contribution to the work and places their expertise at the center of how we approach what needs to be shared work. It also emphasizes the relational nature of such work: again, referring to Laura's characterization of how this work needs to be

done, she emphasizes a "side by side approach" in which learning together is invitational, respectful, and always supportive. It also echoes Debbie Leighton-Stephens call to "walk slowly" together to construct shared pathways through which all learners can be supported and who can walk the stage with "dignity, purpose and options" (Halbert & Kaser, 2013).

7.3 Tracing inquiry mindedness as evidence of impact

I have really appreciated the message that bigotry can manifest itself as low expectations for our First Nations students. As a First Nations woman, having this message stated clearly by non-First Nations educators has been very powerful. I have witnessed educators examine their practise and ask themselves if in fact they have perpetuated this destructive pattern. I have also walked alongside teachers as they begin the journey to doing things differently. These teachers are all good, hardworking, well intentioned teachers. "One of the hardest things teachers have to learn is that the sincerity of their intentions does not guarantee the purity of their practice." (Steven D. Brookfield, Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher)

I believe "we are smarter together". I have benefitted greatly from networking with others. I want to be a part of the community of teachers working on the common goal of getting our learners to "cross the stage with dignity, purpose and options". Networking is a vital part of this community and I am grateful to have the opportunity to participate.

The AES Network provides the foundation upon which educators build inquiries into improving outcomes for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. It is structured in such a way that professional and personal mindsets and identities, beliefs about professional learning and long held colonial beliefs about Aboriginal peoples can be challenged, supported, critiqued, and, sometimes re-forged in a commitment to the moral imperative implicit in ensuring the holistic success of all students. The work of the Network is about courage, curiosity, risk-taking, safety, justice, fairness and equity. It is about transforming educators, students, families and communities. It is about recognizing the potential in students rather than weaknesses; it is about reconnecting Aboriginal youth proudly to their history and heritage and culture; and it is about honouring, valuing and revering the historical and contemporary experiences of Indigenous peoples by acknowledging their rightful place as founding Nations in Canadian society.

> "If we are going to be professional and thoughtful teachers, then we have to ask, challenge and question...how do we do this better, make it better for kids...It challenges the status quo and makes it more personal, and I can work on a passion – not just outcomes, that's too sterile. I get revved up with the inquiry question, it gives me energy, it's about our kids' lives, our

community... Inquiry asks: "what am I doing to effect change in student learning? It creates links to other people, creates new questions, we meet others to see what they are doing. It's confidence building. We are a little school, not lots of money, but we are doing great things."

Inquiry is not something you do; it is who you are as an educator and as a human being. This message was communicated to us over and over again as we conducted interviews and focus groups for this study. There are however, some core attributes we were able to trace. First, the core of any form of inquiry is a sense of curiosity – an attitude described by one AESN member as "I wonder if..." This curiosity coupled with a deep sense of moral purpose provides much of the impetus for AESN members to pursue inquiry projects in support of improving the success of Aboriginal learners. As we referenced earlier, this type of curiosity was often described as a "mindset". For those involved in the AESN, this mindset is an outgrowth of how they see themselves as professionals – their professional identity - and in turn, a reflection of personal identity – who they are. For these educators then, the personal is the pedagogical. Why they devote themselves to improving aboriginal education is part and parcel of how they engage professionally in inquiry processes. An inquiry mindset seated in deep moral purpose prompts educators to see themselves as change agents and allies, as learners rather than authorities, as responsible for effecting change and improvement while holding a deep commitment to justice, fairness and equity.

AESN has become a yearly endeavour for members of our staff; it has become a way for us to organize our efforts to become culturally responsive. Our district has been making a push for teaching to reflect all things local and membership in AESN helps.

Food has been a focus in our school and across the district. I know that community members get sick of hearing us talk about how we should do it, and wish we would just do it. We are doing it, we keep talking about it because it is when we stop talking about it that it will stop happening.

This is why networks of professionals are important to me they fuel our talk. I live and work on Haida Gwaii; professional development opportunities that are commonplace to teachers in other parts of the province are hard to get to. The Network allows us to feel connected, gives us ideas, gives a place to organize our thoughts, a place to shape our vision, and energizes our practice doing work that is relevant here.

Being culturally responsive means embracing island life, and clam digging is a big part of island life. I started clam digging not really knowing what to do. I knew they were down there in the beach, I knew I needed a shovel. I am not proud to admit that my first attempt involved a garden trowel, much to the delight of students who enjoy comparing

rookie digger stories. Most of my modest skills I have learned from my students, whose teachings have brought me a long way.

Our first clam-digging trip with students was in response to our inquiry that year, continuing those trips and increasing the number has been a natural progression that is in keeping with our inquiries. Last year I went clam digging with students 4 or 5 times. The school now has a set of shovels and each year the clam digging has brought more into the school. Last year we served clam fritters at a dinner sale that accompanied a community concert organized by the same students who also worked to hold a plant sale in our new greenhouse.

For a couple years I didn't know what it was like to have clams put away but as you progress with clam digging you improve, you get more, you eat chowder. I still go elbow deep, but my shoulder has been off the sand for a couple of years; I have learned to expend my energies more efficiently. Keeping a record of how you have expended your energies increases efficiency; the Network provides teachers with an opportunity to create a record, to share it with others, to learn from others, and to increase efficiency.

Our inquiries with AESN have much in common with clam digging. I knew it was there and I knew if we kept digging we would get something good. But the digging isn't easy, and by the end of the year it is easier to start summer vacation than to write a report for AESN. I don't attend the meetings or celebrations (travel), I have been to a conference once; but every June I write our report and staff at my school are able to reflect on the year that was and celebrate our successes. These are what we build on; this is what creates a path we will follow next year.

7.3.1 Dissonance, discomfort and irritation

Shifting to, or engaging in an inquiry mindset is tough, often difficult work. An educator whose professional identity is founded in an inquiry mindset is highly cognizant of the fact that for transformation of their own and others learning to occur, they must approach their practice with humility and authenticity. They must be open to the dissonance, discomfort and irritation involved in the shift in self-perception from expert knowledge holder to vulnerable learner – willing to admit their knowledge is incomplete, while simultaneously giving themselves permission to learn. They must move from being reflective practitioners to reflexive practitioners; modifying, adapting, changing, questioning to better meet students' learning needs.

This is an important difference: reflection asks you to consider and examine, but reflexivity invites you to make this change a part of who you are as an educator. It means acknowledging the complicity we share in having constructed the contexts in which Aboriginal learners have been labeled as unsuccessful, deficit or problematic. In other words, these individuals must be committed to making the invisible visible, to making the unsaid heard, to build capacity for shared responsibility for student learning. As mentioned, such work is difficult and discomfiting. Earlier we highlighted this idea by canvassing Kumashiro's (2000) calls for an anti oppressive education; this type of reflexive practice moves educators and students out of the comfort and safety of resting assuredly in their existing knowledge into a space unfamiliar, or "queer" where we "unlearn" and work to "relearn". He argues that stepping into the unfamiliar or uncomfortable is difficult as teachers are "often invested in the status quo" (2009, p. 54) and "find comfort in the repetition of what is considered to be common sense, despite the fact that commonsensical ideas and practices can be quite oppressive" (p. xxxviii). He posits that our comfort levels – even our sense of self is maintained when we learn only that which reinforces our previously held beliefs about ourselves, our position in the world, our position vis a vis "other" and about the structures, institutions and modes of being with which we are familiar. For educators, discomfort occurs when they refuse to retreat from exploring the controversial – when they acknowledge the emotional and political nature of issues such as racism and yet proceed to explore them anyway, and where disruption of dominant discourses can result in crisis – existential or otherwise (Kumashiro, 2009, p. 31), and where they are aware of the "partial" nature of their knowledge, and continue to turn their lens not just outward, but inward to interrogate their own unconscious complicity "with different forms of oppression" (p. 31). A shift in thinking that embraces the dissonance, the discomfort of not knowing requires a concomitant shift in recognizing that having only partial knowledge does not make one deficit; nor does it absolve educators from tackling the problems faced by marginalized populations in schools and society. A moral and philosophical commitment to equity, justice and fairness precludes the maintenance of the status quo.

I have a basic fundamental belief about teaching that was supported by my inquiry data and that was,

"FAIRNESS ≠ SAMENESS"

We all want our students to hit targets. But if we are not considering if our students have their eyes open when they shoot or what direction they are shooting in or what tools we have given them to hit the target or how far back from the target they are starting, how can we accurately assess?

What they come in knowing matters and race, gender, poverty, etc. all affect that initial ability to connect. It is not a matter of accessing prior knowledge, it is about providing prior knowledge for our students most at risk.

I think the most significant finding involved the distribution of power. I have a journal entry from January 11th, 2010 that I would like to quote…

"I hoped that the impact on writing would improve if Native students saw themselves within the content and it did, significantly. But I was surprised at how many other impacts that this question would have outside of the obvious answer or data collection. I did not fully think about how giving the power of understanding certain concepts (especially those that non-first nations students might not have encountered), would put my First Nations students at an advantage for talk, reading, and writing…the same advantage that we usually afford other students. Racism is when one group has power over another.

I know that racism is a very powerful word. It does imply some negative intention, which I do not believe teachers foster. I believe that teachers are involved in education to make the world a better place. It is important however, once we become aware of a practice that does not promote that agenda, to change the way we think and act. Being part of the Network helped me to understand that in order to change the way we think and act, we need the support of others; a network as it were, where collaboration and change are part of the learning cycle.

This learning mindset was evident in a number of situations that we heard about over the course of our data collection. One district leader discussed how the AES Network provided a safe space for educators to have conversations about Aboriginal students, the diverse cultures and heritage values within those cultures and their families as well as the impact of inquiry on Aboriginal student learning. The courage to engage in those types of conversations – the dissonance of not knowing all of the answers was summed up by this leader: *"As a teacher in the early 80s, the mindset was, if you're a teacher, you are supposed to know all, be all, and we are finally getting to a shift to say 'I am a learner' to actively engage with students in learning."*

A district principal from northern BC echoed this idea: *"We are all learners. We know lots of stuff, but there are areas that we need help with. The inquiry gets us to learning and learning from each other. It's safe. It's safe to say I don't know about this, can you help me?"*

My involvement in the Network, particularly my Aboriginal focus, keeps me aware and awake to the Aboriginal culture in my community, nationally and internationally. In my quest to honour, recognize and integrate Aboriginal culture on a daily basis I find myself continually looking for opportunities within the school day. This has led to the creating of an Aboriginal logo and an Aboriginal garden at my former

school. The students and I worked together to shape, plan and establish the garden. The students took responsibility for their work as we co-created, co-problem solved and co-reflected as we learned from and with each other. As a result there have not been any incidences of vandalism. Each day I strive to be a facilitator of learning when working with my students and encourage them to guide their own learning. The Network has helped me aspire to situate myself in a transformation orientation to my teaching. I now strive to teach in a holistic manner which is quite different than my previous teaching practices. Adopting a more holistic approach to my practice allows me to continually stop, reflect and be culturally aware of the needs of all my students. I feel I would not be engaging in inquiry if I did not continue to be an active participant in the Network and for that I am truly grateful. I try to instill in my students to be the best they can be and the Network allows me to strive at being the best I can be.

As our case study of the Arrow Lakes district revealed, teacher learning plays a significant role in the efforts being made by educators to engage their Aboriginal students in the learning process. Forming an inquiry around weaving Aboriginal ways of knowing and being into the existing Woodwork and Outdoor Education curricula required the teachers involved to pursue their own learning: while the overt skills that they gained were apparent in their teaching, a less overt yet equally significant shift in their understanding helped to deepen their appreciation for Aboriginal peoples.

> "My Aboriginal unit in the Outdoor Ed class isn't so much about culture and the stories of Aboriginal peoples or the spirituality side. I make them do things in the environment. Picture yourself as an Aboriginal person in the field…you have a stick, an antler, now try and survive. So I have the students try this out. I had to learn about knapping - how to chip rocks to make arrowheads. Then we get the kids to do it…The archery equipment we use is standardized; the Aboriginal people didn't have that. No two arrows shoot the same no two bows shoot the same. They see how difficult it is/was. So it's an appreciation thing."

The "expert-learner" tension can be alleviated to a certain extent through a supportive network of like-minded individuals. A district leader from Vancouver Island discussed how the structure of the Network provided an avenue for educators to explore their own learning:

> "It gives adults an accessible way of accessing First Nations agreements and goals without feeling they don't have enough information. The AESN gives them a structure and an approach to be successful; where they don't have to feel like they are the experts about the content, the history, the protocols, etc…In many ways as teachers we are more at ease talking about ancient Egypt that our own Aboriginal cultures, so building this level of comfort for the adults is critically important. Inquiry provides a far deeper way of learning; you have to reach into the areas of teaching and learning where you don't know what to do, otherwise you wouldn't be investigating it. This is what makes it most powerful; it asks you to take a risk, examine

what you aren't doing so well or could learn more about. Yet it does it in a safe way; framed as professional growth and focused on learning for kids."

Framing the integration of Aboriginal ways of knowing and being as both professional growth and moral responsibility might help to mitigate some educators' concerns about their lack of knowledge. As an administrator from Vancouver Island noted:

> "It's very difficult; teachers are very busy, it's a busy profession, the best intentions you have, to want to introduce a new curriculum, and sometimes it doesn't happen. A lot of teachers who openly say they don't feel they have the expertise or knowledge to present - a sense of reticence, hesitation. You can understand that...I had that feeling when I presented on Métis peoples, I don't have that background. Is this legitimate? It may not be your expertise, but you have to do it...That sense can often accompany many teachers who are hesitant to teach Aboriginal history or culture."

Another educator from the interior of BC expressed his initial fears about integrating Aboriginal content into the curriculum: *"I had concerns at the beginning; I am going to have calls from non-Aboriginal parents anticipating they would be troubled by the inclusion of Aboriginal questions. That they would say 'okay, great to include local culture, but what about our culture?' But there hasn't been that response."* Dispelling his fears gave him the confidence to move forward and the courage to continue making concerted efforts on behalf of Aboriginal students: *"A lot of times what happens is we see a need, and we just do it. If people or administrators or district people want to support it...we are going to do it anyway, it has to be done."*

During my third year teaching English at a Secondary School, I began working on an inquiry for the Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network. In our district at the time, thirty percent of our students were Aboriginal, and many were having difficulty transitioning successfully through secondary school. I collaborated with another English teacher and together we explored how we could better meet the needs of our at-risk Aboriginal learners. WE wanted to explore the reasons why they were having difficulty and hopefully be able to make changes in our teaching that would positively impact Aboriginal student learning.

We decided that before we could meet the needs of these learners, we needed to understand exactly what their needs were. With the support of the AESN, we began research into the area of Aboriginal education. We were drawn to the work of Russell Bishop, whose work explored Maori student success in New Zealand. He gathered information by interviewing several Maori students. Hearing students speak passionately about their own learning was powerful. The results of this study suggested that Maori student success was highly influenced by a classroom context where caring relationships can be developed to

support learning. The impact of Bishop's study had a significant impact on teachers in New Zealand; as a result, many embarked upon changes in their practice to better meet the needs of Maori students. Inspired by this new knowledge, we created our inquiry question: **Will consistent positive, personal interactions with Aboriginal students and their families have an impact on Aboriginal student success?**

We created a plan for our inquiry. In very deliberate and explicit ways, we were going to engage in consistent, positive personal interactions with Aboriginal students and their families as a way to create trusting and authentic relationships. We then wanted to interview our Aboriginal students so that we could gain insight into their educational experiences. Our purpose was to illicit honest, unbiased information from our Aboriginal students on their experiences in school.

We began our inquiry in our grade 9 English classrooms. Throughout the year, we built authentic relationships with our Aboriginal students, engaging them in conversation and creating positive interactions whenever possible. We also worked hard at establishing a positive relationship with their families, calling home regularly with updates and information. After a few months, these conversations became longer and more comfortable. Many families started asking me questions about their child's learning, and some even started calling me for updates.

At the end of the term, we wanted to hear from our Aboriginal students and get their perspective in their own words. We asked them three questions:

1. What sorts of things hold you back in school?

2. What helps you do well in school?

3. If you were able to coach a teacher so that what the teacher did meant you would do well in school, what would you say to them?

Many common themes emerged. First of all, many students believed that negative relationships with teachers inhibited their success. They felt they couldn't succeed if they felt a teacher did not like them. Secondly, they believed it was important for teachers to make them feel comfortable, welcomed, respected and encouraged. These factors would help them be

more successful in school. Lastly, Aboriginal students stated that extra help, clear expectations, and fun and innovative lessons would have a positive impact on their learning.

We were profoundly touched by the candid responses of our Aboriginal students. It was validating to hear how much they appreciated positive relationships with teachers and how much they valued engaging and respectful learning environments. We also were struck by how simple their learning needs were. They wanted to feel cared for, welcomed, and respected. They wanted to learn in new and innovative ways. They wanted to learn relevant and meaningful material. This inquiry taught us that making the effort to connect with our Aboriginal learners makes a difference and is well worth the effort. The spirit and structure of an inquiry-based learning community such as the AESN gave us the inspiration, support, and knowledge necessary to make real and lasting changes in our practice.

7.3.2 Innovating and "possiblizing" together

The strength of collaborative inquiry is measured in both its potential and in its outcomes. Educators engaged in transformative work recognize that professional learning happens both individually and collectively, but that practice rooted in "possibilizing together" is far more dynamic and powerful than anything accomplished alone. An important component of this form of shared engagement is *relationality*. The AESN members we interviewed recognize that all learning is relational; that others need to be invited into learning and that knowing their learners contributes to a personalized educational experience that potentiates student success. A transformed/ transformative professional identity/inquiry mindset understands that in order to reach all learners they need to engage in culturally responsive teaching practices, as it is part of their moral imperative. Culturally responsive teaching practices invite others to be part of the learning circle: it recognizes that others, such as Elders and community members, are part of learning team that will support Aboriginal learners become engaged with their learning. Recognizing the inherent strengths, not deficits of Aboriginal learners shifts mindsets to envisioning positive futures for all students:

> "We are investing in the future. These kids, they have a huge skill set. And we are not tapping into that, and part of the reason is self confidence; they need the confidence to show what they know....we need what I know and what they know. We need to give them the skills and the confidence to show and share what they know. Reading, the writing component – not just on paper. It's about relationships, schools, classrooms, First Nations communities – it's all about relationships."

Another poignant example of the relational aspect of learning is described by a Network leader in the northern interior:

"We had moved beyond having our Indigenous learning as a 'unit' that we parachuted in and out of, Aboriginal learning was more authentically integrated throughout the year. Local Elders involved students and adult learners in traditional ceremonies that they hoped would help build an understanding of the importance of the land and the gifts that the land gave. The students moved from passive learning to active learning. Older students made traditional welcoming gifts for the new kindergarten students joining the learning community. The Elders in the community stated that they felt valued and respected. The school heard their voices. One member of this learning community stated that when we are in the presence of Elders, whether it is in or out of the classroom, the pace of our busy lives slows down; our ears begin to listen more carefully; our eyes begin to see more broadly; our minds and bodies become quiet and still; and our hearts begin to value the beauty and richness that is shared with us in the moment. Voices are being heard."

When I think about the impact that the Network has had in our district, I think about not only the impact on our Aboriginal students, but also on our entire community. For me, it's all about stories – sharing stories, connecting with people, students, elders, community people. If people don't feel they are valued and belong and that their previous knowledge isn't recognized they don't respond and learn. When they feel welcomed, they will move mountains for you. I have invited Elders into the school who wanted to tell their stories. They aren't necessarily experts, just regular people who wanted to tell their stories. Here's one example: There were two women, both raised in residential schools – they had not been into a school since then. They were very anxious about coming into the school; I had to do a lot of work to make their immersion more gradual, to make it safe for them. I invited them into the school for tea or coffee, just short visits to begin with. They came in finally to talk to the students who did an interview with them. These ladies wore traditional blankets and after the interview, they started to dance. They were crying...at first, we didn't understand why, but we later learned from them that this was their first time being allowed to dance in a school since they weren't permitted to do so when they were in residential school. These women are in their 70s or 80s...it was a very emotional moment as we watched them dance. And as we watched, one by one, each of our students got up and danced with them. It was a hugely moving experience. You can't imagine what this experience has done: those people now come in regularly because they know they are welcome and valued; but for our kids, they saw that that people can survive very difficult things in their lives. They have suffered from abuse, been taken

away from their families, suffered health issues, but the lesson is that you can survive; there are people to support you. The support of the AESN has given me permission to take risks. If I had been told "no" and followed the rules these visits could have been cut so quickly. Instead the attitude from my AESN family is "Go for it!" And I can tell you, on the days where we have community visitors, we have 98% of our students show up, they're interested in what's going on. These events often make them consider what they can do – they say: "I want to know more about this, this is my culture, my history..." It's an incentive for them, a real wake-up call. I'm 62; I haven't finished what I need to do. I am passionate about what I do, I am enthusiastic about positive changes that we're making for our Aboriginal kids and I'm enthusiastic about changes that are possible through the AESN. I am totally committed to making changes in our district and for our students. It's all about relationships and making connections.

In summary then, educators who are imbued with the characteristics noted above are perfectly situated to engage in pursuing inquiries focused on improving the success of all students. The hallmarks of an inquiry approach require a dominant and persistent focus on student learning. It challenges deficit and colonial ways of thinking about Aboriginal peoples, and in action, it engages with and extends the learning of others. Those involved in inquiry seek learning opportunities with supportive others and recognize that taking an inquiry stance results in emergent and organic context specific sense making. An inquiry approach to learning seeks gaps in what is, and looks for what might be – "possibilizing". Because of its recursive nature, inquiry is ongoing and sustained, always shifting, modifying adapting to meet contextual realities. These approaches to inquiry minded, learning centered professionalism are what the research scholarship has identified as "promising practices" for enhancing student learning and creating "impact".

To further trace the impact of the Network, we looked to our data again to find ways that AESN members described their projects within the Network, how they worked with learners and community members, and what strategies, approaches or ways of thinking they used that could be used to provide evidence of their ongoing application of these promising practices.

7.4 Cases that illustrate adoption of promising practices

To further trace the impact of the Network, we looked to our data again to find ways that AESN members described their projects within the Network, how they worked with learners and community members, and what strategies, approaches or ways of thinking they used that could be used to provide evidence of their ongoing application of these promising practices.

7.4.1 Case 1

Because AESN inquiries are based in teacher interest they are necessarily context specific and are framed in such a way as to reflect the particular circumstances in which educators find themselves. For example, a small school located in north-central British Columbia based their inquiry on whether working with their local Aboriginal community would improve relationships between the community and the school. In this particular instance the inquiry revolved around building Aboriginal cultural awareness and understanding amongst the largely non-Aboriginal student population, however, it evolved beyond a simple cultural "add on" approach, and instead wove in Aboriginals' relationship to and stewardship of the land through student involvement in local ecological sustainability projects. Pre-test surveys revealed a high level of student ignorance about Aboriginal peoples and their experiences, yet as their immersion in the local Indigenous context and Aboriginal culture deepened, students understanding, awareness, and appreciation of historical and contemporary Aboriginal ways of knowing and being saw a concomitant shift. A related part of the project created the opportunity to have a local Elder come into the school twice a week to read *Stoney Creek Woman* (by Bridget Moran and Mary John) to students who were then required to work on projects that showed what they had learned.

The scope of these projects showed a distinct understanding of Aboriginal experience that extended beyond simply "bannock and beads": students addressed topics such as discrimination, residential schools and traditional versus modern ways of Aboriginal life. The projects culminated in student presentations to local guests, including the Elder who had read the novel to them and her extended family. This form of showcasing learning mimics the AES Network requirements where the results of inquiry is not kept to oneself, but shared in order to move forward the learning of others.

The results of their post test revealed substantive changes in student understanding of Aboriginal ways of knowing and being: *"We did see lots of kids change their awareness, it's not what you see on TV, it's not Clint Eastwood, these are things people do now. Fishing, smoking, scraping a hide. They ice fish. They still do that. A chance to see that and be a part of it, it opened their eyes. It was an awakening for a lot of them."*

7.4.2 Case 2

Similarly, a project conceived between teachers at a Secondary school in the Thompson-Okanagan region wove local content into the prescribed math curriculum in order to better reflect students' experiences and realities. An increase in the number of Aboriginal students at the school prompted the teachers to form an inquiry centered on improving Aboriginal student success in the more academic Principles of Math course – a pre-requisite for entry into some post-secondary programs. Incorporating local and Aboriginal content into the curriculum supplemented by visual images of local spaces provided by the school's language teacher resulted in increased student engagement as they recognized themselves in the course material. An assessment tool developed to measure the impact on student learning revealed an improvement in student test scores over a two-year period. The actions taken by these teachers is indicative of another feature of inquiry approaches to learning: They were able to identify a gap in the ways in which students were responding to traditional presentations of curriculum and modified their materials and approaches to teaching in a culturally inclusive and responsive way in order to better meet their students learning needs. In addition to showcasing their work at the district and Network level,

the teachers shared their findings and resources at a UBC symposium with 130 educators involved with Aboriginal math who were very interested in seeking more information about the inquiry, the work the teachers had done, and its results.

7.4.3 Case 3

A Vancouver Island middle school infused Aboriginal inquiry into their grade 7 programming. At the heart of the inquiry was raising awareness and understanding of Aboriginal ways of knowing. All grade 7s took a six-week exploratory course designed to expose students to the "big stories" – an overview of Aboriginal peoples in British Columbia and Canada. In the four years the program has been offered, approximately 700 students have taken the exploratory course. Its mandatory nature makes it a unique feature of the educational landscape and it was partly this feature that led a neighbouring school district to seek permission to borrow this approach (having heard about it at a regional Network presentation). The neighbouring district has a significant on-reserve Aboriginal population and suffered some struggles with racism in their schools between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. This district has now implemented the course in all of its schools and have extended the model to include Elders and Aboriginal language instructors working with students to help raise awareness and understanding of Aboriginal ways of knowing and to start to eradicate some of the systemic racism apparent in their school district.

The programs described above have helped shift the conception of Aboriginal students and peoples as "deficit" towards a more positive perception. As this AESN member noted:

> "The inquiry process lends itself to learning. At times working with Aboriginal kids in the school and district, we often get to the specifics, like 'why doesn't Jimmy get to class?' Sometimes you can't seem to pull yourself out of the detail, can we focus instead on the positive – 'what can we do so Jimmy will come?" This viewpoint is echoed by another AESN member: "The deficit approach is often the approach taken by teachers and districts in working with Aboriginal kids, populations. The AESN (inquiry) is a strength based approach, 'how do we get better, will this help our kids? It's about moving all of our students, not just picking on Aboriginal students. The level I work at, you are always working with a problem...this is more about making things better, that's why I latched onto it. School learning, system learning, kids learning..."

7.4.4 Case 4

For one Network leader, the attempts to disrupt deficit thinking about Aboriginal peoples prompted her to pursue an inquiry that reached beyond the school walls:

> "For me personally, I have a strong sense of wanting our society to acknowledge what has happened in the past, and that has created what we see now, we've ignored it as a nation. And we haven't done anyone a service by ignoring Aboriginal issues. I see this as giving us potential to be so much better as a society, it's not just about schools, it's about strengthening our connections with community, with Aboriginal people who live beside us and it's starting to change my life as a person, not just in the work world. It gives me more confidence as an

educator, more confidence to speak to parents and parents feeling more confident to reach out and advocate for their kids because we have stronger relationships. We're paying attention, we're noticing and we're trying to value people for who they are and what they bring to the table rather than thinking about kids as having deficits, communities as having deficits. I hear more positive language now like 'that mom loves her kids and she wants them to do well...how can we help those kids and their families be successful in this world?"

Her inquiry question was focused on working with Aboriginal moms as part of her job involved work in community literacy. She wanted them to come to Strong Start for the benefit of their children, but they weren't coming. She recognized that she couldn't just burst into these women's homes as a district representative and implore them to come to the program; she needed to build a relationship of trust with them before she could convince them of the benefits of Strong Start. It started with going for coffee and segued into creating a learning community with Aboriginal mothers who were looking to get involved in something *they* were interested in. In making connections to what the community valued, and with the desires of the Aboriginal mothers at the forefront, the group began making memory books, scrapbooks and crafts. Child minders were provided so that the moms could work. Over time, the moms started to use the group as a physically safe place where they could be away from alcohol and drugs. Outreach included providing food for every meeting, which took place at the local food bank – a trusted space amongst the Aboriginal women. The local Reserve allowed the group the use of its van to pick up mothers – it was driven by one of the mothers, a Band Counselor who stayed with the group for meetings and took part in activities but who also shared her wisdom with the group. She was able to offer advice on how to reach out to some Aboriginal mothers – just listen, just ask. Three years into the project, the relationships were sturdy enough to prompt the AESN member to ask whether any of the mothers would be interested in coming into the school to participate in a volunteer reading coaching program. Four mothers were paired with kids in the school and worked with the students, coaching them on their reading. While the logistics of arranging and executing the program proved difficult in some instances, the payoff was worth the investment: the mothers who had participated shared their goals for the reading program, their hopes for the children they had worked with and the pride they felt in having participated. The offshoot of this particular inquiry was that the Aboriginal mothers indicated their interest in pursuing their own educational interests. As the AESN member noted:

> "They are now talking future, so we're holding a fundraiser to try to raise money to support the career and educational aspirations of these moms. Those moms now are more confident in talking to the schools. We've decided to strengthen our relationship with another mom, she has six kids, three of whom are in school, one has developmental difficulties and we couldn't get him to school. The mom designed a plan where his cousin would ride the bus with him, she would get him a Leap Pad because he loved technology and they arranged a pediatric support visit and we got him to school! I think without that group we got going we would not be having these conversations, they'd still be on the defensive, we'd still be at the blame stage and because we had that focus of looking at strengths, things are starting to change for kids in a direct way."

In many ways, this particular story reflects all of the characteristics of both a transformative/inquiry mindset and the features of inquiry itself. This AESN member recognized within herself the role

of change agent and ally and worked with the community to effect positive outcomes for not only Aboriginal students, but for their families as well. The opportunities created through outreach resulted in empowering Aboriginal women to recognize their potential and their strengths; they became partners in the learning process for themselves and their children.

7.5 Aboriginal education for all: Integrated content, engaging, relevant learning.

I am an experienced teacher and I have been involved with inquiry and the NOII for over 7 years. I use inquiry as an instructional strategy and as a vehicle for professional development on my own and in teams.

This year, we have many forces driving extraordinary learning for staff and students: AESN Inquiry team, NOII inquiry team, School District Inquiry Team and my Humanities 9 Inquiry question, "What can the canoe teach us about who we are as Canadians, where we live, how we express ourselves and who we want to become as Canadians? What aspect of the canoe will guide your future?" This question caught the imagination of our Aboriginal support educators. Each felt that they could support student learning by: attending classes, presenting on topics such as: Residential Schools, Harper's Apology from Canadians, paddles, and art project on paddles and decorating, and an Elder to tell us more about the canoes of the west coast. We are a team! Each of us has connected with various students as they each learn about local Indigenous art, culture, geography and issues around sustainability. Without the formal AESN and NOII inquiry, I wonder if we would have had such an engaging way to work together.

It starts out slowly, with each of us finding out who we are and why we are doing what we do; and, once we see our students connected and open to discussing Aboriginal history in Canada, boundaries and suspicions leave and we each simply work to learn more. Our district supplies resources such as: literature circle novels, picture books with lesson plans, and other resources. Each of us often says that we do not know. Each of us is searching for more information and students see us modeling learning and grieving at what has been lost – and yet searching and finding other resources.

Students are searching out our Aboriginal educators to learn more about culture (many students are aboriginal and have asked to learn more and others are from other heritages and want to learn more). The Aboriginal Educators have sent emails about how when students search them out for learning support, they feel that much more successful than if students either hide in the resource room or are sent there.

"Idle no More" is in the news and students yesterday asked a visiting Elder about the movement after learning about canoes and paddles. He talked of how the movement is for everyone because each of us is connected to the land – that is how we survive and what will we leave behind!

Today, we looked at our Chapter Nine in our text which starts with an original journal written by a manager at an HBC outpost in 1850. Students said that not only was it biased and written from one point of view but because of the racism, they did not feel it appropriate to study. They felt the whole chapter unworthy of their time.

Students have spent their time on projects: video making, aboriginal art and paddles, story writing, and mind mapping. We hear students saying things like: "I'm going to talk to my dad about carving, we used to carve but I stopped. I want to try again." "If the diamond mine in Attawapiskat has so much money, why are those people living in such poor housing?" "Can you tell me more about smudging?" and a mother writing a letter, "Thank you for sending sweetgrass home with my son, I appreciate you explaining and supporting such important learning." One very moving conversation was with a 14 year old girl who said that she was Christian and she had confessed to her mother that she honoured the spirituality and everyday life of aboriginal culture because it focused on community and working together to help each other in difficult times and that she felt Christians or her experience with her Christian community could do more for her if this kind of spirituality was in place.

We are pulling together in our canoe and learning about: who we are, where we live, how we express ourselves and what we want to become! As educators, we will use the aspect of inquiring together to learn more about ourselves, our students and our aboriginal culture.

We are not able to meet and discuss our inquiries as much as necessary and our NOII inquirers have not yet formally met with the AESN inquirers; but, this process creates the dynamic!

It was very apparent from the data collected that student learning and engagement was deepened significantly in instances where educators had embedded or woven Aboriginal education/ways of knowing/being into their pedagogy. One young teacher in Arrow Lakes School District described her experience with both her own inquiry and with using inquiry with her students through Aboriginal education:

> "What's good for Aboriginal students is good for all students. I think I basically started with myself; I have a Sioux grandmother that I didn't even know about. I shared it with my students, I just talked about it with the class and some of them responded 'Hey, that happened in my family'…They know what Nation they were from. In my own life, my uncle married a woman in the Dakotas who was Sioux…this is how I start fostering respect for my students and the need to have Aboriginal knowledge for everyone…If you are going to teach students anything, it should have some kind of real application to the world around us. It should be real, and applied in a real way. This is real, not about sympathy or empathy, its respect for all peoples and the heritage of our area. [Student inquiries ask] how can we respect it, reintegrate respect for the land, how can we reintroduce what should be there…one culture was dominant over another and that's how we fix it. If we integrate this knowledge into our curriculum, it is pure respect for all people."

This particular teacher and another who took part in the Arrow Lakes focus group are graduates of WEKTEP – the West Kootenay Teacher Education Program offered through UBC Okanagan. Their teacher education program was centered in an inquiry approach that has resulted in these two teachers approaching their own teaching from an inquiry mindset:

> "I was taught very well in my teacher ed. program and I was taught to think that way [inquiry] from that time, so I have always used it. And just because of that training I set up all of my courses and units that way. Because my class, many of them are kids with Aboriginal heritage, as we began talking about it at the beginning of the year and what they do and don't know. They generated their own inquiries. That's important, students are naturally inquisitive and should generate their own inquiry."

As a result of my involvement with the AESN, I learned that inquiry and evidence-seeking mindsets are not about seeking evidence that will look good on a résumé. Doing a research question for the AESN allowed me to see that learning is not easily measured and that learning for students needs to be from the student's perspectives and from their families not from the perspectives of the vocal (non-Native) professionals who have nothing invested in the community and stay a very short time. I also

learned that when we have non-Native teachers (I am not Native) the teachers need to learn to take a wider perspective on learning not just a focus on aspects of academic learning that are easily measured, look good, sound good so the non-Native educator can leave. In the four years and six months I was at the rural First Nations School I had two Superintendents, two directors of Special Education, four Principals and I worked with twenty-three teachers. Over the time I was employed at this school the enrolment of the school was between 40-60 students from kindergarten to grade 12, with a teaching staff of four to five teachers per year. If I had not participated in the AESN I would not have focused on a specific aspect of student learning. By focusing on a specific question I had my eyes opened to the injustices that are still happening in our small rural schools that enrol First Nations students. I personally believe that the lack of support our governments are giving schools enrolling mostly First Nations students is equally to that of Residential Schools. After working at a school that enrols mostly First Nations students I wonder if our government's hidden objectives are still to remove and isolate the First Nations children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate these caring, children into our dominant culture? While I was at this mostly First Nations School I noticed that the most first-year professional outsiders that came and went all demanded their own teacher autonomy, this caused a yearly whirlwind of changes for our learners, every year these extreme changes had to be learned by the students and support staff and took valuable time away from the students learning. In my four years and six months at this school I only saw the professionals try to assimilate these students into the non First Nations culture. It is my personal opinion that almost all these Professionals never wanted to be connected to the school or community. Without the AESN inquiry and evidence seeking mindset perspective, I would not have seen and felt this concern.

7.6 Learning Aboriginal pedagogy and principles of Aboriginal learning

Yet educators like the individual profiled above are not in abundance in BC schools. The majority of teachers are non-Aboriginal and as a result have particular biases and ways of thinking about schooling that need to be unpacked. This effort to unpack and dismantle colonial mindsets is part of what we have already highlighted in our earlier discussion as necessarily *reflexive*; that is, it is more than applying

inclusive pedagogical practices to what one does, but more about how one thinks and enacts a self that is more inclusive and accepting of all learners.

We certainly saw evidence during this impact assessment that teachers are engaging deeply in this work; but we also believe that we can say with some certainly that not all teachers are yet at this point of embracing and integrating such ways of thinking into their core teaching and personal identities. On the basis of our observation and analysis, we believe there may well be stages in how such teachers' thinking evolves over time as they become immersed in and work through their AESN inquiry process. It is these stages of thinking or approaches to working with Aboriginal learners that we want to describe next.

Earlier in this report we offered an analysis of more than 50 cases of AESN inquiries completed between 2009 and 2012. In this summary it was noted that about 27 inquiries were focused on academic success and 16 more focused on Aboriginal student life opportunities and a sense of belonging. This seems to indicate an emerging pattern. We will look carefully at two of these cases to consider how they might illustrate a pattern of professional learning and growth among AESN members.

7.6.1 Tracing student learning outcomes: From academic performance to pride and acceptance

Early AESN inquiry questions were structured in ways that carefully mimicked the earlier NOII process. In NOII inquiries, performance standards in academic subject areas were the primary focus. So one of the effects this had was that performance standards for Aboriginal students in literacy and numeracy were often selected as starting points to explore how teachers might better enable deepened learning. Many of the rubrics used to measure inquiry impact then involved employing pre and post inquiry tools that used standard performance measures, such as "meeting" "exceeding" or "not yet meeting" performance expectations.

An example of this kind of inquiry was conducted at an elementary school in 2008-2010. As their case study highlights these teachers were "determined to engage our learners and believe that a greater emphasis on Aboriginal knowledge and wisdom will help our learners meet both our school goal and the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement goal of reading at grade level. Our primary teaching staff took a keen interest in our Aboriginal focus area and made it a priority for the reading program for all of our learners. Our school as a whole had a week-long literature based unit focused on the book *Secret of the Dance,* culminating in an Aboriginal Celebration". Their inquiry question asked ***"Will the use of Aboriginal content improve reading for our primary Aboriginal students as measured by the PM Benchmarks2?"*** Three rounds of assessment were conducted throughout the inquiry to measure students' performance as a guided reading approach, using the Aboriginal text as its core resource. The summary of this inquiry discusses how there were significant improvements made in Aboriginal students reading performance, with a 31% increase in those learners "approaching" or "meeting" expectations for grade 2, and later in 2010 how "90% of grade 2 and at risk grade 3s were meeting or

2   PM Benchmarks is a widely used standardized set of reading assessment measures designed to determine students' independent or instructional reading levels. The levels of reading are used to measure students' ability to meet or exceed grade level expectations.

exceeding expectations, a 64% improvement". They summarize their next steps as wanting to integrate even more "Aboriginal texts" in subsequent inquiries as they sharpen their focus to thinking about improving writing performance as well.

In this example, the focus of the inquiry is on those aspects of the AEA that focus on "improving reading success in Aboriginal students". We can infer from the work of these teachers that they understand that Aboriginal content and knowledge, when inserted into mainstream curriculum, shows a value and respect for different ways of knowing and being in the world: when this is incorporated into curriculum activities, it will better engage Aboriginal students in relevant and meaningful texts which in turn become a useful tool through which reading performance can be enhanced. This is an important aspect of culturally responsive teaching practice and is reflective of the Aboriginal learning principle "Learning recognizes the role of Indigenous knowledge". Yet as our discussions about transformed and inquiry mindedness have suggested, it requires more than this to fully incorporate a culturally responsive approach. In sum, it is not yet evident from this particular example that the teachers are engaged holistically in understanding the inter relationship between Aboriginal student achievement and the valuing of cultural practices, intergenerational learning, or the ways in which their own beliefs and approaches to teaching reflect a privileging of dominant beliefs about what constitutes success. The inquiry, as it is structured, retains the role of the teacher as knowledge expert, the one who facilitates and delivers learning, rather than one that sees learning as a shared, collaboratively constructed process. We can infer from this framing of the inquiry, and approach to the process of learning (teacher centered) that these teachers' professional identities remain firmly tied to the formal role of knowledge holder. Their level of knowledge about the importance of cultural texts has grown, but this has been largely a reflective rather than reflexive activity.

Another case from 2010-2011 in a different school district provides a much different example. In this school all 86 students are of Aboriginal ancestry. AESN participants describe their context thusly: "Our students bring cultural capital and a varied understanding of their traditions to school. We want to enhance their knowledge and increase their level of school connectedness… We want to develop the whole child and integrate a First Nations worldview in our teaching. Educators need to become sensitive to and knowledgeable about the First Nations cultures within their school community and elsewhere. The district agreement also acknowledges the need for informal opportunities for teachers to build relationships with families and to celebrate with parents and community ways that demonstrate the importance of the relationship between the school and the community." The question they posed was: ***"Will the integration of traditional First Nations resources and activities across curriculum areas result in an improvement in the social responsibility and self regulation of our students?"*** In describing their inquiry, the AESN members reference cultural and informal events between teachers and community members, cultural language initiatives, the presence of Elders in their school, as well as experiential cultural program elements (such as a beading and drum making project) and place based activities such as visiting salmon streams and historic cultural sites. Community mentors from among its Indigenous population involved in trades are also highlighted, but traditional practices including drum making by local artisans are referenced. In other words, they describe a very complex, multi faceted and intergenerational approach to building an enhanced commitment for all learners in the school—with an emphasis on the need for teacher learning to understand how they can support and enhance their students sense of self and identity as a proud member of their cultural community. In

this second case, the teachers clearly have a much deeper awareness of Aboriginal pedagogy and the principles of Aboriginal learning, drawing upon 6-8 of these in the approaches they are using to work across the school site and within the community. One can infer from the words and approaches taken here that teachers are deeply examining their own beliefs and expectations for students, and that they themselves are gaining a deeper appreciation about the ways in which what we do reflects who we are as teachers.

As a result of the AESN my thinking changed. When I first went to this school, I was like the other white professionals, I wanted a good résumé, and I wanted to move somewhere where I could live with others like me. I did not care that teacher autonomy created non-connected classrooms and I did not care if the students were successful after they left my classroom. As I looked at the community, students and the families and thought about the Network's main goal "Every student has the right to: graduate with dignity, purpose and options." I started to wonder and challenge what was happening in the school I was working at. I have now moved, but I have many friends from this small First Nations community and I respect this First Nations group's determination to have the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures respected by the non First Nations culture that migrates through the school. I have a better understanding of the struggles of our First Nations people. I now feel strongly that these small districts should be amalgamated with larger districts so that white Professionals that work in this community can be connected to seasoned professionals picked from a large group of trained teachers and these professionals can learn about the First Nations culture and move someday back to their home community and share the knowledge they learned. We do not send student teachers to work in these challenging environments so why do we allow first year professionals to work there? Maybe some would stay. I might have stayed if the turnover of staff and whirlwind of ideas from the non-connected classrooms had not drained me.

I still work in the same small school district, but in a larger school. This school has a much smaller population of First Nations students but I see many of the same issues. The First Nations families, traditions and cultures do not seem to be respected. First Nations language is not a priority, but the teachers do try to teach French. (I am smiling.) The First Nations students do not see themselves reflected in the material the school provides and the white culture does not understand many of the ways of

the First Nations. For example, when someone dies in the First Nations community the students take a week of two off school. Through inquiry I have learnt that during this time away from school the First Nations students are learning more about life and less about educational hoop jumping. Through inquiry I have learnt that when the students are away because of a funeral the students are learning through modeling, cultural practices and traditions.

7.7 Emergent patterns of teacher learning?

While it is not possible for us to know with absolute certainty on the basis of our interviews and the cases we've reviewed in this and other sections of the report, there appears to be sufficient evidence to support a claim that the AESN inquiry method develops, for many teachers, an evolution towards deeper, more culturally inclusive teaching practice. We think this is enabled in a number of different ways. Our earlier discussion promoted how the structure of the AESN encourages the sharing of teacher learning, and this is part of how this is accomplished. We also believe that the requirement to engage teachers with the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreements is another important context that enables teachers to think more about the approaches they are using to engage Aboriginal learners. Certainly how Aboriginal education principles are reflected in some of these Agreements is another means through which teachers can more fully engage in thinking about and implementing more holistic approaches to Aboriginal education; and in particular when teachers focus on those goals that emphasize belonging and creating enhanced life opportunities. But it is also because the Network principals, Drs. Halbert and Kaser, continually profile the work of lead AESN members who are taking ever deeper, more collaborative and pedagogically inclusive approaches to their inquiries. These members often become teacher leaders in their own districts existing inquiry teams, and can be asked to share their work in regional meetings. And because they model their own explorations as learning and continue to ask new questions of themselves, their work is not viewed as a challenge to others' practice, but rather a model that can be shared, used, re-created and/or reinvented. The learning is the gift they share as they bridge from one stage of learning to another.

Since the English 12 First Peoples resources were purchased in the alternate school that I used to work at, I have watched the First Nations students with whom I work become more engaged. We not only offered this new course, but I also provided all of my students in every other English course the option of readings designed for the English 12 First Peoples course. When given these options, most of the First Nations students would choose them. I would often watch students who rarely completed readings to complete the readings and the assignments. I realized at this time how vital course content relevant to First Nations students is.

This year I have moved to a new school. I was disappointed to learn that none of the English First Peoples courses have had enough students sign up to make the courses viable despite a population that is thirty percent First Nations students. My administrator gave me the task of increase the First Peoples resources and helping other teachers integrate them into their courses. I began this year feeling my way in what felt like the dark. The school had purchased lots of English 12 First Peoples resources but had stopped there. Armed with the English 10/11 Resource list and some suggestions from teachers in other schools, I began to search for and purchase both student and teacher resources. Some of the teachers, especially the Communications teacher in my school, have been open to the new resources and have experienced the success of using resources that are relevant to their students. However, many of the staff are entrenched in using the older, more standard resources.

Attending the AESN meeting this fall was a turning point for me. Listening to the presenters instilled more strongly the importance of making it easy and desirable for my staff to integrate these resources. In addition, it renewed both mine and my vice-principal's desire to get enough numbers to run the English First Peoples courses within our school. We have both been promoting this course with the upcoming grade nine students and may reach our goal of thirty enrolled students which would enable the course to run. Since the meeting, I have polled the English department teachers and asked them if they would be willing to make a point of increase First Nations content into their programs in hopes of increasing engagement. All of the members are willing to do this. To date, not all have, but as I continue to collect and create teaching guides that will make this easy, I believe they will. The meeting also gave me new contacts and, in turn, these contacts have given me other contacts for resources and recommendations. I know that our school is in its infancy in regards to increasing its aboriginal understandings, but I believe that the growth will now continue, especially if we maintain our connection to AESN.

7.7.1 Sharing is the gift of the Network

We were struck again by the idea of sharing as a gift when we reviewed the transcripts of our discussions with teachers in the Nanaimo focus group. On this occasion, one AESN and district leader, herself an Aboriginal educator said:

"In Aboriginal cultures across Canada we get together for celebrations, and part of the protocol is sharing and cultural gift giving. I was sitting next to an Elder today; she was talking about that kind of sharing. The Network gives us access to shared learning. Linda and Judy say sharing is the gift. We all have access to the case studies people have done, and we acknowledge this, like an Aboriginal protocol. But sharing, giving it away is what we do; we don't hold onto anything. That's a good way of thinking about the Network. The cases and the work are great resources because as professionals we are always learning and learning from each other."

We think this idea of sharing as a gift is a powerful one; but we also think that the traditional forms of learning practiced in many Aboriginal cultures (and recognized in the principles of Aboriginal learning and the culturally inclusive pedagogical practices we've highlighted in our report) informs this idea significantly. It speaks to how the sharing of knowledge benefits not self, but others. That the purpose of teaching and engaging in deep learning is so that the benefit spreads and is used by those who take it and make it their own. Learning in this way is integral to the cyclical and emergent process emphasized through the cycle of inquiry promoted by the Network and in some cases, in district structures and processes (such as in Prince Rupert and Arrow Lakes).

7.7.2 Aboriginal teacher leadership

We also saw evidence during our study that the process of decolonizing the thinking of non-Aboriginal educators is being sparked by many of the Aboriginal educators who are involved in the Network. Earlier in this report we discussed how Aboriginal teachers have found the Network to be particularly helpful because it gave legitimacy to the work they were doing as educators working with Aboriginal learners and as advocates for effecting changes in schools so that Aboriginal learners could experience greater success. It also however, has provided a venue through which their inclusive approaches to teaching and learning can be more frequently and effectively profiled. And as we have described in this report, in some school districts powerful Aboriginal leaders have emerged, such as Debbie Leighton-Stephens in Prince Rupert and Laura Tait in Nanaimo.

The focus we've placed on the positive leadership these women provide might suggest that the climate in school districts is incredibly transparent and that all districts and non-Aboriginal educators are fully open to engaging in and learning from their Aboriginal colleagues. But this leadership, even when formally recognized by some, isn't always recognized or valued in every district.

For example, we interviewed one teacher who spoke at some length about her work in building bridges between her school and the broader Aboriginal community in which it was located. Her inquiry, while profoundly deep and transformative in scope - earning her recognition from Network leaders and from leading instructors at a BC University because of how it models giving voice to Aboriginal learners, has failed to capture even the slightest interest from principals, vice principals or district leaders within her own school district. She also described how the local teachers involved in NOII and AESN have largely ignored her successful work with Aboriginal students. She tried to explain in her interview why this happens:

"I have a large voice, I'm Aboriginal and I stand with my community. A lot of people find this very intimidating. So [when these Network members exclude me] it's not deliberate, it's culturally engrained in their place in the community. It's a tough position to walk in. I need to speak louder than most, and be knowledgeable; I needed to prove my credentials by getting a degree. I have to do a dog and pony show everywhere because I am Aboriginal. I am used to that; and I will always do it because it's for the benefit of children, to benefit their learning. All student learning, of course, but I have been working with Aboriginal students. It is time that their learning be just as important as all the other students. And that's what I am here to do. If I use a big voice, it's their voice. It has to be that way. And if that means I'm still excluded, I'm OK with that… now I am working on provincial projects and now I am moving to a district where I can effect learning."

We understand that it took considerable courage for this individual to name her colleagues as essentially practicing their white privilege in ways that excluded her and other culturally identifiable peoples from their deliberations and ongoing work. We cannot say that this feeling is widespread, but it reminds us that the work of decolonizing the education system is emotionally charged and will have bumps along the way. Such work is difficult but necessary, and it will require powerful Aboriginal voices and non-Aboriginal allies—leaders who can and will draw attention to the truths of our settler histories, including our colonial and racist mindsets—to continue to push and challenge educators, leaders and Network members alike to make a spaces for the learning of Aboriginal students, their families and communities.

7.8 Size and geographic location

As we near the end of our analysis, we want to discuss one additional matter that does not emerge directly from the data we've collected for this study, but instead represents an observation about the impact and scope of the AESN in effecting change in the BC educational landscape. We looked carefully at our participant list to see if we could determine the extent to which our study represented the diversity and sizes of the school districts across BC. As a part of our study we met with teachers and leaders from: Nanaimo, Sooke, Comox/Courtney, Prince Rupert, Smithers, Prince George, Vanderhoof, Kitimat, Ft. St. James, Fort Fraser, Ashcroft, Nakusp, New Denver, and Hartley Bay. As is evident from this list, the school districts and regions on this list are generally small and more rural and remote. Prince George is the more obvious outlier in this group as it is a larger, more urban region. However, we wondered the extent to which our observations should be framed through the lens of district size.

As our data shows, many individuals credit the Network for providing them with the tools and strategies for effecting changes in their teaching practice. One of the ways this was frequently expressed was in conversations that described the limitations of working in more remote or rural parts of the province. For example, in both of the case studies of school districts (Arrow Lakes and Prince Rupert) district leaders and teachers alike spoke to the lack of access they had to professional development opportunities, or how long distances over diverse geographical terrains often make travel and connecting with other teachers difficult. They sometimes spoke with envy of the availability of resources 'down the coast'. Despite these stated drawbacks however, what we saw was an expression of the saying "Necessity is the mother of invention": in other words, teachers, leaders and community members alike did what

needed to be done in order to find a way to make things work despite obstacles. And there was certainly plenty of evidence to suggest that this effort paid off in big ways as they have accomplished much over the years they have been involved in the Network, even if this involves working in more isolation or depending on less frequent visits to external professional learning opportunities. Districts also fill the gap as best they can by providing forms of financial support: we heard about teachers carpooling to make travel dollars stretch farther, or how a principal would provide internal support to assist with travel and/or professional development plans. We saw much creativity as individuals struggled to use what resources and strengths they had and put them to good use. And we saw how these districts embraced the AESN model deeply into their existing structures and processes, making a much more seamless and integrated delivery system devoted to improving Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student learning. These districts also took great advantage of the supports offered by the AESN principals, Drs. Halbert and Kaser. They visited these districts frequently over the years of their involvement as a way of providing on site professional support.

Could it be that smaller districts more avidly embrace the Network because of their size and perceived lack of resources? While we cannot be certain this is the case, we believe this observation warrants additional investigation. If this is true then it may be that the Network principals and its Network leaders should redouble their efforts to effecting changes in districts that are described as more rural and remote as the bulk of BC school districts fall into this category. We believe that any subsequent investigations into the effects and impact of the Network might want to target what we would call "mid sized" school districts—Nanaimo might be a good example of this category—to see how well a larger, more resourced district supports the work of the Network. It would also be useful to see how larger school districts – such as Surrey, Vancouver, or Victoria – use and/or promote Network activities in their districts. This would enable its principals to make informed decisions about how to continue to grow and support the AESN, and consider the extent to which its model might require modifications or enhancements.

§ 8: Summary of overall impacts: Sustained, initiated and emerging

In this section of the report we have sought to provide additional evidence from our interviews that illustrate the impacts the AESN is having on BC students, teachers, and districts. We have attempted to provide rich detail about how the Network operates structurally and over time in many different locations around the province to demonstrate the depth and scope of its impacts. When considering overall impact, as in our earlier discussions of the cases we created the categories of sustained, initiated and potential to help tease out the level and scope of impact. We therefore have summarized our assessment of impact into these categories.

8.1 A sustained overall impact on the culture of teachers, schools and districts

There is strong evidence to show sustained, deeply transformative impact in a range of school districts and schools. Both elementary and secondary schools are participants in the Network showing that its approach engages all teachers—from those involved in early learning initiatives to those who work with young adults transitioning out of the school system. This is because the inquiry model starts with the interests and needs of teachers within his/her own specific context. It provides space to develop thinking in diverse and unique ways and doesn't impose a particular model or 'way of doing things' but rather enables the diversity that is the teaching force in BC. It also capitalizes on teachers' deep interest in supporting student learning: this emphasis on putting learning results at the center of the teachers' efforts to innovate is a spectacularly successful approach. It avoids all the pitfalls of top down, systemic efforts at programmatic change because it values the professional knowledge, experience and capabilities of teachers. It honours their commitment to teaching and making a difference, and then uses that natural energy and passion for the work to invoke deeper thinking about how they can enhance student success. We think the model of teacher-based inquiry is here to stay; as we heard from some participants, it has become embedded in their own ongoing efforts to engage in professional development and learning. A network that achieves the degree of commitment, passion and dedication

we saw throughout this study tells us that it will be sustained even if only by the strength of will shared by its proponents. This is the Network's deepest and most profound area of impact.

8.2 A sustained impact in creating and profiling leadership for change

It was often difficult to discern if leadership enabled change, or if the changes wrought through the Network enabled leadership. Certainly we can say that the initial leadership of Drs. Kaser and Halbert was fundamental to launching the Network. It was their initial vision and belief that change could be supported using a grassroots, invitational approach. Yet we can also say that leaders emerged from the work of participating within the Network, and from there, the spiraling of these emergent leaders' influence to broader and more diverse contexts became evident. Several AESN members talked about 'shoulder tapping' as the way in which their strengths as teacher leaders within the Network were initially identified and recognized. Recognition did help to broaden the scope of Network impact as teachers could "see" role models that inspired and motivated. But it wasn't just this informal system of identifying and promoting "innovative thinkers"; existing formal school and district leaders who had an interest in and capacity to stimulate Network efforts were also built into the Network's early work. In this way, several prime locations for innovation were identified as early "lead organizations"— districts such as Prince Rupert for example, where school district efforts at improving Aboriginal student performance had been in place since at least 1989. In this way the process of embedding the Network into district cultures was both nurtured and modeled. In some ways, BC is educationally a small province, and as formal leaders, particularly Superintendents, are transferred from district to district, they imported their previous efforts to effect change through the Network, bringing new jurisdictions into the fold of inquiry-based districts. It is this two-pronged effort of nurturing existing innovative cultures and promoting or championing new leaders who emerge through the work that has the effect of bolstering the commitment of the AESN to a broader network of schools. The creation and promotion of educationally informed leadership is a significant and sustained impact of the Network.

In sum then, what we noticed was the importance of having educational leaders at the provincial level who have the capacity to support the work of local districts and schools, nurture the growth of new leaders and provide a professional 'spark' by creating and hosting events which profile promising and emerging practices in education that address diversity and create culturally inclusive spaces. In essence, these individuals bridge between multiple educational worlds by acting as knowledge translators for the field professionals they work with.

8.3 A sustained impact on student learning

We would be remiss if we did not highlight the scope and scale of change we saw in student learning, amongst both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners. The case study that examined more than 50 inquiry projects around the province illustrates the ways in which each and every inquiry traced and assessed the impacts of their inquiries on student learning. It is not that teachers do not regularly focus on improving their students learning; this is the everyday work of teachers as they work with their students. *However, the Network provided a structure and a process for systematically collecting written*

summaries of this work into the case study format promoted by the Network leaders in each district. The cases illustrate in concrete form evidence of how teachers went about engaging in improving their practice and investigating ways in which learning might be better realized. As such, the cases provide a remarkable record of and a database for documenting and building on initial investigations. We are not aware of any other programmatic initiative in the province that has this feature of documentation and evidence gathering (although we do note that annual Accountability reports produced by school districts aggregate student achievement data more broadly).

As was indicated in the case study analysis, there were ranges of different learning impacts reported by AESN members, although a focus on literacy and performance standards in reading and writing were a frequent early emphasis of inquiry work. In this report we discussed how teacher learning appeared to work through stages of understanding about the learning that matters for Aboriginal students in particular. We argued that there was evidence of a staged approach; that the focus on student learning began with more of an interest in academic measures and then shifted toward understanding how self-esteem/self-worth and belonging/acceptance were even more important to effecting school success. We draw from Cadwallader's (2010, BC Ministry of Education) Prezi, who makes this point: strong Aboriginal student identities are *enabling*. When learners have strong foundational roots into knowing themselves and their communities, they are more resilient and are less likely to feel they are being "forced out" of the schooling system.

This deepened understanding of the importance of identity required that teachers develop new or alternative ways to trace progress; we saw that some schools and districts were developing and/or modifying alternative forms of assessment, most notably rubrics that sought to map or chart students' progression in the development of "Aboriginal understandings". This points to another impact of the Network: its focus on assessing student learning in using different formative approaches so as to document over time the shift among students' attitudes and beliefs about Aboriginal peoples. While in its infancy, we certainly saw evidence of how teachers are approaching the task of measuring non-academic outcomes more consistently and in ways that incorporate Aboriginal pedagogies, knowledges, and ways of knowing and being.

8.4 A sustained impact on Aboriginal education policy and programs

As we discussed briefly earlier in this report, there have been efforts to effect change in Aboriginal education at the provincial level; a short history of these efforts was provided in the literature review. What we noted was that systemic approaches—initiated by government or the Ministry—were framed through policies that sought to shape districts' approaches to the goal of improving the success of Aboriginal students. This included collaboratively developed local Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements. We know that these were necessary initial efforts that would bring political attention for these matters to all school districts, but we also argued, by drawing from Williams' (2000) research, how the development of local Aboriginal education measures was a more successful approach as it built on the diversity and strengths of local communities.

The AESN has been a sustained and effective mechanism through which to bridge the chasm between provincial policy intentions and the needs of local Aboriginal learners (and their communities). This

is because policy documents do not mandate or include specific measures used in classrooms or schools; that isn't their purpose. They offer a framework for value statements. But without the specific intentionality of action, policies are often more cerebral: they represent "good intentions" but they are more difficult to enact. The AESN structure enables and promotes a move to action. The Network relies on the "good intentions" expressed in the EA's as a starting point, but bring it to life by requiring teachers to consider how to directly implement or bring those intentions to life in classrooms. This movement from policy to practice is a sustained activity of the Network and it has had considerable impact on the work done with teachers, leaders and community members as is evidenced by the data collected for this study. The Network has been a powerful catalyst through which local change has been realized. The Network has forever altered the landscape of Aboriginal education in BC, bringing it to a level of profile not experienced in its educational history to date.

8.5 An initiated impact on culturally responsive teaching practice

The AESN has made significant inroads into developing a space for how one goes about shifting teachers' practices in ways that decolonize their approaches to teaching and learning. The AESN was an outgrowth of the NOII, as noted earlier. It provided an important early platform for introducing inquiry-based research into teachers' daily practice. But it was when the idea of culturally responsive teaching and Aboriginal ways of knowing were incorporated into a second network, that significant changes in teacher's beliefs and attitudes began to shift.

As the cases and narratives illustrate, there were many teachers for whom this introduction to thinking about Aboriginal ways of knowing and culturally inclusive practices was completely new. For non-Aboriginal teachers in particular, the familiarity of schooling and the idea that as teachers they played a largely positive role in the lives of the children and families they worked with was the norm. To have this challenged; to see themselves as part of the problem and not part of the solution was an enormous shift. The powerful stories individual teachers shared with us show the extent of the dissonance they experienced. But it also shows their perseverance and willingness to embrace new ways of being and teaching. We think there have been some immense successes; but we are not all the way there yet. As the stories from some Aboriginal educators makes evident, there are still patterns of privilege that exist in schools around the province. And the voices of Aboriginal teachers, while strong, isn't always enough to end decades of settler thinking. We think that this is a powerful role that the Network can play; to model deconstructive thinking—by this we mean deliberate and ongoing efforts to unpack assumptions about education that serve to continually marginalize Aboriginal learners—and to promote what has been described in our literature review as anti-oppressive teaching practice. A focus on this, when coupled with the existing emphasis on understanding the holistic nature of teaching and learning with Aboriginal communities will ensure the impact builds towards sustained transformation.

8.6 An initiated impact on culturally responsive leadership

In a related observation we also believe that the Network has been exceptional in initiating practices that value and support the work of Aboriginal teacher leaders. As noted above, leadership is an absolute strength of the Network; but there is an opportunity to further nurture and support the work of

Aboriginal educational leaders. The AESN has provided an important mechanism through which individual Aboriginal leaders have been both promoted and recognized, yet we believe this work has not yet reached a point where the understandings of Aboriginal leadership have permeated the culture of the Network itself. There is some structural work that could be done to the Network model through which to more actively promote the role that Aboriginal leaders can and should play in transforming school district cultures and approaches to Aboriginal education. Aboriginal educational leaders bring the strength of what was described to us as "walking in two worlds" or "speaking in two voices" to the Network model: their heritage, values and ways of knowing and being provide the foundation from which their pedagogy flows ensuring that their endeavours in meeting student needs is approached in a holistic manner. This is modeled well in some school districts where Aboriginal teacher leaders have been promoted into formal positions of leadership. There is room to explore how this might be formalized in the structure of the Network so that emerging Aboriginal leaders can be given roles to develop their strengths as educational leaders and transformational change agents. From this cadre of dedicated learning centred leaders, districts and Network teams alike will be able to grow their capacity to engage in culturally responsive practices and transform the cultures of their schools to ones that embrace the capabilities and passions of their Aboriginal learners.

8.7 An initiated impact on understanding learning as a community based educational partnership

We saw in the review of the AESN case studies that more inquiry teams are venturing beyond the formal classroom walls into the broader community and looking to find partners in completing their inquiries. We see this as a particularly positive development. In districts like Prince Rupert where Aboriginal peoples have been deemed partners for more than 20 years, the approaches to integrating services and support systems is deeply embedded and District leaders, teachers, non-teaching staff and community members (Elders and other leaders) are genuine partners in planning and delivering education in ways that embrace the potential that their Aboriginal students clearly possess. We are reminded in particular of the inquiry in Vanderhoof where an Aboriginal Network leader is actively working in both formal school and pre-school learning activities and is carefully tying together the strands of life-long learning with Aboriginal pedagogy and culturally inclusive strategies that engage learning support wherever it exists in the community: it is becoming a much more seamless and integrated approach to thinking about the learning needs of the *family*. There are other communities and schools around the province where this work is also in its early stages. This work needs to be more fully valued and recognized as a part of Network inquiry processes and believe that the Network structure could be altered so as to more deliberately support and encourage teachers to name how and who they are involving as partners in their work. Supporting community members to participate in showcases at the regional and provincial level might also be a tool through which this could be achieved. This could be accomplished by supporting community members who travel to share their learnings with teachers and leaders across the province.

8.8 An emergent impact on recognizing and disrupting colonial mindsets and actions

The AESN has had some very significant transformational impacts on schools, teachers, and districts around the province, the methods by which non-Aboriginal teachers are 'taking up' the challenge of deconstructing their existing colonial mindsets is in very early stages and so we characterize it as an "emergent impact". Certainly some of the narratives we've included in this report point to the deep reflexive work of some non-Aboriginal teachers: the impact for these individuals is profound and important to their emerging identities as anti-oppressive educators. Yet this is not something promoted with regularity in the Network; nor is it regularly modeled by its participants in formal settings. Anti-oppressive educators and Aboriginal scholars make the point that the work of deconstructing one's own privilege is an ongoing and necessary part of how one 'becomes' an Aboriginal ally. We would like the Network to find ways of more frequently highlighting the nature of continually engaging in this deep, deconstructive work as a hallmark of inquiry.

§ 9: Concluding observations for policy makers

In this report we have used rich description and the narratives and voices of participants to tell at length the story of the AESN. We believe that policy makers will be able to realize the significance of the Network's impact based on the scope and depth of information we have documented. However, in closing we want to make several points that we believe have important policy implications for how government might take steps to continue the excellent work that has been accomplished by the AESN members and leaders.

9.1 The need for consistent and ongoing support

We know that governments are always stretched to find dollars to support the many initiatives they believe will make a difference for their citizens. However, we also note that the AESN has made excellent use of its limited dollars. Because of the very real and substantial impacts that the AESN model provides for teachers and inquiry teams in their schools, we believe this centralized level of support should be continued. From a systemic change perspective, the impact of this small investment is many times amplified as learning is shared across schools, districts, and among network members.

However, we have also observed how some districts have levered their own funds to help teacher inquiry. This is because, as this study makes abundantly clear, the goal of enhancing the success of Aboriginal students is a shared one, and the Network provides a model that supplements and extends the impact of districts' work on this priority. We believe that this observation merits consideration: what ways might provincial policy makers encourage this kind of levering of additional resources? There are likely different models, but we believe that providing some regionally targeted support in addition to school inquiry grants might be a wise way of using limited resources.

We also want to emphasize that the work of **Aboriginal educational leaders** is having a significant impact on efforts to enhance Aboriginal student success in every region we undertook to study. Not only are they effecting change in the success of Aboriginal students, they are making important and significant inroads into shifting the thinking of non-Aboriginal leaders and teachers around the province. Their work is inspiring change on a transformative scale. Yet we also believe that this success is due to the commitment of the Network principals and the individual leaders who have responded to the call for working as partners in this morally centered work. The work of changing the practice of

non-Aboriginal teachers requires significant effort, and we saw that the most effective of these efforts involved deeply engaging non-Aboriginal teachers and leaders in experiences that involved working with and within their local Aboriginal communities. It also involved doing important work at deconstructing the colonial mindsets that are naturalized within the current mainstream educational system. Engaging in this work must be much more systematized if we are to effect the instruction of the largely white, middle class teaching force, but we believe, on the basis of this study and our analysis, that it needs to be under the guidance and tutelage of Aboriginal leaders already working within the BC school system. We think of this as an investment in our future as an inclusive, respectful and successful nation.

Finally, we now have a strong baseline of data to show how the AESN has transformed many districts and schools; to illustrate its continued effectiveness funds could also be set aside to regularly report on the impacts of the Network. This might be built into annual reporting mechanisms but we believe another larger scale assessment of impact should be completed within the next three years.

9.2 Final words

It seems fitting to end our report with a story, one that might serve as a metaphor for what the AESN and its partners seek to accomplish.

Eber Hampton is an Aboriginal educator and former University President who has devoted much of his career to thinking about and promoting what it means to reform education in Canada in ways that include and honour wise ways of knowing and being in the world. He tells a story in a 1995 publication where he meets an older white man in a grocery store who asks him if "he has some time". Assuming he wants help carrying groceries, Hampton agrees, only to be confronted by the man who walks towards him with an empty cardboard box. They explore the box together, eventually discovering "You and I together can see six sides of this box". Hampton writes:

> Standing on the earth with an old white man I began to understand. I had thought he wanted me to carry his groceries but instead he gave me something that carries me, protects me and comforts me… I am often so close that I can only see one side. Rarely am I able to step back and see one or two other sides but it takes many of us to see more than that. As in all conversations, it is the difference in our knowledge and language that makes the conversation difficult and worthwhile. It is this common earth that we stand on that makes communication possible. Standing on the earth with the smell of spring in the air, may we accept each other's right to live, to define, to think, and to speak. (1995, p. 41-42).

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Appendix A: Journey of Resilience

By Roberta Edzerza, Kate Cree and Pam Groves, Prince Rupert.

CANOE JOURNEY FOR RESILIENCE

Your trip through life in which you can deal with problems
and you can bounce back from life's challenges.

The People in Your Canoe

* Healthy Relationships

Tools for Resilience

Attitude	Actions
1)	1)
2)	2)
3)	3)
4)	4)
5)	5)
	6)
	7)
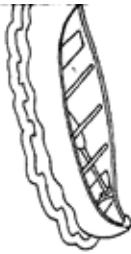
Support System

Challenges, Choices and Changes

* Peer pressure
* New adventures

Back Eddy of Bad Habits
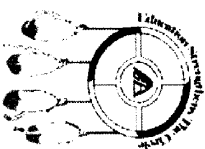
* Smoking

Resilient Route

Self-destructive Route

The Jou

Appendix B: Aboriginal Understandings

By Laura Tait, Nanaimo.

Aboriginal Understandings Learning Progression – SD68 Aboriginal Education

	Moving Toward the Water	Boarding the Canoe	Raising your Paddle	Journey Into Deeper Waters
	Awareness implies a sense of 'need to know'	**Developing** implies a willingness to address one's own understandings and beliefs	**Acquiring** implies a demonstration of knowledge and respect	**Action/ Advocacy** implies a demonstration of knowledge, respect and a commitment to advocacy
Beliefs and Attitudes towards Aboriginal Peoples	• Recognizes that knowledge may need to be enhanced • Aware that issues exist around Aboriginal peoples	• Demonstrates a willingness to enhance one's knowledge and understanding • May bring an informed perspective to current issues	• Demonstrates a responsibility to enhance one's knowledge and understanding • Possesses an intention to bring an informed and critical perspective to current issues and acts upon those intentions • Demonstrates respect for Aboriginal people	• Provides leadership to enhance others' knowledge and understanding • Seeks out opportunities to act on the injustices toward Aboriginal people
Knowledge of Aboriginal Peoples and History on local, regional and national levels	Demonstrates awareness of • Local Aboriginal peoples and territories • Aboriginal languages and cultures • Indigenous Knowledge • Canadian history as it pertains to Aboriginal people	Beginning to explore the topics of • Local Aboriginal peoples and territories • Aboriginal languages and cultures • Indigenous Knowledge • History and the impact of colonization • the impact of the Indian Act on present day Aboriginal people • the contributions of Aboriginal people to contemporary society	Demonstrates knowledge of • Local Aboriginal peoples and territories • Aboriginal languages and cultures • Indigenous Knowledge • History and the impact of colonization • the impact of the Indian Act on present day Aboriginal people • the contributions of Aboriginal people to contemporary society	• Recognizes the influence of the dominant culture, while striving to foster the Aboriginal Worldview • Demonstrates and practices a knowledge and respect for Indigenous Pedagogy

Laura Tait, SD68 Aboriginal Education 2011

Appendix C: Aboriginal Animal Traits

Submitted by Ken Barisoff, Arrow Lakes.

Aboriginal Animal Traits and Meanings

Beaver   Bear   Eagle   Frog
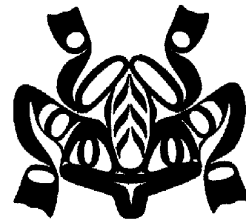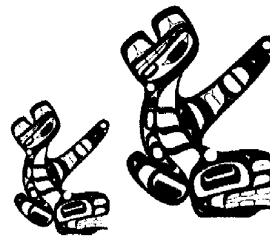
Heron   Hummingbird   Killer Whale

Loon   Moon   Owl   Raven

Salmon   Thunderbird   Whale   Wolf

Aboriginal Animal Traits and Meanings

Beaver

Creative, Artistic and Determined. Also known as the carpenter of the animal kingdom. A builder of dreams.
Beaver is an important crest and the subject of many legends. One legend tells of the origin of the beaver: A woman with brown hair dammed a small stream to make a pool for swimming. As she swam, her leather apron kept slapping the water. The pool became a lake and, because of scolding words from her husband, she refused to leave it. She became covered with brown fur, her apron turned into a tail, and thus she became the first beaver. Beaver reminds us that we have to act on our dreams to make them a reality.

Bear

Strength, Learned Humility, Motherhood, Teaching. The protector of the animal kingdom, awakening the power of the unconscious.
A symbol of great strength, authority and mobility, and is an important family crest. Because of its power and human-like qualities, the bear was referred to by West Coast people as Elder Kinsmen. When killed, it was taken to the chief's house, sprinkled with eagle down (a symbol of welcome and friendship) and generally treated as a high ranking guest.

Eagle

Great Strength, Leadership, Prestige, Spirit healing and Creation. Eagle also has a strong connection to Peace
Symbol of great wisdom, authority and power. Long a symbol of spiritual power and illumination eagles inspire people of all societies. Their energy is healing and aids in creation. One of the principal crests of the West Coast Indians. Many myths and legends surround the Eagle. Eagle down, a symbol of peace and friendship, was, and still is, sprinkled before guests in welcome dances and other ceremonial occasions.
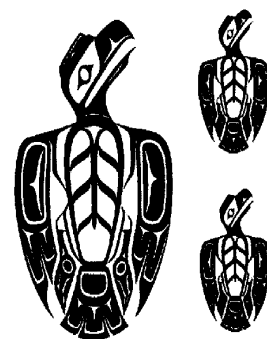
Frog

Spring & New Life - Communicator, Stability
The Frog was a guardian symbol. When strangers approached, the croaking of the frog would serve as a warning. The Frog was said to have warned humans of impending danger. The Frog is frequently depicted in the art of the Northwest Coast and many legends are attached to this whimsical little animal.

Heron

Patience, Graceful, Aggressive self determination and self reliance.
Follower of ones own path. No structure, little stability and no security.

Hummingbird

Love, Beauty, Intelligence, Spirit Messenger that represents friendship and playfulness. Tireless Joy and the Nectar of life.
The Hummingbird is also a symbol of good luck and good fortune. It was considered a positive sign to spot a Hummingbird just prior to some major event such as hunting or traveling to another village. Hard workers and fiercely independent. Hummingbird teaches us how to find the miracle of joyful living from your own life circumstances.
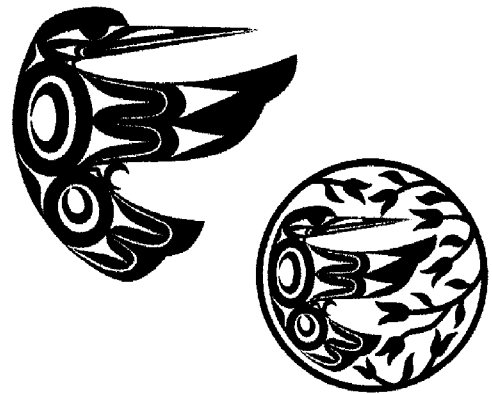
Killer Whale

Traveler & Guardian - Symbol of Good, Power of Song, Awakening Inner Depths
The Whale is a popular symbol for romance as they mate for life. The Whale like the Wolf, stays with its family and travel in large pods.
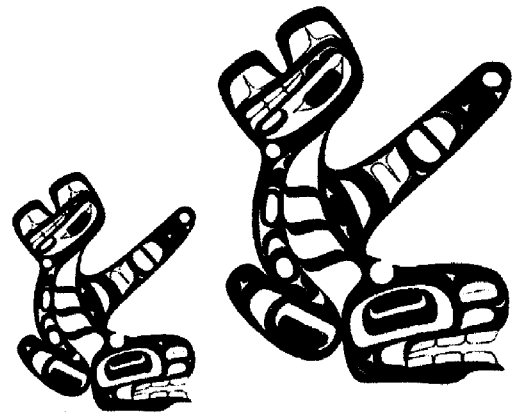
Loon

Peace, Tranquility - Generous Giving Nature, reawakening of old hopes wishes and dreams.
The Loon is very much a part of the West Coast aura; it plays a significant part in the symbols of the West Coast Indians. The loon is always around water, and water is the ancient symbol for the astral plane, dreams and other levels of consciousness. Loons ask you pay attention to your dreams. The Loons call though melancholy and eerie may also be telling you that all your hopes, wishes and dreams you may have tucked away in the back of your heart are about to come to the surface. If you compromise your dreams you may truly find yourself haunted.

Moon
Protector and Guardian of the Earth by Night
The Moon lightens the darkness of the night. The Moon was the exclusive crest of only a few of the highest ranking chiefs. The Raven is said to have released the Moon into the sky. The stars are pieces of the Moon that flung off when Raven threw it into the sky. An eclipse was said to be a Codfish trying to swallow the Moon. In order to prevent this, a bonfire was set with green boughs to add smoke. As people danced ceremonially around the fire, thick smoke rose to the sky causing the codfish to cough and spit out the Moon. When the people saw the Moon appear at the edge of the mountain they would drum to bring the Moon higher into the sky.

Owl

Wisdom, Omens, Vision of the night
No bird has as much myth and mystery surrounding it than the owl. Part of this mystical aura is due to the fact that the bird is nocturnal and the night time has always seemed mysterious to humans. The owl is a symbol of the feminine, the moon, and the night. Because of it association with the moon it has ties to fertility and seduction. The owl is bird of magic and darkness of prophecy and wisdom.

Raven
Creation & Knowledge - Bringer of the Light, magic
One of the most prominent figures of the first peoples. The Raven is credited with giving the light, fire, and water to the Indians. He had the power to change at will into an animal form or to that of a human being. The Raven is the transformer, trickster and creator. Known in legends as the one who released the sun, moon, and stars; discovered man in a clamshell; brought the salmon and the water; and taught man how to fish and hunt.

Salmon
Dependability and Renewal - A Provider
Symbol of abundance and prosperity, the salmon was the chief sustenance for the West Coast Indians. The Pacific Northwest Coast people believed that Salmon were actually humans with eternal life how lived in a large house far under the ocean. In the Spring, they put on their Salmon disguises and offered themselves to the villagers as food. The tribes believed that when entire fish skeletons were returned to the sea, the spirits would rise again and change into Salmon

people. In this way, the cycle could begin again the following year.

Thunderbird

Powerful & Mystical - A Leader of All.
A mythological bird who was the creator and controller of all elements and spirits. When he flew, the flapping of his wings caused the thunder, and the flashing of his eyes caused the lightning. He lived in the highest of mountains.

Whale

Bravery and Strength
Often depicted as a symbol of great strength and bravery, but was sometimes feared, as the Indians believed the whale would capsize their boats.

Wolf

Intelligence & Leadership - Strong Sense of Family, Guardianship, Ritual and Spirit

Revered because it was a good hunter, the wolf symbolizes cunning and was often associated with a special spirit a man had to acquire to become a successful hunter. As Wolves mate for life and live in close family units usually traveling in packs, they are regarded as a family-oriented symbol in West Coast Native culture. Wolf is the land manifestation of the Killer Whale as they mate for life, protect their young and do not separate from their families.

http://www.littlebearart.ca/mythology.html

Animal meanings from Wiki-Answers

Thunderbird: Thunderbird is the most powerful supernatural creature. He lived in the mountains and fed on whales. When he flapped his wings, thunder rolled. Known as a hero in the legends of the Coast Salish Legends.

Killer Whale: The Killer Whale is the manifestation of Wolf; it is held in great awe for its size and power.

Eagle: Is a symbol of both power and prestige as well as peace and friendship. Eagle feathers are still considered sacred and were part of many ceremonies and rituals.

Moon: Is the protector and guardian of earth by night.

Sun: Is the protector and guardian of earth by day.

Wolf: The wolf is a symbol of strength in the family and the kinship associated with it. It is known to have the strength and loyalty in all relationships, and is a great team player with effort on behalf of all in the community.

Salmon: Is known as the provider of life, he is a symbol of abundance of prosperity. Salmon was and still is one of the main sources of diets for many of Salish People.

Beaver: Has a strong sense of family and home with openness to alternatives and the power of working towards goals and attaining a sense of achievement, . The Beaver has a understanding of the power in nature and works in harmony with it.

Loon: Is a symbol of sharing peace and tranquility and having a generous and giving nature.

Owl: The owl is a symbol of wisdom and is known to warn people of danger or death.

Otter: The otter is a symbol of trust and loyalty.

Heron: The heron is a symbol of one who is very patient, graceful and easy going.

Frog: A symbol of a new begining to all things, tho very small the frog plays a great role in our culture, he lets us know when it is time to put away winter activities and prepare for the new season.

Bear: A bear symbolizes consistency and stability of action, has the ability to discover the inner truth about oneself, and has great self awareness, with a desire to deliberate about choices and actions.

Raven: Raven is known as the Transformer or Trickster, and is a hero. Native Legends credit Raven with bravery and among other things, releasing the Sun and Moon.

http://wiki.answers.com/Q/What_do_the_animals_on_a_totem_pole_mean#ixzz2BZh565li
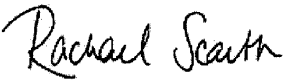
Appendix D: Ethics

Human Research Ethics Board
Office of Research Services
Administrative Services Building
PO Box 1700 STN CSC
Victoria British Columbia V8W 2Y2 Canada
Tel 250-472-4545, Fax 250-721-8960
ethics@uvic.ca www.research.uvic.ca

University of Victoria

Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR	**Catherine McGregor**
UVic STATUS:	**Faculty**
UVic DEPARTMENT:	**EPLS**

ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER	13-004
ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE:	24-Jan-13
APPROVED ON:	24-Jan-13
APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE:	23-Jan-14

PROJECT TITLE: **BC Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network (AESN) Impact Assessment**

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS: AEN Advisory Group: Judy Halbert, (Delta School District), Den Koehn (Terrace School District)
Co-researchers (UVic): Allyson Fleming, Kathy Sanford

DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING: **The Office of Federal Interlocutor for Mètis and Non-Status Indians**

CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol.

Modifications
To make any changes to the approved research procedures in your study, please submit a "Request for Modification" form. You must receive ethics approval before proceeding with your modified protocol.

Renewals
Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a "Request for Renewal" form before the expiry date on your certificate. You will be sent an emailed reminder prompting you to renew your protocol about six weeks before your expiry date.

Project Closures
When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please notify the Human Research Ethics Board by submitting a "Notice of Project Completion" form.

Certification

This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria Research Regulations Involving Human Participants.

Rachael Scarth

Dr. Rachael Scarth
Associate Vice-President, Research

Certificate Issued On: 24-Jan-13

13-004   McGregor, Catherine

There's a network in British Columbia that is transforming schools. In this report we explore how these teachers and leaders are examining their practices with Aboriginal children and communities.

"If we are going to be professional, and thoughtful teachers, then we have to ask, challenge, and question: How do we do this better, make it better for kids? In our discussions, we've also come to understand that what is good for aboriginal students is good for everyone… but it took all of us challenging the status quo to finally figure it out."

—Network participant

"I know that racism is a very powerful word. It does imply some negative intention, which I do not believe teachers foster. I believe that teachers are involved in education to make the world a better place. It is important however, once we become aware of a practice that does not promote that agenda, to change the way we think and act. Being part of the Network helped me to understand that in order to change the way we think and act, we need the support of others; a network as it were, where collaboration and change are part of the learning cycle."

— Network participant