Considering the Achievements
and Effectiveness
of First Nations Schools

Reaching for Success

A Discussion Paper

Written by

Barbara Kavanagh

with

The First Nations Education Steering Committee

Standards Project Advisory Committee

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Introduction

In the context of the history of First Nations people, First Nations schools have been in existence for a relatively short period of time. When the Saddle Lake Reserve took over the operation of the Blue Quills Residential School in 1969, it became the first school in this country to be First Nations controlled (York, 1990). In the three decades following that occasion, the number of First Nations schools has grown quite rapidly.

In British Columbia, there are now 130 First Nations schools in operation with over 6600 students enrolled (in comparison to approximately 3000 First Nations students enrolled in public schools). The circumstances in which those schools operate vary tremendously. Geographically, the schools are located throughout the province, including in the far north and the western extremes. Many of the schools are located in very remote or semi-isolated locations. Others operate in or around large urban centres. The grade levels they offer range from nursery/day care only, to some elementary, to elementary and secondary. Finally, the number of students enrolled in the schools differs significantly, ranging from only twenty to thirty students to several hundred. Given that diversity, it is not surprising that the priorities and needs of the schools reflect a similar range of differences.

What is perhaps most remarkable about the evolution in First Nations schools in such a relatively short time is the extent of their accomplishments. In spite of tremendous challenges, generally inadequate funding, and too often little or no support, some determined people within communities managed to establish schools which have made important achievements.

There are currently approximately 130 First Nations schools.

Grades

√ **approximately 33% offer only kindergarten programs;**
√ **21% offer kindergarten and some elementary;**
√ **31% offer kindergarten, elementary and some secondary; and**
√ **15% are adult learning centres.**

Student Population

√ **Approximately 16% of the schools enrol less than 10 students;**
√ **27% enroll between 11 and 25;**
√ **21% between 26 and 50;**
√ **9% between 51 and 75;**
√ **13% between 76 and 100;**
√ **9% between 101 and 150; and**
√ **4% over 150 students.**

The question which many First Nations schools now face is how to determine and demonstrate that what they are doing is effective. Answering that question, however, raises many challenging issues. Administrators, school governance authorities, teachers, parents, students, community leaders and other community members are all concerned that schools provide an "effective" education, but the only broadly recognized tools which have been available to measure that effectiveness have been provincial standards. That situation is extremely problematic. If First Nations are to be self-determining, they must be allowed to establish their own goals and judge the effectiveness of their education systems according to their own expectations and ideas.

This project was implemented in an effort to explore the possibilities which will arise when First Nations are allowed the freedom to set their own education standards. But the exercise is also about providing an opportunity for First Nations people to think about what they want to do differently. Too often, time and resources are not available to allow for planning and creative thinking about what can be done in new and exciting ways. This initiative, then, is not simply about accountability; it is about improvement.

The key theme which has arisen through the development of this paper is flexibility. It is very clear that the design and implementation of a rigid set of measurement criteria will not assist First Nations schools in their efforts to provide quality educational opportunities to their students. Rather, the goal of this project has always been to outline general expectations for all schools -- expectations which each school can then interpret, adapt and meet in their own ways and according to their own goals and circumstances.

Several other important themes are also evident in this paper, including:

- the need for balance in the lives of students, including, among others, balance between their lives in and out of school, and in and out of the community, balance between their personal goals and family and community responsibilities, and balance between their academic learning and personal and social development;

- the need to bring together the traditional with the contemporary, providing students with the skills and knowledge which will enable them to function in any capacity and in any situation, built upon the solid foundation which comes from an understanding of and pride in their First Nations languages, cultures, traditions, and values;

- the importance of meeting the needs of all students, regardless of their needs, learning styles, circumstances or special gifts;

- the importance of involving everyone in collective decision-making and efforts toward the development of children and youth, including school staff, parents, families, community leaders, other community members, social service workers, and, perhaps most importantly, the students themselves; and

- a recognition that schools are a part of the community in which they operate, which means acknowledging the circular relationship between healthy nations and healthy schools.

Another point which is central to any consideration of education standards is the ability to follow-up on the expectations and criteria outlined. If standards are defined, but First Nations schools are without the funding and other resources necessary to implement those standards, the schools are automatically set up for failure. This project, therefore, is being complemented by continual efforts to ensure that First Nations schools are provided adequate support.

In the meantime, it is important to remember the accomplishments that First Nations schools have already made, in spite of the challenges they face, and to celebrate the advances that have been made in First Nations education since the establishment of First Nations schools. As a participant at one of the project workshops asserted, "we've shown that, despite a lack of concern shown by the federal or provincial governments, and even sometimes by our own leadership, we've grown and succeeded!"

1. Background Information
Why "Standards"?

This paper represents one component of a larger research project being initiated by the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) and the First Nations Schools Association (FNSA). That project is intended to consider issues associated with the effectiveness of First Nations schools in providing educational opportunities to their students. This component of the research builds upon the *Standards for First Nations Schools Project*, a discussion paper prepared by Rita Jack for FNESC and the FNSA in 1997.

The issue of education standards has been a long-standing concern of First Nations and FNESC. For example, the summary of community regional sessions organized by FNESC in 1995 and 1996 indicates that "a First Nations Schools Association could organize evaluations for First Nations schools which would allow member schools to set standards and determine the mechanisms for evaluation" (Williams, 1996). In addition, the FNESC regional sessions summary of 1997 notes that:

> to measure the effectiveness of First Nations control and jurisdiction over First Nations education, First Nations must be able to develop and evaluate their own standards for education. First Nations people agree that the standards of education for First Nations learners must be at least equal to those of the provincial system and should allow for a transfer between systems. However, they also believe that to fully meet the goals of cultural relevance and appropriateness the existing standards must be enhanced" (Williams, 1997).

As Jack (1997) notes, the purpose of her paper was to present issues associated with standards for First Nations education, and to establish a foundation for discussions with representatives of First Nations and First Nations schools. Jack's paper and the discussions which followed were intended to begin a more detailed consideration of existing standards for education, the effectiveness and appropriateness of those standards for First Nations schools, and possible alternate standards, based upon recommendations by First Nations schools representatives and First Nations education specialists.

1.1 A Word About the Term "Standards"

The term "standards" is perceived by many people to have a negative connotation, as it is often associated with notions of conformity. That, however, is not the interpretation of the term which has been used throughout this project. While the term standards was used in the discussion paper by Jack, and it may be used periodically in this paper, the aim of this project is *not* to identify a series of rigid criteria against which school success is to be strictly assessed. Representatives of First Nations schools have clearly indicated that an inflexible standards framework will not meet their needs, and will not reflect the variety of situations of First Nations schools, students, communities, and families. Too often, the need to comply with set standards overshadows efforts aimed at capacity building within schools, and restricts schools from establishing appropriate and innovative education programs.

Research supports the notion that the rigid application of strict criteria is not a useful approach to ensuring school

"I think that First Nations schools would perhaps agree to many common outcomes, provided that they are put within the context of the community."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"Many of our objectives will be common, even though our approaches may differ."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

success. Newman, King and Rigdon (1997) examined issues related to the accountability of education systems and the enhancement of school performance. The authors found that strong accountability structures are difficult to implement, and can present serious obstacles to or undermine a school's organizational capacity. They also note that "highly prescriptive standards deny school staff both the "owner-ship" or commitment and the authority it needs to work collaboratively to achieve a clear purpose for student learning." According to those authors, bottom-up initiatives are necessary for improvement, and internal accountability mechanisms have been shown to be most effective.

Rather than focus on precise standards, then, this project is intended to gather and share ideas related to the establishment of expectations, assessment techniques, the evaluation of student learning, and the achievement of school goals. As Newman, King and Rigdon (1997) maintain, collective education agencies — like FNESC and the FNSA — can facilitate useful exercises related to the cultivation or reinforcement of widespread consensus around professional norms, and establish **external signals** to help schools define their own standards and the kinds of information collected. This project will outline a framework within which individual schools can set their own standards for performance and a responsible reporting system, by highlighting important issues and considering areas for school and staff development. That is the context within which the term "standards" is being used.

"I personally don't have a problem with the term standards, provided that it is defined by the community according to community expectations."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"We can't impose standards on communities, but we can give them models. We can outline ingredients for success, and talk about effective education practices."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

1.2 Project Components

By highlighting a number of key issues associated with the education of First Nations students, this project will attempt to provide information to enhance school performance by improving the level to which they aspire. This project involved three phases:

- the preparation of a draft framework paper, which attempted to build upon the work of Jack (1997) and outline a more detailed framework for the consideration of issues associated with school success;
- the implementation of five regional workshops, which allowed people from throughout the province an opportunity to critique the framework, add relevant information and considerations, and gather examples of high standards for school and student performance and approaches to assessment; and
- the redrafting of the framework paper to include the information collected through the regional sessions.

Following the completion of this project, it is expected that additional work will be undertaken to further the consideration of these issues. Several recommendations made by people who attended the project workshops are included in Appendix One. FNESC and the FNSA will attempt to respond to those recommendations, and to continue their efforts to identify and define high and realistic standards for student achievement and for the organizational capacity of First Nations schools, without imposing uniform tasks or tests, or setting rigid and unrealistic expectations.

2. Discussing the Concepts of Education Standards or School Performance Indicators

As Jack (1997) notes, the issue of standards is critical to the development of education. Education standards, she argues, are the agreements we make as a society regarding the results we expect students to achieve, and they are the most basic specifications that "education architects" can use in designing and building unique systems of teaching and learning which are appropriate for each community.

The exact meaning of the term standards, however, is unclear. Standards have been defined as the degree of excellence required for particular purposes; principles of integrity, propriety, or honesty; education aims; community expectations; or yardsticks against which performance can be assessed. Education standards can also be viewed as something to which schools can aspire, and effective schools are sometimes defined as those with high expectations about student achievement, behaviour, and school goals.

Based upon its analysis of international efforts to set standards, the Organization on Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (1995) concludes that standards are "indicators of quality that specify expectations for students." The OECD (1989) has also suggested that the concept of education standards includes two components: (1) clarifying educational aims and goals, on which standards can be founded; and (2) developing information and indicators that, as far as possible, allow debate, reflect the goals, and identify key challenges. Both of the steps are mutually reinforcing, and should be based upon a proc-

When I think about community discussions of standards, I think of it in terms of the school staff telling community members "you have told us what you want; this is what we've heard; we will now strive to provide no less."

Workshop Participant, May, 1998.

ess of consensus building, rather than widening rifts in the pursuit of specifics. The OECD (1995) therefore maintains that standards must be set through a patient process of consensus building, which must inspire trust and confidence by the facilitation of ample and reliable feedback and a sensitive communications strategy.

The establishment of standards is not a straightforward task. It is a comprehensive undertaking that will have relevance for almost all other activities within a school. Standards, according to some sources, should be demanding, but fair, and they should have a clear purpose. Developing standards has been said to involve the identification of explicit, schoolwide expectations that focus on student performance, mechanisms for collecting and reviewing relevant information, and a culture of peer pressure among teachers.

The issue of standards is highly complex. There is some interaction between the setting and assessing of standards, so the issue of standards relates directly to issues of evaluation. The existence of standards and evaluation criteria can also offer credibility to institutions, which will increase the freedom and opportunities available to their graduates. In this way, "standards" are related to issues of credentials and accreditation.

Schools that start with an identified mission, good hiring practices, and family and community commitment to education programs have been said to have an advantage in terms of the development of standards, indicating the relationship of standards to several core aspects of schools and education systems.

It is also almost impossible to discuss issues of standards without some consideration of funding. Implementing measures to enhance school effectiveness would be much more successful if First Nations schools had an adequate and stable funding base. Unfortunately, representatives of First Nations schools have clearly and consistently articulated the inadequacy of existing funding levels. In spite of the tremendous financial constraints under which they operate, however, the accomplishments of First Nations schools are remarkable, and this paper will attempt to outline the potential which exists for even greater levels of success without focusing only on the very real and significant need for increased funding for First Nations schools.

"Until we can afford to offer a quality education program, how can we talk about implementing a quality education program."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

2.1 The Imposition of Standards on First Nations

In her discussion paper, Jack (1997) includes a thorough discussion of the history of First Nations education in this country, and a reference to the fact that "the process of educating First Nations since the inception of a formal education system has been to subject First Nations students to the standards imposed by the government of the day." Jack also notes that while First Nations have had some success in taking back control of and responsibility for education, fiscal arrangements demand that First Nations schools maintain the standards and curriculum of the provincial education system.

"First Nations people do not have input into setting public standards, and those expectations are not the same as ours."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

The Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) insists that First Nations schools reflect provincial guidelines in order for them to receive funding. For Band Operated Schools, the *DIA Management Regime and Initial Allocations, Section 1.2 Program Approval/Teacher Certification* states that:

"Some students will never progress sequentially through the public system. Different systems are required. We need to reach for new options for portions of our communities."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998.

"Provincial standards are meaningless to First Nations schools. They are aimed at financial considerations only."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"The public school system has written down all kinds of things about student achievement, and embedded them in all kinds of policies. But we need to keep open to a broad range of approaches and avoid bureaucracies which are unresponsive to the needs of our kids."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"Tying the provision of the resources we need to provincial standards is offensive."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

1.2.1 Program and curriculum offered in band schools must meet Ministry of Education curriculum standards.

1.2.2 … bands must employ certified teachers … required to be members in good standing of the British Columbia College of Teachers …

First Nations schools can also become Independent Schools, but if they choose to do so that are still subject to provincial legislation and provincial requirements and standards.

More (1984) highlights this difficulty in the *Okanagan Nicola Indian Quality of Education Study*. More cites the DIA *Indian Education Paper Phase 1* (1982), which indicates that the DIA is responsible for ensuring that the quality of Indian education programs is in line with Canadian provincial standards.

Studies have consistently demonstrated, however, that within the public school system, First Nations students generally have not enjoyed levels of success equal to other learners (see, among other sources, Jack, 1997; RCAP, 1996; Matthew, 1996; Battiste, 1995; Haig-Brown, 1995; Comeau and Santin, 1990; York, 1990; The Royal Commission on Education, 1998; National Indian Brotherhood, 1984; National Indian Brotherhood, 1972, all cited in Kavanagh, 1997). The workshop participants also maintained that the public school system should not be used as a model for educating First Nations students. That system, it was argued, is too inflexible and too focused on financial issues, and is generally failing First Nations students. Jack (1998) concludes that, based upon the problems First Na-

tions students experience in the public education system, it is timely to assess the utility of applying its standards to First Nations schools.

Another important issue for consideration is the purpose of First Nations schools. First Nations schools were developed for a variety of reasons, including the need to provide for a more meaningful and supportive environment for First Nations students, and in an effort to incorporate First Nations culture, history and language into their curriculum and school structure. Efforts to do so, however, have taken place without an established framework for planning, development or evaluation (Jack, 1997). The standards established by the BC Ministry of Education clearly are not specific to nor do they reflect the goals which are unique to First Nations schools. As the Assembly of First Nations notes in its document *Towards a Vision of Our Future*, Volume 1 (1988):

> First Nations must develop national minimal standards for First Nations education as guidelines for First Nations Education Authorities. These guidelines must reflect the First Nations philosophies, programs and instruction.

Jack (1997) highlights the need for standards or expectations, as she states:

> We must make it clear to our students what it is they need to know and be able to do in order to be successful. We must think this through clearly and articulate it in order to guarantee that our system will be held accountable for providing high quality and equitable education for all First Nations students.

"In First Nations schools, we must decide how we will describe ourselves, and why we exist. That is fundamental. Everything else is just the mechanics of getting things done."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998.

"It is important that we explore and research the issue of standards for First Nations schools. Too often, public schools are held up as the measuring sticks and benchmarks of success, but that is a system which is failing our students."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"First Nations schools were built from a belief that our kids deserve better."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"Band schools are intended to make our people strong again."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

In numerous meetings, conferences, and workshops facilitated by FNESC and the FNSA, the importance of education standards has also been raised, with First Nations participants speaking to the need to develop and evaluate First Nations standards of education with which First Nations people must agree.

The framework included below is intended to extend discussions of this pressing issue. Battiste (1995) notes that "Aboriginal communities that have assumed control of their schools are still plagued by questions of how to implement Indian education in the 21st Century. What goals and outcomes are important? What is appropriate, meaningful, and necessary?" This framework attempts to address those questions by highlighting several key components of First Nations education, outlining some of the issues associated with each component, and, wherever possible, suggesting some relevant "aspirations" for First Nations schools. All of the ideas included, however, are intended for discussion purposes only, and are not intended to be prescriptive or definitive statements about how a First Nations school should operate.

3. Establishing a School Vision

Questioning how to improve school standards raises fundamental issues related to societal aims, the nature of participation in decision-making at all levels, and the very purpose of the school as an institution (OECD, 1989). Jack (1997) notes that "standards are critical factors in clarifying the purpose of the educational system and should relate to the standards or quality of life that First Nations are aiming for." In other words, considering education standards raises issues related to school vision or the establishment of "quality" education. Defining quality, however, is not a simple matter.

> **"I find that in First Nations schools, when you walk down the hallways you see children who have lights in their eyes. The goal of our school is to ensure that happens."**
> *Workshop Participant, May, 1998*

3.1 Defining "Quality" Education

The term "quality" has been increasingly used by people involved with the education of First Nations students, but there is no universal definition of "quality" education according to First Nations perspectives (see endnotes for a brief consideration of effective education as outlined according to a more general perspectives). However, several comments can be made about this issue.

> **"We need broad definitions of success."**
> *Workshop Participant, May, 1998*

The workshop participants generally expressed a belief that almost all First Nations schools share several similar goals, and that those goals are usually focused on the needs of the students they serve.

First Nations schools generally aim to foster a sense of belonging, and provide a supportive environment in which students have a chance to expand to their full potential and also learn how to accept failures and move on. First Na-

> **"Develop students with strong roots, and nurture them. That will give them the ability to succeed in any world."**
> *Workshop Participant, May, 1998*

[The Hazelton First Nations Education Centre] believes that all people, when given the opportunity, encouragement and support, can gain control over their lives. We also strongly believe that individuals learn, change, and grow with the most long-lasting effects when they take part in deciding their educational experience.

It is our intent to provide a safe, non-threatening, non-judgemental, self-directed, and instructor led environment for program participants. This enables a solid opportunity for change. It is our desire to exhibit and project the importance and value of quality education based on First Nations beliefs, values, language and traditions, for present and future generations.
Best Practices Project
April, 1997

tions schools try to ensure that the environment they provide is intimate and personal, in which no students remain anonymous and unheard. This objective was reflected by Wilson and Napolean (1998) in their study of education in School District 52 (Prince Rupert). The authors noted that the students attending schools located in nearby villages are often in smaller classes, receive more individual attention, and experience greater flexibility in their learning.

Among the other common concerns raised by the workshop participants are the desire for children to be secure, healthy, to know who they are, and to recognize their own skills and talents. The participants also expressed the hope that First Nations schools can help students to be happy, fulfilled, able to be healthy adults, and free to grow.

Many First Nations people are concerned that students develop the literacy and numeracy skills that they need to succeed, but it is also important to be realistic about the students' individual strengths and weaknesses. Some students may not be academically inclined, and other children may have special needs which make their goals unique. It is crucial that each student's unique capabilities and limitations be accepted. The challenge for First Nations schools, it was noted by a workshop participant, is to meet children where they are and raise their abilities from that basis. It was also noted that outcomes for individuals are key, and that standards relate to what the school must provide to allow each student to achieve his or her own specific outcomes. For example, it may be that First Nations schools will accept no less than an individualized learning program for each student, as there is a strong commitment to standards which reflect individual potentials and development, regardless of differing needs.

Generally, First Nations people are interested in developing education systems that reflect First Nations cultures, philosophies and values. At the same time, however, they are concerned about the need for young people to be able to function effectively in the "mainstream" society. In other words, there is an emphasis on allowing First Nations children to live in and achieve their goals as they relate to two worlds – both within and outside of their First Nations communities. As one workshop participant noted, it is important to motivate students to do what they want to do, but also to help them to understand that they need some basic skills to be able to achieve their goals.

In the landmark paper, *Indian Control of Indian Education*, the National Indian Brotherhood (now the Assembly of First Nations) (1973) outlined the general educational goals of First Nations people by stating:

> Our aim is to make education relevant to the philosophy and needs of the Indian people. We want education to give our children a strong sense of identity, with confidence in their personal worth and ability. We believe in education:
>
> ♦ as a preparation for total living;
> ♦ as a means of free choice of where to live and work;
> ♦ as a means of enabling us to participate fully in our own social, economic, political and educational advancements.

Jack (1997) also notes that a positive cultural identity is needed both to promote pride as a First Nations person, but also to be able to respond effectively to real or perceived forms of racism and discrimination that exist in society. In addition, in order to be successful and cope in any situa-

"It is good to encourage in students the ability to function anywhere they want. But it is also important to recognize the reality for students. Many students in the public school system can go anywhere they want in the world. For some people from First Nations communities this is not an option. Their lives are within their communities."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

The mission of the Aatse Davie School is to develop confident, responsible students with self-esteem, pride in heritage and community, and able to function within and outside of Fort Ware.
Best Practices Project April, 1997

tion, First Nations students need to develop self-confidence, independence, self-sufficiency, decision-making ability, and a strong sense of identity. The workshop participants noted that most schools strive to promote values such as fairness, caring, sharing, initiative, honesty, and contentedness with who you are.

In her discussion paper, Jack (1997) highlights the stated philosophy and goals of several First Nations schools. Included among those quoted are the following:

> We believe that education is the process of becoming knowledgeable about oneself and the world. Education is a lifelong endeavour. Every individual is unique. Learning comes easily to children who have pride in themselves, their culture and community. Holistic cultural growth which connects and strengthens self, family and community. Support, connect and strengthen the culture (Neqweyqwelsten School Handbook, 1994/95).

> [Our objectives include] to promote a healing program for all members of the school community. To identify Secwepemc values and traditions and to practice the same. To promote self-awareness and help strengthen traditional Secwepemc family values. Rediscovery of Secwepemc traditions (Chief Atahm School).

> [We aim to] Enable children to realize their full potential. Provide an opportunity to speak, read and write their own language and to enrich their knowledge of the culture and heritage. Ensure that the students are provided with the necessary educational tools to succeed in the non-Native world (St. Maria Goretti School).

> Education should promote, perpetuate and strengthen our culture and language. Education should provide our children with teachings, experiences and values

"Our drive should be people who can speak their language, understand their culture, survive on the land, and yet succeed academically."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"We want out kids to have the strength they need, that's grounded in their culture, and to have the skills they need to succeed wherever they want to be."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"Our goal is for every child to have a chance to feel special."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

which develop personal qualities of self-reliance, co-operation, generosity, honesty, respect for others and for the environment. Education is a preparation for total living. The ultimate responsibility for education belongs to the parent, the child and the community. The school curriculum will reflect those teachings and values which are highly honoured by them. We believe in First Nations jurisdiction for First Nations education (Seabird Island Community School, 1993/94 Teacher Handbook).

Charter-Voight (1991) describes a series of community workshops held by the Upper Nicola Indian Band, at which participants were asked to reflect on their perceptions of an ideal education. The participants identified the following aspects:

1. the importance of both traditional and technical knowledge;
2. holistic education, including attention to both practical knowledge and physical needs;
3. parental and community involvement in education, as education is the basis of a peaceful community, and elders, adults and children are not separate; and
4. the importance of the environment and resources, including both natural resources and people viewed as valuable resources.

Generally, the participants at the workshops identified an ideal education system as providing the "best of both worlds."

The Upper Nicola Band workshops also resulted in the identification of the following educational goals:

> "Don't get drawn into the idea that if an Aboriginal child is provided an education with a good sense of themselves, they can't make it outside. If a child grows up with a good sense of who they are, and learns to be effective and efficient in their own world, they can make it anywhere. Growing up, there were people I knew who had never been to school, but they were brought up to believe in themselves. That gave them the strength to function in any environment."
> *Workshop Participant, May, 1998*

1. supportive schools and community relations;

2. quality instructional programs and resources (demonstrated in the curriculum, which includes reading, writing, arithmetic, and traditional learning and values), which provide a basis for post-secondary education, life skills and problem solving;

3. qualified teaching staff, ideally composed of Native teachers, but also including teachers who (i) can teach multi-grades; (ii) are resourceful and creative; (iii) meet community needs; (iv) are flexible; (v) start projects on their own; (vi) are emotionally stable; and (vii) are good role models. Tutors and teaching assistants, as well as appropriate class size, were also noted as important; and

4. efficient school administration and effective operations.

Hampton (1995) also considers the issue of quality First Nations education, and outlines twelve "standards of First Nations education." Those standards, Hampton suggests, can be applied to all areas of education, and they include:

1. an inclusion of **spirituality**;

2. recognition of the importance of **service**, and an emphasis on collectivity;

3. respect for **diversity**;

4. a focus on First Nations **culture**;

5. the maintenance of First Nations **traditions**;

6. a demand for **respect**;

7. a recognition of the importance of **history**;

8. **relentlessness**, and a continued focus on the battle for children;

9. a recognition and respect for the **vitality** of First Na-

> *"It is good to value volunteerism, as it fosters the importance of giving."*
> *Workshop Participant, May, 1998*

> *"We want to make as many options as possible available to our students, but the range of options appropriate for each student may differ."*
> *Workshop Participant, May, 1998*

tions people;

10. a recognition of conflict, **tensions** and struggle between First Nations and non- Native education;

11. a recognition of the importance of **place** and land; and

12. **transformation**, and the need to transform the relations between First Nations and non-Native individuals and societies.

In addition, Wilson and Martin (1997) outline a vision for First Nations education in Prince Rupert, and begin by stating that:

> We believe that education for First Nations children and youth must be firmly grounded in the beliefs, languages, values, structures, and models of First Nations cultures and should grow from the people's experiences and histories. In addition, education for First Nations children and youth must take place within the framework of a vital, alive, and dynamic community.

> Through education that is firmly grounded in First Nations culture, and fostered within the nurturing sense of community, children should take part in experiences that enable them to develop a sense of belonging, of value, of responsibility, and of competence. All of these elements are embedded within each other and reinforce each other.

Wilson and Martin (1997) go on to identify the following issues as key to an educational vision:

• the importance of grounding the values and beliefs that comprise a vision within First Nations cultures;

• a recognition that learning always takes place within a community;

• the need for children to feel a sense of belonging, including knowing who they are and where they belong;

"We can't ignore the basics, like literacy and numeracy, but we can provide a unique, culturally sensitive foundation on which to build."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"We want to strengthen the spirit of our children."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

- the need for children to have a sense of self-worth and value;
- the importance of responsibility and reciprocity in the lives of children; and
- the need for children to feel capable, and to be able to accomplish what they set out to do.

For the purpose of his study, More (1984) defined quality education as the relationship between: (a) student achievement in its broadest sense; and (b) the educational goals and objectives of the Indian communities. He further asserts that the relationship, or "goodness of fit," between the goals and achievements is the essential factor in assessing quality. To be useful, More suggests that specific local or regional educational objectives should be developed which are appropriate for the relevant community or communities.

"First Nations education should be based on the belief that First Nations values and perspectives are something valuable to offer the world."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

Finally, Wilson and Napolean (1998) outline nine "common indicators of success in First Nations education," and suggest that successful programs:

- reflect a strong understanding of the role of culture in defining meaning and building a strong sense of self;
- recognize that conflict is often created by change and growth and that from this conflict comes a richer vision of what is important in education for First Nations students;
- grow from ongoing, viable relationships among educators, parents, administrators, community members, and students;
- incorporate structures and models that reflect First Nations ways of teaching and learning;
- are carefully and properly developed, and acknowledge the roles and responsibilities of many people in the education of children;

- acknowledge the complexity of current First Nations issues and their implications in educational, financial, and policy decisions;

- acknowledge the varying ways people define success, and make explicit some of the assumptions inherent in different views of success;

- provide ongoing professional development opportunities and a network of support for teachers of language and culture programs; and

- focus on the First Nations of the local communities as well as First Nations in other parts of British Columbia and Canada.

The issues outlined in those various perspectives of "quality" or "effective" education will be raised and considered in more detail throughout this paper.

3.2 Language and Culture Programs

As discussed above, many people view the teaching of First Nations languages and cultures as crucial activities of First Nations schools, and as central to their purpose and the quality of education they provide. As Kirkness (1998) notes, "the teaching of Aboriginal languages must go on if a meaningful education for Aboriginal children is to be provided" (p. 66). Kirkness also notes that "language is the principal means by which culture is accumulated and shared, and transmitted from generation to generation," (p. 66), and she refers to language as the "mind, spirit and soul of a people" (p. 140). Language and culture, almost all of the workshop participants noted, is at the heart of everything else a school does, and their inclusion in the education process must be seen as a requirement, not as an option.

> "Tremendous amounts of money are spent on French immersion programs, but almost no resources are available for First Nations languages. A real commitment to our languages must exist."
> *Workshop Participant, May, 1998*

Schools can play an important role in transmitting and maintaining language and culture. Brand and Ayoungman (1989) claim that while home is a critical first factor in language maintenance, the school is as critical, and can reinforce the process of language acquisition. In a recently published *Handbook on Aboriginal Language Program Planning* (1998), Ignace also thoroughly discusses the issue of language revitalization, and concludes that while an ideal language program must involve people of all ages in the home, family and community, "the education system can and should play an important role in reversing Aboriginal language shift."

> **"What is it you want for your language? Can you achieve that?"**
> *Workshop Participant, May, 1998*

While the importance of these issues is clear, however, what is not clear is how "standards" relate to language and culture. Any standards must be compatible with the culture of the nation, and must be determined within each community. It was suggested by several workshop participants that it would be useful to bring traditional ways of testing childrens' knowledge of the nation's culture into the schools. At the same time, the importance of recognizing the evolution of languages and cultures and making their teaching and evaluation relevant to the lives of students was also noted. Generally, the workshop participants indicated that what is perhaps most important is that schools and communities establish specific goals for their languages and cultures which are clear and realistic.

> **"All kids are special. We think of children with special needs as unique, not as having something wrong with them."**
> *Workshop Participant, May, 1998*

3.3 Special Needs Education

Another issue which is a primary component of First Nations schools and a feature which is central to the quality of education they offer is their inclusion of all learners, regard-

less of their needs or special circumstances. The workshop participants agreed that all students should have fair access to the help they require, and meeting the needs of all students and recognizing their unique skills and circumstances is one of the most important aspects of First Nations schools. In addition, the workshop participants supported the notion that children should not be seen as having "special needs;" rather, they should all be viewed as special people with special gifts, and every effort should be made to build upon their strengths, abilities and talents rather than focusing on what they are lacking.

As Ainscow (1991) notes, research and experience has resulted in significantly different views in terms of how special needs should be defined, how they occur, and how they should be addressed. There may therefore be a variety of school programs developed for special needs students, and each school may incorporate different methods for improving the skills of teachers for dealing with children with special needs. Regardless of these differences, however, there is increasing agreement that special needs programs should move from being add-on activities to becoming central elements of school programming.

Most First Nations schools are already making significant efforts in this regard, but the critical lack of funding to support their initiatives represents a tremendous challenge. In addition, it is often difficult to access trained specialists who have an understanding of the context of First Nations schools -- a difficulty which is particularly acute in remote and northern areas. One of the most important constraints in terms of special needs students is the rigid classification system which First Nations schools must follow in order to access funding. All of these issues are highlighted in a funding pro-

"We face a real dilemma. We don't want to classify kids, but we have to in order to access funding."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"We need to remember our traditional ways of dealing with things. There was a greater sense of a learning process. We knew that children learned from many people, not just a teacher. Special needs kids had a variety of people to teach them to touch a number of aspects of their lives, and to assist them and reinforce their strengths."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"We must find all students' special gifts."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

posal prepared by FNESC and the FNSA -- *None Left Behind, Addressing Special Needs Education in First Nations Schools* (FNESC/FNSA, 1997).

There is also a need for more research into effective and appropriate teaching methods, and new, inventive approaches to the issue of special education. Several workshop participants indicated the need to identify the unique learning styles and appropriate strategies for First Nations students with special needs, and it was suggested that a sharing of ideas and information between schools would be beneficial. The First Nations Schools Association, it was argued, could be an appropriate organization to facilitate such an exchange.

Focus on student needs. Measure individual successes and celebrate them!
Workshop Participant, May, 1998.

There are a number of other issues relating to special needs education with which most workshop participants agreed. Students with special needs, it was noted, should be allowed an opportunity to acquire basic skills, such as literacy and numeracy, to the best of their abilities. They should also be taught lifeskills and expectations for appropriate behaviour. Everyone must understand that definitions of success may vary, and that students with special needs may require their own "measuring sticks," but they should still be challenged to fulfil their potential -- whatever that might be.

In that regard, First Nations schools should not be expected to implement special needs programs which meet rigid criteria. In addition, special needs education should not be thought about in isolation from all other school matters; addressing special education requires a team approach, and it should be a concern of all school staff and community members, not just special needs specialists. Parents should be encouraged to understand special education issues, so

that they will not be defensive about any testing and/or unique assistance their children may require. The effectiveness of First Nations schools in addressing special needs issues, therefore, may include the involvement of all school staff in their efforts, their attempts to implement programs and activities in cooperation with parents, families and other community members, and their commitment to including special needs programs as a core element of their operations.

3.4 Defining Quality Within the Community Context

As the workshop participants all made clear, in terms of designing a vision and objectives which are relevant, it is crucial that the community is viewed realistically. The situations which exist within First Nations communities have an impact on how students learn, and this should not be ignored. Education cannot be compartmentalized and isolated from everything else which is happening, and in order to provide students with a quality educational experience, schools must not ignore externalities. Whenever possible, the vision of the school should relate to community expectations and the vision of the community and the nation.

In many cases, a community vision may not exist. In those situations, the school may play a useful role in facilitating relevant discussions and community visioning processes. As one workshop participant noted, his school undertook a process of planning and visioning that began with a focus on children and what the people of the community wanted to achieve for them. From that basis, a vision and plan for the entire community started to emerge. In this regard, one aspect of a school's effectiveness may relate to its role in

"Standards for education cannot be defined without standards for everything else in the lives of children."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"We have to recognize what is in our communities -- the good and the bad. We need to be honest about what is happening."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

supporting the community of which it is a part. As Goodland (cited in Fullan, 1993) notes, "healthy nations have healthy schools," and while schools cannot solve all societal problems themselves, they must see themselves as a part of the solution. In this way, schools can be active partners in efforts to strengthen and heal communities.

Similarly, communities need to focus on providing children with secure and safe environments in which they can fully develop, learn and grow. Unfortunately, not all children are now living and learning within such a context. While tremendous efforts have been made to address the legacy of colonialism, residential schools, and assimilationist policies, there is still a need for healing at the individual, family, and community levels.

> **"What has happened to us historically does matter. The state of the community does matter. Family dysfunction does have an impact on the ability of kids to learn."**
> *Workshop Participant, May, 1998*

As the workshop participants noted, the history of First Nations people, and the resulting internalized racism that in many cases still exists, continues to interfere with decision-making, parental support for schools, the rate of volunteerism in schools, and the energy people have to focus on school and education. Acknowledging this reality is not intended to suggest blame; rather, it is meant to ensure that each child is viewed in his or her entirety.

> **"At our school, we identified qualities that are important in individuals, and compared them to traditionally valued qualities. Many of them were similar. But when we tried to do things to raise those qualities, we were challenged as a result of cultural dysfunction in the community."**
> *Workshop Participant, May, 1998*

Poverty, for example, has a significant impact on the education process. If children arrive at school hungry, they must be fed before any real learning can take place. In addition, safe and secure shelter is necessary if children are to be given the best opportunity for success in school. Similarly, the learning of some children may be effected by dysfunction within their families, extended families, or communities in general, and addressing those problems is crucial to the education of those children. As noted by Napolean

(1998) in a study conducted for Hazelton Secondary School on the success of First Nations students, many of the issues with which the school must contend are created by major economic forces; economic instability and job losses result in increasing debt, worry, family and community tensions, and conflicts which "don't stop outside the schools doors." Napolean also cites several students interviewed for her study, who note among the problems affecting their education alcohol and drugs, depression, family conflict, lack of family support, lack of sleep caused by partying parents, hunger, and "giving up under the weight of it all."

The issue of community health relates to another pressing issue for First Nations schools. When assessing the effectiveness of schools, it is important to recognize the number and variety of responsibilities to which the school and its staff are expected to respond. In many cases, school staff must provide more than education to their students; they must provide the students with support and assistance in a number of areas, including health and counselling. In addition, it is important to be realistic about the role that schools can play, and to remember that school represents only six hours of a child's day; it is impossible for schools to provide everything that a child needs within that time period. Also, while schools can play a part in community healing processes, they ideally will represent only one among many elements of the healing process.

The complexity of communities and students' lives raises another point with which the workshop participants generally agreed. It is important that there be collaboration amongst community service agencies. In too many cases, education departments and schools are thought of as separate from other social service areas. There is therefore a

"We've created expectations about what our schools should do for our communities. Maybe it's time to reassess those expectations in the context of the whole community."
    Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"We're asked to deal with such a range of issues and address the needs of so many different groups, but we're way too under-resourced."
    Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"Watch out that we don't make schools carry things they can't carry."
    Workshop Participant, May, 1998

Our school organized a workshop to raise awareness about FAS/ FAE, and the feedback we received from the parents was all positive. But a social development worker objected, and said that what we did was inappropriate, not properly organized, and without proper supports. That type of response is common. We need to work together more and worry less about "our areas." *Workshop Participant, May, 1998.*

"We talk about the education system preparing us for new challenges, but we also still talk in terms of programs. Services are lined up in "program pockets," but we can't talk about them separately. We must talk about the whole student, which includes all areas. We can't slice up the pie, and talk about one piece while ignoring the rest. We have to communicate this to other areas like health and daycare." *Workshop Participant, May, 1998*

need for shared training in order to build trust and design strategies for working together. The issue of early childhood education, for example, is key, and relates to education, health, day care, and other social service areas. As Wilson and Napolean (1998) note:

> communities and schools should work closely together to provide children centred support for families and young children. Health and education initiatives should be strongly linked and well-coordinated. Schools should be actively involved with other community agencies who share similar goals for supporting children.

Similarly, issues associated with special needs education cut across many social service areas, and addressing fetal alcohol syndrome/fetal alcohol effect (FAS/FAE) -- a very real and pressing challenge for First Nations schools, families, communities and students -- will require cooperation and a concerted effort by everyone and all social service agencies.

All agencies and organizations face challenges, and it is important that they understand each other's constraints and aims. Too often, the crisis orientation of most communities makes the establishment of effective partnerships more difficult, and in some areas bureaucracies are being developed within communities which prohibit coordination and collaboration. This concern should be addressed in order to ensure that the needs of children are being met as fully and effectively as possible.

Many of the workshop participants suggested a similar theme in regard to community and school interactions. An individual's "wholeness" must be addressed, both in the school and everywhere else. Schools can potentially play

a role in examining what constitutes a person who is a fully participating member of the community. Each person, it was noted, should be self-directed, and know how to be effective in his or her place. In the past, it was the responsibility of older people to teach children how to take their place within the community, to be fair, and to make themselves a part of the group. Some of these things were taught, and many were also demonstrated through example. Sharing these understandings through the school, but also in numerous other ways throughout the community, is crucial.

3.5 Implementing the Vision

Generally, the vision defined for each school and/or education system will vary to some extent, reflecting the unique circumstances and values of each community. It is important, however, that some vision exist.

 What is equally important, however, is that the vision be implemented. The existence of a school vision is somewhat meaningless if it is not shared, understood and practised. Ideally, a clear goal or purpose should be the foundation for **all** of the educational activities undertaken by a school.

But the existence of a school vision should also not be imposed on schools. As one workshop participant noted, requiring that a school have a mission statement or mandate may result in staff trying to impose them too quickly, and in isolation from the community. It was suggested that deadlines should not placed on the process of developing a vision; the community should be allowed to participate at

The Community Healing and Intervention Program (CHIP) of the Ktunaxa Nation is one example of a community-wide initiative which takes a community development approach to addressing the needs of people affected by Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Fetal Alcohol Effect. The program aims to support for affected children, as well as their families, caregivers, educators and communities. CHIP is a health promotion program, and it aims to enable affected individuals to work productively and participate actively in the social life of the community in which they live. Peoples' capacity and skills are emphasized through the central theme of "hope and potential." The CHIP program includes the involvement of families, band members, the schools, the Ktunaxa Independent School Society, local colleges, health professionals, social workers, justice workers, a Native Women's cooperative, and industry.
  *Best Practices Project
        April, 1997*

whatever pace is necessary. Only when a clear and appropriate vision is agreed upon and thought about consistently can it be an important indicator of a school's effectiveness and success.

4. School/Community/Family Relationships

As discussed several times above, it is important that education standards and school and/or educational visions be defined locally. It is also important that there be community-wide awareness of and agreement with those standards and school visions. These issues, therefore, relate to more general considerations about the relationship between the school and the community of which it is a part.

The importance of strong relationships between schools, their communities, and the families of their students is widely recognized. Schools are not the only learning environments for children. Parents and families provide the mental and emotional framework which the community and school builds upon. There is an increasing recognition that families, communities and schools each have a role to play in the intellectual, emotional and social development of young people, and that family members can reinforce traditions and beliefs that help children understand their world and develop appropriate behaviours and attitudes. As Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) note:

> No matter how well they are able to do so, families are children's first educators. They have a unique interest in their success. They are a crucial and largely untapped resource, with a tremendous capacity to contribute to their children's education and the work of the school. But as research has shown, in almost all communities too many parents are disengaged from their children's success.

There is a new level of acceptance of the importance of parent and family involvement in education. Generally, it is crucial that schools serve their wider communities well, and

"Encompass everyone, and make the vision community owned."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"Education is a communal endeavour."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"We need community members to feel comfortable talking about the education of their kids, so that they will tell schools: "you are not alone in the education of my children, or my grandchildren.""
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

communities will ideally also be an active source of support for the school. Too many people see education as the sole responsibility of the school, based on long-held perceptions about the roles of parents, teachers, principals and community members. Parents and community members must be receptive to education as a community-wide process.

Positive role models in communities and their participation in the school can be very important, and the community can assist the school with efforts to establish a healthy environment committed to combating drug and alcohol abuse (Armstrong, 1988). A study by Mackay and Myles (1995) shows that among the Bands in Ontario, those communities whose children enjoyed the highest graduation rates were those whose chief and council ranked education as a top priority. As the workshop participants noted, however, in too many communities education is not among the primary concerns of the leadership. Efforts must therefore be made to change that situation.

Wilson and Martin (1997) emphasize the need for an inclusive approach to education, arguing that education should involve participation from all generations of the First Nations community, "from Elders who ground education in the wisdom of the past, from adults who bring to it the dynamism and energy of the present, and from children and youth who are the future." Research has also shown that greater collaboration between schools and families results in improvements in conventional standards of student achievement (such as grades, test scores, graduation rates etc.), increased staff morale and job satisfaction, and increased community confidence in the school (Rioux and Berla, 1993). Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) state that "if we are

"Connectedness is what is important and unique to First Nations cultures."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"There are other benefits of community defined standards. Right now, too often public schools are used as the standard. If you do something creative that is really effective, still some people say "it's not like the public system so it's not good enough." Unfortunately, that notion is supported by the outside system, too."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"If you set goals, the community will sit back and wait for you to accomplish them. If the community helps you set goals, they'll help you to accomplish them."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

going to bring about significant improvements in teaching and learning *within* schools, we must forge strong, open and interactive connections with communities *beyond* them," and links with families, employers, universities and others are all important.

Ainscow (1991) outlines a summary of positive outcomes that can be expected from partnerships between the family, school, and community, as follows:

Benefits to Students

- increased achievement and motivation;
- more positive attitude toward school and school work;
- higher quality and more appropriate homework;
- increased attendance;
- decreased dropouts, suspensions, and discipline referrals;
- better relationships with family; and
- improved feelings about self.

Benefits to the Family

- increased empowerment and education;
- improved family life and closer relationship with children;
- greater community/school support of families;
- better communication between home and school;
- increased understanding of school's curriculum, programs and activities;
- increased knowledge about how to help children;
- greater opportunities to engage in learning activities at home;
- greater opportunities to work closely with teachers;

"We tried to establish a school vision from the inside out. Ten years later, we're still trying to make it work. Similarly, we tried to develop policies to allow us to do things better, but they don't necessarily reflect the vision of the community. Now it seems like we need to rebuild and reassess everything in light of community values."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"I think that if you asked First Nations students who went on to post-secondary education "what things in your life allowed you to be successful," most would say families, or other role models."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"I found this the most exciting part of the paper. Right now, in too many cases only certain people own the process of education."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

Bella Bella Community School has initiated a Parent Advisory Council (PAC) which is intended to encourage active parental involvement in the school through volunteering, and to support the use of the school by the community. The PAC is based on the notion that education begins in the home, and that school is an extension of the child's education. The PAC recognizes that due to negative experiences in the past, many parents and grandparents are now uncomfortable in the school environment. In an attempt to change this situation, the school has provided a room for parents to drop in and share some of the coffee, recipes, materials on parenting, healthy snacks, and other things available in the parents' room. The PAC has hosted many events, including a television show with interviews with school staff, parents and community members about the potential role for parents in the school. *Best Practices Project April, 1997*

- more consistent expectations, practices and messages about homework and home learning activities;
- increased access to schoolwide resources such as family resource centres, home visits, classes and workshops; and
- greater opportunities to shape important decisions that enhance their child's chance for success in school.

Benefits to the School

- better communications between school and home;
- improved student behaviour;
- enhanced social and interpersonal between students;
- greater acceptance and understanding of students and families from other cultures;
- reduction of in-school violence;
- better working conditions for faculty and staff;
- improved attitudes and relationships and better communications between teachers and families;
- greater family participation in school programs and activities;
- schools being more accessible and user-friendly to family and community;
- more family/school activities;
- families viewing the school and faculty/staff more favourably; and
- families having a feeling of ownership, belonging and inclusion concerning the school.

Benefits to the Teachers

- improved morale;
- more positive and rewarding teaching experiences;
- greater feelings of accomplishment and success;

- more support, appreciation, and trust of families' judgment;
- fewer discipline problems;
- more responsive and motivated students;
- less stress and frustration;
- greater awareness of family perspectives and less stereotyping of students and their families;
- higher expectations of students; and
- closer relationships with students.

Benefits to the Administrator

- improved relationships with students and family;
- fewer family complaints;
- better use of limited resources to address the critical need of linking home and school;
- increased communications from family members about the child that is not available in any other way; and
- greater family/community support for needed school improvements.

In First Nations communities, another important factor related to school, family and community relationships is the need for all of those players to combine efforts in order for language programs to be successful. As many of the workshop participants noted, language teaching is a community responsibility, and it cannot be isolated in the schools. It must be taught and reinforced in the homes and the community if significant language renewal is to take place.

Ainscow (1991), however, also suggests a number of barriers to increased family involvement in school. He notes that some parents and community members may find that their

One priority of the Neqweyqwelsten School Authority (Chu Chua) is to ensure that work done in the school is complemented by activities in the home. This goals is reflected in the school handbook: "Home and school will work together to support the learning of our children. We recognize that education is a responsibility shared by parents and teachers." A long-standing practice has been to have students and parents take part in a daily Home Reading Program. The program involves parents and teachers recording the books read by the students, with rewards and incentives to recognize the work done. The initiative has resulted in ongoing communications between teachers and parents, good homework habits, family awareness, understanding and support of the school, and more positive relations between students and teachers as the teachers know more about their students' lives outside the school.
Best Practices Project
April, 1997

"Communities expect the school to teach language and culture, when the parents and grandparents aren't teaching it at home. We must excite people so it is brought back into families."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"I want to discuss how we can heal our communities so that people will want to become involved in education."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"Most of our people are afraid or intimidated and feel they have nothing to offer the school. Their experiences in residential schools were terrible. Healing must go on to get people to come here."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

busy schedules, problems, and other pressures make involvement in the school difficult. Many family members may also fear that they lack the skills and knowledge necessary to be fully involved. Napolean (1998), for example, found that many of the parents she spoke with feel that they do not have a meaningful role in their child's education, and that they do not know how to help with education preparation and planning, or course selection.

Finally, there are psychological barriers for many parents, who may feel unconnected to the school, intimidated, or who may perceive the school as unapproachable and threatening. Ainscow notes that "usually parents' attitudes toward school are rooted in their own educational background … the family members assume the school will also "fail" their children if the school "failed" them." This issue is particularly crucial given the legacy of the residential school system for many First Nations parents and grandparents. Napolean (1988) cites some parents who had negative educational experiences, who find it extremely difficult to discuss their children's education, and projected their experiences onto their children. Wilson and Napolean (1998) also note that many parents distrust schools because of their negative experiences, and in this context situations that cause friction can become magnified. Mackay and Myles (1995) note that in too many First Nations communities people are dissatisfied with the home-school cooperation and band-school cooperation, parents feel excluded, and the school staff feel isolated and unsupported. It was noted by one workshop participant that this is an important area for support from the community leadership, who can assist with priority setting and building confidence in the school.

School personnel and education authorities must reach out to families and community members, even if initial conditions do not support such efforts. It is important to bring the community into the school, to help prepare materials and supervise needy students. Teachers must recognize that they have much to learn from families, and they must be encouraged to use the specialized expertise of parents and community members. Many kinds of community support have a strong record of success.

Given the challenges identified above, however, it is important to consider what it takes to mobilize people and increase the community's commitment to education. One issue which was raised quite often by the workshop participants is the need to effectively and respectfully bring elders into the schools. Including elders and other resource people in an appropriate way, it was noted, may involve acknowledging their contribution, perhaps through the presentation of an honorarium or some other gift. But there must be a recognition that involving people in the schools may raise difficulties; for example, one very sensitive but also very important issue is the need to ensure that everyone who is a part of the school, including elders, is healthy and able to relate to children in a non-threatening, positive way.

Communities can help to enhance parenting and community support, possibly by establishing workshops for parents and foster parents, including such issues as establishing healthy relationships, talking and listening to children and youth, constructive discipline, conflict resolution, and assisting children and youth with education and career planning.

Early childhood education is also a powerful tool for fostering the long-term success of learners, and there is a need

"To involve the community, we need to set aside enough time, and commit ourselves to the process, no matter how long it takes. We need to make people feel like their input to decisions is important."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"Usually, it's a battle to get parents involved in the school. But parents are more likely to come for events organized by the students. I remember a grandmother who came to such an event, and she said "I have never been in a school before, and I almost didn't come because I was afraid. But now I'm so glad that I came."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

to develop these programs in communities. As one workshop participant suggested, early education helps to socially prepare children for school, and gives them a tremendous advantage when they enter kindergarten.

Also, clear and thorough orientations for parents so that they understand the education system may help them to feel comfortable in the school and to be aware of what their children are doing in terms of their education.

Parent advisory councils are often useful, but they are only one tool for enhancing community involvement in the schools. Formal councils may initially only involve a handful of parents, and formal structures and procedures may intimidate some people. Strong, informal relationships are sometimes key, and the following initiatives have been shown to have some success:

"The First Nations Education Council of School District 52 (Prince Rupert) has initiated a Role Model Program which is aimed at raising cultural awareness and promoting the self-esteem and pride in First Nations students. The program is focused on making the school visit comfortable and a positive experience for everyone by encouraging careful and cooperative planning with the visitor, adequate notice and preparation time, support for the role model in getting to and being in the classroom, and respectful recognition of the contribution made by the visitor."
Best Practices Project
April, 1997

- offer workshops to increase parenting skills;
- increase two way communication between the school and the home, and establish regular contact between teachers and parents, both at times when students are and are not experiencing difficulties;
- encourage early childhood education programs;
- encourage parental volunteering in and visits to schools;
- encourage learning activities in the home, such as reading programs;
- involve parents, community members and community leaders in school decision-making;
- coordinate community services so that all efforts to provide services to First Nations learners are complementary and mutually reinforcing;
- provide school reports in plain language, with space

for parental responses;

- use inclusive "parent" interviews, including families, teachers and children;
- make student assessments clear and simple, and ensure that parents understand and are familiar with the format and content of student records;
- prepare and share written school policies and a school handbook;
- conduct a community needs assessment to determine community attitudes about the school;
- involve community members in planning for change;
- establish a parent centre;
- communicate regularly with parents and community members through newsletters, written notices, telephone calls, and home visits;
- undertake periodic surveys to assess how parents and community members perceive the activities available;
- hold open houses, and host community events and dinners in the school;
- make meetings fun, and let parents and community members set the agendas;
- open the school to the community and make it available for community meetings to show that the school is a part of everyone's lives;
- visit homes individually; and
- translate written documents into First Nations languages whenever possible.

"One way to get more parents involved is to stimulate kids. When the kids are enthusiastic about school, they bring in their parents."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

All of these activities will increase the sense of community ownership of the school, and will broaden notions of school accountability.

Perhaps most importantly, it is crucial that the school personnel and leadership act on recommendations and follow

"We need to take our authority from our governing systems, not from the Indian Act or School Act."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

through on commitments made. This is a key aspect of encouraging strong relationships with the community.

Generally, it is important that schools make families feel valued and valuable, welcome them at all times, encourage classroom visits, be sensitive and flexible to accommodate parents, and make the climate of the school friendly and accessible. Programs and activities aimed at creating such environments, as well as perceptions that school/family/community relations are strong and positive, are therefore important indicators of school success.

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5. School Operations

In addition to the existence of a clear and community supported vision of education, the operations of a school are an important aspect of its effectiveness. School operations involve a variety of components, several of which will be discussed below.

5.1 Jurisdictional Issues

As Charter-Voight (1991) describes, the concept of Indian Control of Indian Education, which is still a widely supported notion, affirms the right of First Nations people to educate their own children. As indicated in Section 1, however, full authority for First Nations education has not been transferred to First Nations governments. As Brady (1995) notes, there has been no change in the locus of control over Native education. First Nations people must continually respond to federal government proposals and policies, often with little or no input, "which has the potential to, and frequently does, frustrate Native aspirations to control their educational institutions" (Brady, 1995, p. 363). The federal government continues to control the way in which funding is accessed based upon its own goals and priorities, which do not usually reflect the needs of First Nations, and, as noted above, DIA continues to insist that First Nations schools implement provincial curriculum and standards.

A key aspect of the effectiveness of First Nations schools is their ability to control their own operations, structures and activities according to their own visions and goals. First Nations people have clearly asserted their right to this authority. Their inherent right to self-government, which includes

"What's holding us back? A lack of funding and jurisdiction. Until we sort those issues out, it will be tough going.
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"As long as we're tied to federal and provincial jurisdictions, it takes away the ability of the community to decide."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

We need to learn to believe in ourselves. We can run a successful school system. We need to overcome internal barriers. We need to learn about decision-making.
Workshop Participant, May, 1998.

"We need the political will to do things -- to address real issues."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

jurisdiction for education, is derived from First Nations' existence as self-governing entities at the time of contact. Section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* also protects aboriginal and treaty rights, which many people argue includes education. What is now needed is a greater commitment to First Nations control of education on the part of the federal and provincial governments.

There are examples of a transfer of control for First Nations education. An agreement signed in February, 1997 by the Mi'kmaq Chiefs of Nova Scotia, the Minister of Indian Affairs, and the Premier of Nova Scotia is one such example of a transfer of authority for education to First Nations (cited in Kavanagh, 1997). This agreement, said to be the first to involve such a comprehensive transfer of control, allows for the federal government to transfer approximately $140 million to the Mi'kmaq over a five-year period. The funding will provide for the operation and maintenance of facilities, band administration and capital. Programs covered by the agreement include primary, elementary, and secondary education on-reserve and post-secondary education funding to band members on and off-reserve. The programs and services to be provided, the agreement notes, must be comparable to other educational systems in Canada in order to permit students to transfer to and from other educational systems (Morgan, 1998).

In addition, the Nisga'a Agreement in Principle (1997) includes the right of Nisga'a Government to make laws pertaining to: (1) Nisga'a language and culture, including the teaching of Nisga'a language; (2) pre-school to grade 12 education of Nisga'a citizens on Nisga'a lands, including curriculum, examinations and other standards which permit transfer between school systems and admission to pro-

vincial universities, and certification of persons teaching subjects other than Nisga'a language and culture to a standard comparable to those of the College of Teachers; as well as (3) post-secondary education in Nisga'a lands, including the establishment and determination of the curriculum for post-secondary institutions, the accreditation of persons who teach or research Nisga'a language and culture, and adult education. The Agreement also maintains, however, that the Nisga'a may make laws in that regard provided that they are comparable to provincial standards respecting: institutional organizational structure and accountability; tuition and fee schedules; admission standards and policies; instructors' qualifications and certification; curriculum standards; and degree requirements.

It was suggested by several workshop participants that it is the responsibility of communities, nations, local, regional, and provincial organizations to make a unique and special place for First Nations education, and that support is needed at all levels to assert the right of First Nations to control their own education systems. In one workshop, there was significant support for the notion of a province-wide First Nations Education Authority, with real power to make decisions and act for the collective interests of First Nations in the area of education. That Authority, it was noted, should include people with technical experience in education. This suggestion is compatible with the Mi'kmaq agreement cited above, which provides for a Mi'kmaq education organization which will assist Mi'kmaq communities in the exercise of their education jurisdiction.

"Jurisdiction will allow us to design structures to reflect the way we do things, rather than having to fit into someone else's structure."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"We need to grasp hold of our education system and prove to people that we can handle it."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

5.2 Governance Authorities

The existence of responsible governance authorities for First Nations schools is also an important factor in their success. First Nations schools in British Columbia are governed in a variety of ways, including through Chief and Council, an education department within the band government structure, an education committee or coordinator, or independent School Boards. The variety of mechanisms in place reflects the differing needs and circumstances of each community, and no single structure is best suited for all schools.

Whatever form of governance structure is appropriate, what is most required is commitment by the leadership to education and students. It is also important that community leaders themselves act as positive role models for young people. As mentioned above, the workshop participants clearly noted that in too many instances community leadership does not emphasize the importance of education enough.

This situation is particularly pronounced when issues of funding arise. With the number of areas requiring attention in First Nations communities, there is a tremendous demand for any funding available. This may, in some instances, result in pressure to use education funds for other purposes. The community leadership clearly must be committed to using education dollars only for educational programs; a failure to do so will have tremendous implications for the effectiveness of First Nations schools. It was also suggested by some workshop participants that education authorities will ideally have complete financial control of education funding, to ensure that competing interests do not interfere with its spending.

"We need Chief and Council to really listen to parents, families and youth."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"The governing body must also be healthy. They are dealing with key issues."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"Politics within communities too often overtakes initiatives of the school, and too often the leadership ties the hands of administrators."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

It was suggested by some workshop participants that there are benefits to having education authorities operate independently of the band structure, as this will ensure their attention remains focused on education matters. Education authorities, it was argued, should report to, but not be controlled by, Chief and Council. In addition, it was suggested by some people that collective authorities can be useful. For example, the Saanich Indian School Board represents the educational concerns of four Bands located on Southern Vancouver Island. The School Board allows for numerous collective initiatives, providing for at least some level of economy-of-scale, and facilitating a sharing of resources according to need. It was also noted that the School Board can make some decision-making processes more neutral, as it is somewhat removed from the community. While in many instances community involvement in decision-making is crucial, in some circumstances, such as in the allocation of funding, it is useful to have a somewhat external organization facilitate the process.

Whatever structure is chosen, education authorities can undertake a number of different functions, including:

- arousing and sustaining community concern about the quality of education provided;
- facilitating processes for determining expectations for the school;
- ensuring that a relevant and appropriate curriculum exists;
- ensuring that teachers undergo effective initial training and have opportunities for ongoing professional development;
- encouraging sound management structures of the school, including community and parental involvement;

"We must get beyond power struggles."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"How can we get our leadership to talk about education seriously, and transfer rhetoric into action?"
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

- working to obtain adequate resources for the school; and
- monitoring the performance of the school and, when necessary, working cooperatively to facilitate improvements.

"My concern is that it's all politicians and counsellours sitting on the school board. I feel very strongly about the lack of involvement of parents, families, and community members."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

Also shown to be important is a clear mechanism for community participation in decision-making that relates to the school and its programs, and adequate training and support for individuals involved in school governance is key. As mentioned above, it may be necessary to provide training in decision-making, to overcome barriers such as internalized racism. The development of appropriate and accessible supporting materials, such as school handbooks, parent handbooks, and clear policies and guidelines are also important considerations. Finally, some workshop participants noted that too often school staff feel separate from the School Board or Education Authority. It is useful when the Board is visible and involved with the school in a positive and proactive way to ensure that the Board and staff have a good understanding of the roles, responsibilities and constraints of one another.

"Where are the First Nations politicians? Education is never on the agenda."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

In addition to the governing body, leadership within the school is important, including a principal who is able to help people improve what they do. The presence of an effective principal who is able to deal with issues such as instructional time, class size, curriculum, and evaluation is an important element in school effectiveness. Ideally, the principal should also be connected to and respectful of the community, supportive of community ownership of the school and education system, and he or she should have a good understanding of community values and priorities.

5.3 School Organization and Calendar

The organization of school activities and the school calendar can also be important factors in determining school success. To be successful, some First Nations schools may want to consider alternative cycles of schooling and structures of articulation between levels. For example, in some cases it may be useful to use grade blocks (such as grades 1 - 3, 4 - 6 etc.), or to eliminate grades and use levels, with children of various ages in each level. It has been suggested, for example, that rigid forms of ability groupings can be extremely harmful for children, especially in earlier grades before a child's actual skills can be determined. Some workshop participants felt that alternate structures could help to address some of the psychological effects of having to hold back students who are not ready for the next grade levels. These issues, it was generally agreed, require more detailed consideration and study.

Discussion of these issues at the workshops led to considerations of the length of elementary/secondary schooling; some people questioned whether the idea of "12" years to complete secondary school is reasonable for all students. Some students, it was suggested, might benefit from a "transition" year between elementary/secondary and between secondary/post-secondary education.

Making a transition between schools also presents difficulties for some students, as the students often enter larger classes with teachers who do not know them personally, and there is sometimes a quicker pace and less flexibility. In some school districts, schools already provide for a "transition year" for students coming from remote communities, allowing students to adjust to differing expectations, and

"There needs to be more research into alternative learning models. For example, how do you implement self-directed learning and really involve students in their own learning? Can you give them choice regarding what to learn and when? How do you do that? How is modular learning really implemented?"
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

meaning that they graduate in three years instead of two (Wilson and Napolean, 1998). It may be useful to examine the effectiveness of those practices, particularly within the context of other relevant issues such as school size, funding levels, and benefits to students.

The timing of the school day and daily scheduling may also be considered in order to provide the most effective schooling. Research has been conducted to determine whether children learn better at particular times of the day, the length of their attention span, and for how many hours they can actually learn. Community considerations may also mean that alternative scheduling would be positive. For example, some communities may feel it would be useful to have children spend time in language nests, in lifeskills workshops and classes, in cooperative education programs, or in situations which would allow them to interact more with elders and family members outside of the school setting. Schools may consider the possibility of starting days earlier, ending earlier, using afternoons for more active workshops, or for sports, art classes, and/or extracurricular activities.

> **"The school organization should reflect the curriculum."**
> *Workshop Participant, May, 1998*

> **"I agree that we should move school hours to when kids learn best."**
> *Workshop Participant, May, 1998*

A similar issue relates to the length of the school year and the length of terms. Many individuals have noted the importance of altering the school calendar to allow for the incorporation of cultural pursuits. The issue of absenteeism may also relate to the school calendar. All schools have students who are absent more than others, but some absences may allow for relevant and important learning opportunities such as young people taking part in hunting, trapping, and/or fishing with families. In addition, as Wilson and Martin (1997) state, "strong values around family and community relationships in times of illness, grieving or celebration tend to supersede values like the importance of school attendance,"

and traditional and contemporary events that reinforce a sense of connectedness to the community may be seen as a priority in some circumstances, as children learn much about who they are through participation in community experiences. Some schools may design mechanisms to accommodate such practices, such as modular learning styles, a full year calendar, or possibly integrating differently timed, more frequent, and/or shorter breaks.

Generally, expectations for school organization and calendar should be flexible, taking into account differences in school vision and purpose, community needs and priorities, and learning styles of the students. For example, the school's organization, scheduling and calendar may need to allow for a highly structured environment for students with FAS/FAE.

Important considerations in regard to school calendar and organization, however, are levels of parental and community acceptance for alternative schooling patterns, school staff acceptance of change, family flexibility in terms of their time and employment responsibilities, and the possible transfer of students between schools. To be effective, a school's organization should not present tremendous challenges for students, graduates, families, or school staff. The workshop participants generally agreed that more research is required into the issue of alternate school calendars.

"One issue we face is that parents want us to reflect the public calendar, but also to add traditional pursuits and cultural activities which make that difficult."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"We want our school to be the centre of our community, but funding doesn't allow the space for this to happen."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

5.4 Physical School Structure

Another key aspect of school effectiveness is the physical structure of the school itself. Health and safety issues are primary considerations in this regard, and schools must first

and foremost provide a safe learning environment for their students and staff, with an absence of health hazards. They must also be accessible to all people, regardless of their physical needs, so that people with disabilities are able to stay in their communities to work and learn.

"Ask people with disabilities how to set up facilities so that they are accessible and comfortable."
Participant at a workshop organized by the BC Aboriginal Network on Disabilities Society, June, 1998

In addition, adequate lighting, heating, noise reduction, and ventilation are issues of basic comfort, and the school should ideally have adequate space and, if necessary and possible, special learning areas such as a gymnasium, wood shop, art room, laboratory, and music room. Many cultural activities also require different settings, which aren't always accommodated in physical plans.

Some workshop participants also highlighted the need to establish schools which are physically reflective of First Nations cultures and students, both architecturally and in terms of their art and interior design. Studies have shown a connection of the physical school structure with student, staff and guest morale. A comfortable environment will also increase the likelihood that the school will be used as a "community" building. As the OECD (1993) notes "a physical structure which does nothing to evoke a warm, caring sense and welcoming atmosphere will do little to promote the quality of education."

"Too many of us are working in unsafe, cramped spaces."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"My general experience is that there's never been a band school built of adequate size."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

Finally, it is important to focus not only on the school site. Many learning activities may take place away from the school, such as in cultural sites and on the land. In this regard, it was suggested that the school should be seen as "mobile." Cultural and traditional activities outside of the school structure, however, raise several considerations related to student security, such as transportation concerns, safety on field trips, weather and outdoor environment re-

lated hazards, and concerns related to the use of tools and equipment such as knives, guns, traps, fishing gear, boats, and medicines -- all of which may be required in the demonstration and practice of traditional activities.

5.5 Other Student and Staff Safety Issues

In addition to the physical environmental, health and safety considerations, the emotional health of staff and students are crucial. The availability of student support services, counselling, and/or guidance services are important factors in relation to the emotional health of students. Unfortunately, as highlighted by Wilson and Napolean (1998), student support services and counselling are often considerably less accessible in schools located in First Nations communities than they are in public schools. A lack of resources for mental health, drug and alcohol counselling is particularly troubling given the personal challenges many students face, and the tragically high rates of suicide among First Nations youth.

Extracurricular and recreational opportunities also play a key role in student well-being. As Wilson and Napolean (1998) note, a person's sense of self-confidence, self-worth and value -- a profound source of their strength -- is in part of result of their ability to contribute their knowledge, skills and understandings. For many students, this sense of contribution comes from their participation in sports and school extracurricular activities.

A workshop organized by the BC Aboriginal Network on Disabilities Society (BCANDS) raised another important issue in regard to student safety. That workshop focused on sexual abuse interventions, and included a lengthy dis-

"We need adequate maintenance of our schools, and DIA provides limited funding for this area. We have to be extremely creative with the funding we receive to get anything done at all."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"What is healthy sexuality? Where do kids get proper information? We can start in elementary school, teaching about appropriate touching, and the right to say no. This will allow for the evolution of healthy relationships."
Participant at a workshop organized by the BC Aboriginal Network on Disabilities Society, June, 1998

We must stop cycles of child abuse, no matter what that requires.
Workshop Participant, May, 1998.

cussion of the need to teach students about healthy sexuality. Talking about sexuality, it was noted, is extremely sensitive and difficult. However, the participants at the BCANDS workshop also felt that too many children are trying to survive based upon poor information and myths, and with poor support systems. They also suggested that the best way to deal with issues of abuse is by giving children proper information. In addition, HIV, AIDS and sexually transmitted disease awareness and prevention can be implemented through the school system, which may require working closely with parents so that they feel comfortable with what is being taught.

A related issue raised by the standards workshop participants is the need to address the potential for abusive individuals to have a role within the school. It was suggested that First Nations schools may use criminal records checks for their staff, including attendants and aides for students with special needs, and possibly even for regular visitors and volunteers. This practice may present some difficulties, such as fears and discomfort criminal records checks may cause some individuals. Given that situation, some schools may choose to instead screen their volunteers through reference checks, and some may choose to ensure that guests always have adequate supervision. Whatever mechanisms are chosen, many of the workshop participants indicated the need to consider the protection of students as the primary concern, and to require that all parents, community members and even elders working with the school are healthy.

Maintaining discipline is also a part of the educational process, and is crucial to the development of a sense of community within a school. Students have been shown to learn

better in a safe and secure climate, and ensuring such an environment includes students exhibiting appropriate behaviour, such as respect and consideration of others. School staff also perform best when they are working without fear and in an atmosphere which allows them to enjoy their work.

First Nations schools may take a variety of approaches to student discipline, including an emphasis on addressing causes rather than focusing on "punishment," and allowing for inevitable mistakes. In too many cases, discipline policies focus on the needs of the staff at the expense of the students, which can actually push students to act in inappropriate ways. Discipline procedures should avoid causing frustration and dropouts, and involving parents and community members in this aspect of the education process may be very helpful. As Eastersen (1991) suggests, it may be possible to assign community work to deal with unacceptable behaviour, utilizing the community in ensuring a positive learning environment within the school. In general, having clear, consistent, respectful and supportive discipline policies is perhaps another indicator of school effectiveness.

5.6 School Staffing

Teachers play a vital role in schools, and the commitment of the teaching staff is a key to their success. One of the most important issues in this regard is the need for First Nations teachers and other school staff. Many people have emphasized the need for many more First Nations teachers in both First Nations and public schools. The presence of First Nations teachers and staff in schools has numerous benefits for students, parents and the community; they are often more aware of and committed to First Nations cultures and tradi-

> **"We need to have high expectations about student conduct."**
> *Workshop Participant, May, 1998.*

> **"A positive concept of discipline focuses on healing rather than punishment, and helping students understand how not to get into trouble again. Suspension is a totally inappropriate response to difficulties."**
> *Workshop Participant, May, 1998*

BCANDS has distributed a "Sexual Abuse Prevention Checklist," which includes information for parents, service providers, and schools to examine the effectiveness of their sexual abuse education and prevention programs. Among the questions addressed in the checklist are: Do schools teach sexuality to all of their students, including those with disabilities? Do schools provide sexual abuse prevention programs to all their students? Do schools encourage the integration of young people with disabilities into the community? and Do schools have clear policies and procedures for handling suspected sexual abuse? *For copies of the checklist, please contact the FNESC office.*

tions, they are often more understanding of and better connected to the students, community and parents, and they can act as positive role models for First Nations students and other people in the community.

While the presence of First Nations teachers and staff may be an indicator of a school's effectiveness, however, this issue raises a difficulty related to the shortage of First Nations people trained as teachers and administrators, an issue discussed in more detail in Section 7 – Teacher Education and Training.

Some of the workshop participants also emphasized the need for more positive role models in the schools, whether they be First Nations or non-First Nations teachers and staff. Ensuring that the individuals working in a school provide good role models may involve considering their actions when they are outside of school, but still visible within the community. It was noted that more and more people are taking strong stands regarding "codes of conduct," and parents have increasing expectations in terms of the behaviour of their children's teachers, teaching assistants, and language teachers.

Other important considerations include the presence of an adequate number of teachers with the required education and experience, a reasonable level of teacher turnover, and adequate staff development (an issue explored further below). Wilson and Napolean (1998) suggest that there is greater teacher turnover in schools in First Nations communities than there is in public schools. Because of this, the authors assert, parents do not have an opportunity to get to know and trust the teachers, teachers do not understand the family and community context in which their

students live, and long-term relationships are never developed. Encouraging teachers to stay for longer periods of time is a challenge, but can also result in significant rewards.

Policies for the selection of teachers and other school staff is another important consideration, and hiring criteria may include, among other factors, commitment, experience, knowledge of culture and language, motivation to improve skills, dedication to the education of all students, ability to manage and organize a class, ability to communicate and motivate, and knowledge of subject matter. Perhaps what is most important is that the teachers care about their students. It is also important that schools provide support to teachers to ensure that they do not "burn out," and effective tutors and teaching assistants can be very helpful in this regard. A school's administrative staff is also a key factor in its success.

There are, however, several important issues affecting the staffing of First Nations schools. Given their limited budgets, it is difficult for some First Nations schools to provide salaries which attract excellent teachers. In addition, the experience gained by teachers working in First Nations schools is not adequately recognized by other education systems in terms of seniority, salary levels, and teacher qualifications. These limiting factors must be addressed in order for staffing to be as effective as possible.

5.7 Libraries and Other Learning Resources

Adequate supplies, materials and resources are additional considerations in regard to school operations. Farrell (1995) notes that studies have shown that the availability of

"Too often, because of a lack of funding, we are forced to hire teachers who don't really want to be there."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"We should start having staff exchanges. For example, one or two teachers could go somewhere to put on a workshop, for only the cost of their travel expenses. The First Nations Schools Association could help to coordinate this idea."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

appropriate and effective reading materials in schools can result in tremendous improvements at relatively little cost, and can allow for a range of teaching materials. As Farrell states, "it should not surprise us that children who have access to textbooks and other reading material learn more than those who do not and that the more books they have the more they learn."

"The library should be a community place."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

Unfortunately, First Nations schools are not provided adequate resources to provide library materials and services at a satisfactory level. In too many schools, even adequate space and basic materials are difficult to access because of a lack of funding, and there is a tremendous need for more books and materials with First Nations content. Too many inappropriate materials still exist, and it is sometimes difficult to search out relevant materials. It is important that this situation be addressed, and that schools be provided adequate resources to promote First Nations authors, poets, and play wrights.

"It would be useful for the First Nations Schools Association to facilitate a library exchange so that we could share resources."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

In addition, many First Nations people have expressed concern about the availability of computers and other technologies in schools. It is important that First Nations students have the opportunity to learn to operate computers and other technological equipment if they are to achieve success in a variety of post-secondary education and employment situations. Too many First Nations schools also lack adequate resources for extracurricular activities; as noted above, this issue is a significant problem, as involvement in sports and other activities was highlighted by many workshop participants as a key component of student self-confidence, satisfaction with school, and long-term success.

6. Curriculum Development and Availability

According to Jack (1997), the Ministry of Education calls for all students to demonstrate competency in challenging subject matter as preparation for responsible citizenship and productive employment. This statement, however, raises questions related to what knowledge or skills students must possess, and what exactly a student must know and be able to do to demonstrate competency. These questions relate to curriculum.

Curriculum represents one of the most important aspects of the education system. How curriculum is defined, planned, implemented and evaluated also critically influences the quality of the education provided. As Williams (1996) notes, "curriculum development is an area of critical importance for First Nations education authorities. Without the ability to develop culturally relevant curriculum First Nations end up having to provide a similar version of curriculum to what is provided in provincial schools. This has proven ineffective with First Nations learners over time…" In addition:

> control over what is taught is perhaps the most important type of control, since it is central to the socialization of the child and to the survival of Indian culture. … over the past decade, a growing effort has been made to develop curriculum materials focused on Indian languages, history, symbols and cultures (Barman, Hebert and McCaskill, 1987).

Jack (1997) notes that "First Nations schools have had to work to adopt the provincial curriculum into their schools

"Education is fundamentally about the transmission of culture. Unfortunately, there is a hidden curriculum in public schools which teaches non-First Nations values and culture. We need to do away with this, and make the teaching of our culture and traditions open and clear."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

and … the fact that this has been brought forth as an issue reveals that this is not an ideal system for First Nations."

There are numerous reasons why provincial curriculum is not meeting the needs of First Nations students, but one of the most important is that the students do not see themselves reflected in its content. There is a significant need for increased development and availability of curriculum which reflects First Nations cultures, philosophies, and ways of knowing. As Christensen (1995) notes, "students must be taught how to listen to the knowledge they've stored up, but which they are seldom asked to relate. Too often students feel alienated in schools." Knowledge must not be seen as foreign, and should not be primarily about other people in other times. Levine (1995) refers to this issue as "student-centredness," and he argues that this means "perceiving the curriculum as a means through which students make sense of their own experience, encounter the world beyond their immediate lives, and put these two elements of reality together into a meaningful whole." Levine also argues that because a student-centred approach is respectful of the students and their worlds, it celebrates their languages and cultures.

Glassner (1990) suggests that education processes should also emphasize skills, not facts or information that have no use in the lives of the students. According to that author, the ability to use knowledge is important, and students should be taught the skills necessary for them to be contributors to their society so that they will be enthusiastic about their learning. Key aspects of curriculum development include relevance (which enables students to see and understand how parts fit together), and practicality.

> **"We need to think about what our people need to know, now and in the future. They need knowledge of the land base that is still available. Yes, it is important to know about other places in the world. But this should be balanced with an understanding of their own territory."**
> *Workshop Participant May, 1998*

> **"Each child must see him or herself reflected in the curriculum."**
> *Workshop Participant May, 1998*

Glassner (1990) therefore believes that while a complete definition of quality is elusive, it would include usefulness. Usefulness, he adds, is not restricted to practical or utilitarian; it can include that which is aesthetically or spiritually useful, or useful in some other way that is important to the student. The goal should be students who have the skills to contribute to their society, who are enthusiastic about what they have learned, and who are aware of how learning can be of use to them in the future.

Such comments are supported by a study by the Four Worlds Development Project (1989), which included a curriculum review of the First Nations Dyshart School in Manitoba. That study found that students failed to understand the relevance of what was being taught in the classroom to their life outside the school and to their vision of what their futures would be like. As a result of this perceived lack of relevance, there was little transfer of skills from one academic context to another, basic skills were not retained from one year to the next, and students displayed little enthusiasm for their academic work.

Many First Nations people have stressed the need for curriculum that emphasizes academic achievement and allows for an acquisition of basic skills. Reading, for example, is seen by many people as the foundation for all other learning activities, and many workshop participants emphasized the need to teach basic skills in the areas of english, math, reading and writing. As Wilson and Napolean (1998) note, there is widespread agreement that "teachers and administrators should continue to focus on developing academic competence, especially in oral and written English. The need to ensure that students are provided the skills they will require in the public education system is also a key consideration.

"When we make curriculum relevant, we'll find success."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"Parents must be involved in talking about what wholistic education is. It relates to the heart and soul of our communities."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"What characteristics are truly valued in an individual? Has anyone ever gone to communities to investigate this? It would be useful to do so. Those should be the standards."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"We need to prepare our kids for the transition to public schools. Most of us don't have the luxury of keeping our kids to grade 12."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"To be ready for change, our students must know how to learn, and to access a variety of information and materials."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

Curriculum is needed which will help all students develop the values, skills and knowledge they will need to achieve success — however they might define it — in their schooling, employment, families, communities, and personal lives. In this regard, several workshops included discussion of the need to expose students to a wide array of experiences and subject matter so that they can choose their own goals based upon an understanding of the variety of options open to them. This issue is also reflected in Napolean's study (1998), which indicates that too many First Nations students have planned inadequately for the future, and that those who have planned have chosen from a limited range of career options and are poorly prepared for working in their communities.

In addition, students need to be prepared for life-long learning, and taught problem solving skills, critical thinking and an ability to question things they read and hear. It was also noted that students should also be encouraged to be creative, to know how to discover, to give meaning to the world around them, to understand others, and to be able to express what they feel, know, believe and value.

In an equally important way, First Nations people also see the need for curriculum which also embodies and builds upon a strong cultural foundation and First Nations philosophies, values, traditions, the relationship between land and people, conservation, respect for others (particularly elders), sharing, and cultural identities (Eastersen, 1991). For example:

> The knowledge, skills and values to be learned by children reside within the people, within the land and within the interaction of people and the land. Furthermore,

the curricular processes that 'teach' people how to get along, how to relate to the land, how to survive and how to be in the world are contained within these interactions. Curriculum from this perspective is a living entity (Gitwangak Education Society, cited in Jack, 1997).

Many of the workshop participants highlighted the need to include spirituality in the curriculum, as a means of providing balance to the lives of students. Spirituality was described as the relationship and connection between people and the environment and world around us. Spirituality was also seen as a means of looking at the whole person, including their heart, soul and mind. Language programs are also directly associated with these issues, and again the importance of parental, family and community involvement with these programs was raised. It was pointed out that sometimes parents think that when their children are learning about culture and language, they are not learning valuable curriculum. Schools must work to demonstrate that this is not the case, and parental involvement in program planning may be useful in that regard.

Kirkness (1992) argues that "curriculum must be structured to use the child's awareness of her or his own cultural environment as a springboard for learning about the external world," and she maintains that parents and the community must be involved in curriculum development if it is to be successful. Kirkness further argues that there is an increasing recognition of the need to have culturally relevant programs and curriculum, and an increased effort to put some relevant information into existing curriculum; however, there is not as much recognition that First Nations education systems and processes must spring from First Nations cultures.

> *"Students don't really have the opportunity to examine themselves wholistically, and to look inside themselves spiritually. They know they're angry, but they deal with that at a surface level only. We need to help them feel better about themselves."*
> *Workshop Participant, May, 1998*

> *"Their ability to find their place within their community and nation will lead to their ability to find their place outside of their community."*
> *Workshop Participant, May, 1998*

"Don't put culture into the education process, put the education proc-ess into the culture."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"Making education processes reflect our cultures is the key. We must be brave and do this!"
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"Let's start using the knowledge which is in our communities."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"Research is needed into how to fit traditional perspectives of child development into the contemporary education system."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

In this regard, the way in which the information is transmitted to students is also seen to be an important consideration. Some people have indicated the need to teach culture in context, utilizing elders and community resource people in the classroom to validate the authenticity of the information being presented. In addition, it was noted that communities have certain expectations for young people, and for how they will become a part of the community and develop into future leaders. Communities also have expectations about academics and their individual achievements. Now there is a need to consider how to bring those expectations together, and learning how to do that must involve families and students.

Involving students directly in cultural events and activities is seen by many people to be a useful learning technique, as is the teaching of basic skills with the use of traditional activities to reinforce concepts or skills acquisition. In addition, the need to bring traditional processes, such as story telling, oral instruction, and community-based examples into teaching and curriculum, has been emphasized.

Based upon their study of First Nations students and their learning habits, Henry and Pepper (1988) argue that teaching strategies that use concrete examples and move from theory to practice are most effective. The authors suggest a variety of techniques, including using cooperative learning groups and group projects, informal classroom activities, experience-based activities, metaphors, analogies and symbols, games and flexible learning activities, peer tutoring, visuals and illustrations, and a great deal of encouragement.

The people involved in the Four Worlds Development Project (1989) support such assertions, as they pointed out the following differences between the educational needs of First Nations and other students:

(i)   First Nations students learn better in a cooperative rather than competitive classroom environment;

(ii)   they better understand subject matter presented in a wholistic manner before individual facts or skills are taught;

(iii)   they respond better to visual information than they do oral;

(iv)   they are accustomed to learning by having skills modelled for them, as opposed to having processes described; and

(v)   non-directive and an egalitarian management and teaching style are more effective for them.

Some of the workshop participants agreed with those assertions, and added that multi-sensory education helps many First Nations students to perform better. Other workshop participants, however, were somewhat concerned about generalized comments related to the learning styles of First Nations students, and argued that more research should be conducted in this area before any final conclusions are reached.

Methods of teaching relate to another important consideration – the difference between content and performance standards. Jack (1997) highlights this issue, stating that content standards relate to the knowledge or understanding students are expected to have, whereas performance standards describe a specific use of knowledge and skills.

The Hazelton First Nations Education Centre works to ensure that every part of the curriculum has a local or cultural focus, such as circle and smudge, Gitskan Language and Art, music, and carpentry. The academic skills programs are designed to ensure equivalency, and often surpass provincial standards. If the centre cannot offer a course a student wishes to pursue, arrangements are made for the student to do it through correspondence with local tutoring and additional materials to make the courses relevant to his or her life and cultural background. Every week, talking circles and smudge are used for spiritual healing, cleansing the soul, and dealing with the difficulties of everyday life. The centre is open to all sorts of ideas, and students are encouraged to become involved, to enrich the lives of those who choose to attend the centre.
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The First Nations Education Division of the Greater Victoria School District has been actively involved in developing curricula and learning materials for levels K-12. A variety of cultural materials have been developed for teachers to integrate into their classrooms. In addition, a Framework for Developing First Nations Curriculum has been written, which addresses a variety of issues including planning for, writing, implementing and evaluating curriculum.

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The Tales of Northern B.C. Reading Series were developed to provide adult learners with reading materials of an appropriate level which are also relevant to First Nations people living in the North. The books are being used with success in several learning centres.

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Jack notes that in transferring cultural information, a focus can be on what students should know, on what they should be able to do, or on both.

In terms of ensuring that effective curricular materials are available, this may involve using existing materials, text books, and literature that are appropriate. More textbooks, curriculum kits, and audio visual materials from a First Nations perspective are beginning to appear. As a study by Ross (1988) indicates, however, there is a shortage of children's books written without bias. Ross researched the stereotypes and racism in children's books, and found that appropriate reading materials were too few, too hard to find, and even more limited in terms of junior and intermediate materials. The workshop participants also noted that First Nations students are overwhelmed by negative stereotypes in the media and school textbooks.

In addition, Kirkness (1998) refers to the lack of curricular resources for language teaching. Kirkness argues that there is a need for "extensive research in the area of Aboriginal languages, their philosophies and their relationship to developing curricula and appropriate materials for language teaching." Given that situation, new materials may need to be created in many instances, and resources must be made available to First Nations to allow for the development of relevant curriculum and curricular materials.

In regard to curriculum development, several important points were raised throughout the workshop discussions. It was suggested, for example, that it is difficult for each community to do everything that is required. Curriculum development includes a need for curriculum framers, people with knowledge of cultural content, community resource peo-

ple, graphic artists, editors, publishers, supplies and materials. Opportunities for sharing within and between nations should therefore be considered. While some curriculum must be specific for each community, it is sometimes useful to do comparative studies of First Nations cultures, and sharing resources between nations can help to demonstrate the diversity of First Nations people.

The need to identify First Nations people with expertise in curriculum development was also noted in several workshops. Creating an inventory of people with curriculum development experience who can link the cultural components to theory, as well as a list of places which provide training for new people to learn curriculum development was noted as a worthwhile initiative. First Nations people needing new curriculum could then use those resources to identify appropriate people for the task. While the individuals listed may not have knowledge of each specific culture, it may be possible to match people who have the cultural knowledge with people who can transfer that knowledge into a curriculum framework. Similarly, it was also suggested that having curriculum templates and models available for distribution would also help communities and schools.

The development of culturally appropriate curriculum and curricular materials raises very important issues related to copyright. As many people have noted, there is a need for more research and information sharing to ensure that materials are developed and used respectfully and without appropriation. A resource and information guide prepared for the Association of Aboriginal Post-Secondary Institutes, Education Resource Centre (1996) on *Copyright Law* explores the issue of copyright and how it pertains to traditional indigenous knowledge, and the types of works protected by copyright. As the resource guide notes, ownership of a work is important because it determines who has control of it, who can benefit from its use, and who must be contacted to get permission to use the work. It was suggested at the workshops that the relevance of this issue for curriculum should be explored more fully.

7. Teacher Education and Training

As mentioned in Section 5.6, many people agree that the competence and commitment of teachers are vital prerequisites for quality education. Eastersen (1991), for example, notes that the effectiveness of First Nations education is critically dependent on the quality of teaching. Throughout the province, there is a core of excellent teachers who demonstrate tremendous enthusiasm and energy in their teaching careers. It is important that there be continued efforts to foster an effective and skilled teaching force.

Fullan (1993) also supports the notion of continuous teacher education, including pre-service and in-service training, as a major vehicle for educational development, but the author asserts that "despite the rhetoric, society has not yet seriously tried to use teacher education as a tool for [educational] improvement," and there is not always a sufficient commitment to investing in teacher education. There are likely several reasons why this is the case, including the fact that investing in teacher education is a long-term solution to pressing issues. There are, however, no substitutes to having a high quality teaching force.

One of the most important issues in terms of teacher education is the need to attract good recruits – particularly First Nations people with an interest in teaching and education. While teacher education programs must ensure that the professional and personal qualifications of new entrants to the teacher force are adequate, it may be useful to broaden the concept of a "good" teacher beyond a focus on students with the highest grades.

"Teacher training tends to be ignored. It is more important than we give it credit."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"First and foremost, we need more First Nations people trained as educators."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

As discussed above, the existence of First Nations teachers in a school can have numerous benefits. Accordingly, in recruiting and accepting students into teacher education programs, consideration could be given to the individuals' previous experience, knowledge of First Nations cultures and traditions, connection to First Nations communities, and understanding and awareness of the needs and unique circumstances of First Nations students. Wilson and Martin (1997) highlight this issue by commenting that "when teachers are able to bring a strong understanding of culture to their classes, they have the potential to validate and improve the quality of education for all students," and "it is extremely important for children to have teachers who care about them and who understand the realities of their lives. One workshop participant emphasized the importance of attracting recruits with the appropriate characteristics by noting that effective training is only one component of teacher effectiveness; personal suitability and past experience is equally important.

In terms of the education process, it is also necessary to prepare new teachers effectively. In this training, in addition to the basic skills necessary for the teaching process itself, it may be useful to include cross-cultural awareness programs, information related to working cooperatively with First Nations communities and families in implementing educational programs, and an emphasis on meeting the unique needs of First Nations students. It is important to set teachers up for success, which may involve greater exposure to a variety of situations, including more practicums for developing teachers in First Nations schools -- particularly in schools located in remote and/or northern locations. These opportunities would provide for cross-cultural training in a practical setting, and preparation for high stress

"Too many teachers are ill prepared for band controlled schools. You almost have to experience the situation to fully understand it."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"Let's give society a jolt so that they begin to look at our children the way we do -- as unique individuals with so much to share and offer."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"We need to effect teacher education programs to make all teachers aware of the needs of First Nations students."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"We should be willing to talk about racism and address it directly."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"Incorporate multicultural and First Nations awareness as mandatory requirements. Then empower local First Nations people to define and design those requirements."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"Established, institutionalized programs teach according to provincial standards, they are too narrow, and too focused on intellectual development. The programs need to be more wholistic, and they need to incorporate spirituality and values."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

environments. Ellwood (1995) notes that numerous scholars have shown how easy and damaging it is for well-intentioned educators to make mistakes based upon cultural ignorance. The effectiveness of teachers is limited if they do not understand what their students see and know, and this in turn can limit students' chances for success.

Hersch (1993) asserts that "most teacher education programs in North America serve to maintain a social system based on inequality and injustice." Instead, teacher education programs should promote future teachers who deal critically with reality and work to improve it (Liston and Zeichner, 1991). In this regard, it is important to design courses on anti-racist education, and Hersch (1993) suggests that Aboriginal people who graduate from teacher education programs may be the most appropriate people to design anti-racist teacher education curricula and materials, as "anti-racist materials produced from an Aboriginal point of view would also present a superior form of knowledge for all learners, because it would be more concretely rooted in actually existing reality." In addition, several workshop participants suggested that courses in First Nations education should be a degree requirement.

Grant also maintains that more work in the area of teacher education remains to be done, particularly in terms of incorporating new philosophies of teacher education into Universities. Hebert (1988), for example, argues that more effective teacher education programs may use a process of empowerment and the development of a critical pedagogy, a perspective supported by Hersch (1993). Therefore, the flexibility allowed for innovative teaching philosophies and learning styles may be an important element in the success of First Nations teacher education programs.

The workshop participants indicated several areas of mainstream teacher education programs that need reform, but Universities were also seen to be among the institutions most resistant to change. It was recommended that the programs begin making special education a core aspect of their training, and that they train more for open-mindedness and flexibility. Some workshop participants indicated that teacher training programs need to focus on teachers as educators with knowledge of counselling, social work, drug and alcohol prevention, and child abuse, as well. Children do not always come to school ready to learn; sometimes teachers must have an ability to help their students with basic social issues. This issue is also related to the problem of expecting schools to do too much, as discussed in section 3.4, and raises the need for collaboration amongst service providers.

It was also suggested that conventional programs in institutions produce teachers who believe that they know what is best for students, which can lead to conflict if parents, community members or students disagree. It may be useful to rethink the tools for teaching, particularly if more research is conducted regarding whether there are learning environments which are more appropriate for First Nations students. Teachers should also be trained to have better observation and responsiveness techniques, so that they can watch students to see and adapt to what they need.

Finally, the workshop participants suggested that teacher training programs may be able to address ways to incorporate language and culture programming into education; it would clearly be impossible to accomplish this goal in terms of each specific First Nations' values and traditions, but it may be useful to discuss fundamental concepts related to

"Programs are too oriented to the status quo, not to what is possible."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"We were concerned that sometimes communities can't accept our own trained people, which really hurts morale. We wanted to engage the community in training so they would recognize our teachers. Also, we found that when people left the community to study teaching, sometimes they forgot about the community they were to serve, or brought back stereotypes and biases about First Nations learners. In an effort to address this problem, we implemented a training program at home."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

teaching language and culture. The issue of language teacher training is particularly key. As Kirkness (1998, p. 4-5) suggests:

> it appears that there are few certified Aboriginal teachers who have the facility with their ancestral languages. Those who have been given the responsibility of teaching our languages have typically been fluent speakers with little or no training. ... All across the country, Aboriginal language teachers continue to plead for training.

FNESC is undertaking research into Aboriginal Language Teacher Training Programs in an effort to outline skills and tools which are consistent in the teaching of First Nations languages.

In recent years, there has been a growth in the number of teacher education programs designed specifically for First Nations people. These programs have been said to be very effective, and Grant (1995) suggests that they have had some success in getting First Nations teachers into more classrooms. As pointed out by several workshop participants, however, it would be useful to now take the time to evaluate the effectiveness of these programs, to identify whether they are working, and, if so, to determine what aspects are the most important. It was also suggested that there be more graduate programs offered closer to communities, and more programs generally available in the North.

In-service training is a key consideration. It is important that First Nations schools take measures to maintain teacher competency and teacher motivation. Part of the problem with initial training programs is that there is simply too much

"We are designing a course about the reality of our community, and the local college has committed to incorporate the course as a requirement in all service training programs such as teaching, health administration..."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

information to acquire, too many skills to learn, in too little time. As a result, formal teacher education programs may be best viewed as the initial stage of an ongoing process of learning for teachers, and schools which include provisions for in-service training for their teachers may be more likely to enjoy success.

In addition, as the workshop participants noted, teachers who are new to First Nations schools may need training which reflects the school's values, goals and philosophies. They also may need exposure to some of the differences associated with working in First Nations schools. First Nations schools are generally smaller, less structured, and have fewer screens between the staff and parents. These characteristics can result in greater job satisfaction, and many teachers enjoy a closer connection to the people in the community; however, they can also raise challenges. As Wilson and Napolean (1998, p. 13) state, "schools in the villages are a major focus of the community. This allows for greater communication with parents and greater possibility for conflicts to emerge and continue." Dealing with these issues in a positive way can be covered in very thorough orientations, or though continued in-service training.

Some workshop participants indicated that teachers leaving conventional training programs need to be taught flexibility in their thinking, and require "deprogramming" to overcome the mindsets they were taught in school. In addition, it may be useful to share with teachers alternatives to provincial curriculum which they may never have been exposed to in University. Non-First Nations teachers, it was noted by a workshop participant, are often hesitant to teach cultural content, and orientation sessions and implementation workshops can help them learn to do so effectively and respect-

"People need extra training if they are to teach in First Nations schools."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"In-service teacher training can work to unseat myths and stereotypes of First Nations students."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

fully. Finally, it was suggested that in-service training in special education is a key issue.

Unfortunately, a concern was raised about in-service training for First Nations schools; teachers who receive such training, and who may commit considerable time and energy to learning about the unique aspects of working in First Nations schools, may not have that extra work recognized if they leave the school, and may not have access to the same benefits as do people trained in conventional ways.

"Before we can have quality education, we need new teacher training in Universities and Colleges."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998.

Generally, however, teacher training was seen to be one of the most important factors in school success, including appropriate in-service training. It was suggested by some workshop participants, given its importance but also its cost, that First Nations schools and the First Nations Schools Association investigate the possibility of sharing in-service training, perhaps by designing and implementing professional development days specifically for teachers in First Nations schools, or (as noted above) by coordinating teacher and personnel exchanges.

8. Evaluation

Evaluation and assessment are issues directly associated with education standards and school effectiveness. Regular, thorough, and transparent evaluation processes can be used to address a number of concerns. Evaluation relates directly to issues of accreditation. It also relates to community acceptance and the need to demonstrate to parents, the community, and funding agencies the credibility and achievements of First Nations schools.

Useful evaluations in the context of First Nations schools, however, may require expanded attitudes and expectations on the part of parents, community members and the public, and may require a commitment to new approaches to and ways of thinking about success and quality education. Current evaluation systems do not reflect the goals and values of First Nations. As Matthew (cited in Jack, 1997) states:

> … the context in which First Nations exist today … is sufficiently different from that of public schools that the difference must be accounted for in the evaluation process. It is argued that evaluations conducted from a technical point of view, utilizing criteria developed outside of the First Nations community to judge the worth of the school programs are of limited value to First Nations decision makers.

Evaluation incorporates a number of different factors, and includes the need to assess the school's organization and operations, teachers, and students.

"Don't be defensive about what you're doing at the school. Find out what people honestly think about the school."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998.

Evaluation is important when you're trying to have a system recognized. It demonstrates that you have the capacity to meet certain goals and expectations.
Workshop Participant, May, 1998.

"Evaluation should be seen as positive, not punitive."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

8.1 School Evaluations

School evaluations can be very time-consuming but also very valuable exercises. Comprehensive school evaluations should be undertaken periodically, while smaller assessments and checks should be more regular.

"A school's evaluation should consider its transmission of culture." Workshop Participant, May, 1998.

The need to evaluate First Nations schools raises a number of important questions, such as who will choose the assessment indicators, what information is relevant and should be collected, and who will define effectiveness and success. Currently, individuals who are sent by the provincial and federal government to evaluate First Nations schools sometimes lack an understanding of First Nations cultures and priorities. This makes it difficult for them to put the activities and programs they review into an appropriate context.

For this reason, it has been suggested by several people that a process for peer evaluation would be useful, and that the FNSA might be an appropriate vehicle for the organization of teams of First Nations schools representatives to evaluate each other. This issue has been a topic of discussion for some time.

"We need more how-to's and examples of school evaluations. The FNSA should design a framework. We also need more people trained to do evaluation." Workshop Participant, May, 1998.

Primarily, it has been noted, school evaluations should involve determining how satisfied the community is with the operations of the school, whether students generally stay in and enjoy school, and whether they are gaining what they need from their educational experiences. The information outlined throughout this framework paper is intended to offer some other suggestions in regard to these questions, indicating some of the key considerations which relate to First Nations schools and education processes.

Some of the crucial components, the workshop participants suggested, are the school's reflection of its goals and vision, the level of community involvement in the school, its flexibility, ability to respond to change, and signs of improvement, and its wholistic nature. The evaluation may involve conventional measures such as graduation rates, completion rates, attendance rates, and age/grade placement rates. These indicators should not, however, be seen as the only, or even the most important, considerations.

School evaluations may also involve assessments of the school governing authority and administrative structures, as well as the school's infrastructure and school manuals.

In addition, evaluation of a school's effectiveness will likely include some consideration of the success of its programs, and as language and culture are such crucial aspects of First Nations schools, these programs must be among those assessed. The issue of evaluating language programs has been a topic of interest for some time. The summary of the 1996 FNESC regional sessions, for example, notes that "First Nations are suggesting that they should come together and jointly determine the goals of Aboriginal language programs and how they should set and evaluate standards" (Williams, 1996). Many of the workshop participants also addressed this issue, and suggested that standards relating to language and culture must match the school and community's goals, and should depend upon whether the focus is on language and culture revival, retention, rejuvenation and/or maintenance.

Ignace (1998) also directly addresses the issue of standards, evaluation and language programs, and presents a similar conclusion. Ignace notes that assessment criteria

"We need to keep accurate records of where kids are, if they've left school, why they've left, and what we're going to do about getting them back. We also need to see who's going on to post-secondary education, training and employment""
Workshop Participant, May, 1998.

"Evaluation of the school should be school based. It should fundamentally ask "what's important to our school, and is that happening?""
Workshop Participant, May, 1998.

"If the needs of the students are addressed it's a quality system." *Workshop Participant, May, 1998.*

for Aboriginal language programs that aim to promote the continuity of intergenerational language transmission include: (a) its provision to students a level of proficiency so that they can use the language in the community and use it with such confidence and ease that they will speak it with their children; and (b) the provision of incentives and measures for re-integrating the actual use of the language outside of the school, in the Aboriginal household and community.

Ignace (1998) also notes that Aboriginal language programs can teach an appreciation of language and cultural knowledge and skills, and that these programs have a valuable place in the curriculum. In general, Ignace suggests that language programs should be evaluated according to the objectives they set, which may range from fluency, to competence in the language, to more knowledge about and skills in the language.

When evaluating teachers, you may consider whether they understand and reflect the school's vision, philosophy and goals in their work. You may also ask whether they reflect your language and cultural goals, even if they are not directly responsible for language and cultural programs. *Workshop Participant, May, 1998.*

As suggested above, the school governing agency, the community, families, teachers and students may all be involved in answering questions related to school effectiveness and success based upon collectively established goals and expectations.

8.2 Teacher Evaluations

It is also important that teachers be regarded as professionals, submitting their expertise to regular appraisals. Teacher evaluations should be viewed as positive components of school operations, as they can promote teacher motivation, recognize the work and commitment of teachers, and highlight areas for improvement, thereby fostering professional development.

It was suggested at one workshop that the only aspects of teacher effectiveness that can be assessed by people who are external to the school is whether the teacher is certified, and whether he or she passes a criminal records check. All other matters, it was argued, can only be properly assessed by people working within the school. School administrators, for example, are best able to consider whether teachers demonstrate adequate skills in terms of record keeping, classroom preparation, job performance, commitment, and understanding of the First Nations culture. The evaluation process itself should be open and adaptable. Ideally, teachers should be involved in the process of their own evaluations, and should undertake self-assessments, so that they have a full understanding of the goals and outcomes of the evaluation process. Other issues raised by the workshop participants include the need for a response to recommendations made, and the need for more administrative stability so that teachers are provided some consistency in follow-up.

"We really need information in this area, as well as templates and models for teacher evaluation."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

8.3 Student Assessment

One of the most important but also controversial areas of evaluation is student assessment. For too many people, student assessment dominates education; whether in the form of exams and tests, or marks and grades for course work, its influence is pervasive.

Discussions of student assessment too often focus primarily on testing students to determine their levels of competency in a variety of subject matters. Some people view standardized tests as "objective," "rigorous," "easily quantifiable," and therefore teacher-proof mechanisms that will

"What should students know? Ask them. And ask their parents, families and communities. They can determine what is acceptable."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"Research is needed regarding ways to assess students that will measure the things that are important to us but that are difficult to measure."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998.

"We need training on how to assess students. We need examples of alternative assessment tools, such as portfolios, and different record keeping techniques and reporting mechanisms."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"Most of our students at some point transfer into the public system. We have to recognize that, and ensure that they are able to successfully make the transition."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

guarantee validity. Often this perspective of student assessment distorts the learning process, as teachers teach to the test, emphasize short-term memorizing, and cause anxiety and stress in students. It also means that testing is used too much to categorize students, which is extremely problematic. Levine (1995) argues that the "tyranny of the standardized measures" leads to pressures to trivialize, teach isolated skills, and neglect higher-order skills, and Meier (1995) suggests that they ignore the skills needed to function in a complex world, including being able to work collectively, understand the perspectives of others, persevere, motivate, solve problems in a real-world context, lead, and value moral integrity and social commitment.

Student assessment, therefore, should be viewed more broadly than in terms of standardized testing, and it should be thought of as a positive aspect of the learning process. It is useful to set clear goals and high expectations for students, and ensure that students are encouraged to meet those goals. As Rampal, Singh and Didyk (1984) found in a study of First Nations communities in northern Manitoba, there is a strong positive correlation between teacher expectations and student achievement. And as one workshop participant commented, assessment should ascertain whether, at each level, students are getting the knowledge, skills and values they need to have their feet firmly planted in both worlds. As the OECD (1989) also reports, information on performance can tell us what we've mastered, and what we may want to learn more about.

Evaluation can sustain and motivate students, recognize their efforts, monitor their progress on an ongoing basis, and certify their competence. Student assessment is also key if First Nations students are to be allowed an opportu-

nity to transfer to other schools, gain entrance to post-secondary institutions, or gain employment.

Unfortunately, in some cases student evaluation is discouraging, because it emphasizes weaknesses and "failures." Rather, assessment can make a positive connection to education if it moves beyond measurement to include highlighting of strengths, guiding students on how to improve their performance, and informing and shaping their learning process. This is often referred to as the instructional aspect of assessment. What is key to student assessment, then, is to ensure that it is appropriately designed in terms of form, use, level of difficulty, frequency, timing and feedback. Assessment procedures must also be culturally appropriate; too often, for example, First Nations students are labelled as having special needs as a result of inappropriate testing techniques.

Glassner (1990) argues that it is important to ask students to demonstrate that they can use what they've learned, and that they have mastered processes, demonstrating their abilities rather than their memories. It is also necessary to carefully consider what will be rewarded; for example, should the assessment process recognize fast work or quality work, quantity of participation or quality of participation, independent achievement or a cooperative attitude, or a combination or balance between each characteristic? Alternative approaches to assessment may include a continuous assessment of students using their regular work (moving away from formal exams or standardized tests), records of achievements, portfolios, practical tasks, school-based assessment by teachers, self-assessment by students, using the results as feedback to help define objectives and encourage learners to take responsibility for their own learn-

One alternative assessment method used by several First Nations communities is the Structure of Intellect (SOI) Program. SOI is intended to provide practical evaluations of the basic learning skills of students in grades K - University, including adults. The program also provides specific training for any underdeveloped skills which may be identified, and provides the student with an understanding of their learning strengths and learning style. The learning skills that are taught through the SOI program are applicable to academic achievement, as well as being beneficial to self-esteem, verbal comprehension, memory and focusing skills which are necessary for employment and success in school. SOI recognizes that people learn in different ways, and emphasizes how students learn.
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ing. Generally, effective schools may be those that focus their student assessment mechanisms on what they see as ultimately important in terms of student achievement, and the values and principles students are expected to demonstrate.

The workshop participants made a variety of additional observations related to student assessment. They indicated that it should be used to demonstrate a mastery of subject matter and skills appropriate at each grade level, and many people argued that there should be no "social passing." Allowing children to advance grades without adequate preparation, they argued, was setting them up for failure. Student assessment, it was noted, should match the learning process, and should be structured to complement individual needs and individual learning plans. The need for research into alternative assessment tools that can incorporate values, culture, and individual potential was also emphasized by many people.

Generally, in all evaluations, whether they be school, teacher or student assessments, it is most important that there be follow-up on the recommendations or suggestions which arise. The evaluations should include recommendations for improvement, and a plan of action to reward and continue the positive outcomes, and remediate and assist with any weaknesses. Implementing these clearly requires commitment and adequate funding. Evaluations which lay dormant on shelves can cause frustration, bitterness and will result in diminshed commitment to future assessment processes.

I've seen lots of evaluations. Unfortunately, too many of them are sitting on shelves. **Workshop Participant, May, 1998.**

9. Summary Comments

The issue of standards for First Nations education is extremely complex, and the consideration of this important area will likely continue for some time. The framework outlined above is intended only to promote discussion about how First Nations schools might begin to develop measures which are appropriate and effective. As Delpit (1995) notes, "asking or demanding that people work harder and do more of what has always been done in the way that it has always been done will not produce the needed changes or results in education." This statement was echoed by a workshop participant, who noted that "we musn't be afraid to try new approaches. Too often, we go back to what we're used to. We pattern our education system on what we know. This must stop."

The imposition of standards that were developed for public schools will not meet the needs of First Nations schools, a fact which is clearly indicated by anecdotal information based upon the years of experience of First Nations educators. It is also clearly demonstrated by the unacceptably low success rates of many First Nations students attending public schools.

First Nations schools provide an important alternative for many First Nations students. Establishing measures to demonstrate the effectiveness of those schools is an important aspect of increasing recognition of the real benefits they create. As many of the workshop participants noted, there is a real difference in the children who are graduating from First Nations schools, in terms of how secure they are,

"The more you do what you've always done, the more you'll get what you've always got."
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"Too many First Nations schools are trying harder, but with the same tools. We're now learning not to try harder, but to try differently"
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

"First Nations schools are too often judged within the context of today only, without consideration to past and future developments. Think about how far they've come and the accomplishments they've made. Previously, simply the idea of First Nations schools seemed unrealistic. Now look!"
Workshop Participant, May, 1998

their sense of community, and their willingness to go on and see the education they have as a first step.

It is clear that the availability of adequate funding is a key factor in determining the success of First Nations schools in each of the areas outlined above. However, while there is definitely a need for increased funding for First Nations schools, this reality should not halt considerations of other issues.

As Jack (1997) suggests, what is most important is that standards are set at a level such that students will do their best to achieve them with the support of parents, schools and the community. Educators alone can not make the necessary decisions or changes to ensure the success of First Nations schools; establishing school visions, and considering ways in which to measure the success of First Nations schools in reflecting those visions, will require a commitment from the entire community.

"We need a sustained commitment to change." Workshop Participant, May, 1998

Enhancing and demonstrating the success of First Nations schools will also be strengthened by coordinated efforts between schools, and this project is intended to reflect that goal. As one workshop participant commented, we need to think more about how to support one another, and come together in meaningful ways to work toward healthy and positive futures for First Nations young people. The First Nations Education Steering Committee and First Nations Schools Association are dedicated to such a concept, and hope to continue to share ideas and research through a continued consideration of the issues highlighted above.

Endnote 1.
General Discussions of School Effectiveness and "Quality" Education

The concept of school effectiveness and quality education is a common concern, but one without precise definition or a common set of criteria. One indicator of quality used quite consistently is student achievement, which is often related to standardized achievements tests and national averages. As Smith and Lusthaus (1995) outline, in some discussions quality has been understood in relation to criterion-referenced measures and normative test scores. Throughout the world, there is an increasing emphasis by the general public on the "products" of education and the need to set clear and precise measurements of effectiveness. This thinking, however, is somewhat limited.

"Quality" means different things to different observers, not all people share the same perceptions of education priorities, and the number and variety of duties assigned to schools raises questions related to the quality of what, and quality for whom? There is no way, then, to avoid the subjective nature of "quality." As a result, many people argue that schools should be encouraged to establish their own student and community centred definitions of quality, which relate to determining the underlying goals of the school and education system.

The possible definitions of effective schools, quality education, school visions and/or educational goals, are almost unlimited. Some descriptions focus primarily on student achievement, such as:

> The purpose of the educational process is to assist students in their development of the joy and tools for learning which will permit them to live productive lives in their world (National LEADership Network Study, 1993).

The OECD (1995) cites the example of the Ontario school system, which identified ten essential learning outcomes for students, including:

- be able to use language to think, learn and communicate effectively;
- be able to use mathematical knowledge and skills effectively;
- be able to apply scientific methods and knowledge in understanding the world, solving problems, and making responsible decisions;
- be able to use a wide variety of technologies effectively;
- be able to apply historical and geographical knowledge in analyzing world events and understanding different cultures;
- show a commitment to peace, social justice and the protection of the environment in their own community, Canada and the world;
- have the skills needed to get along well with other people, show respect for human rights, and practice responsible citizenship;
- plan properly for entering the work force or continuing education;
- appreciate, enjoy and participate in the arts; and
- build healthy lifestyles and relationships.

Goodland (cited in Smith and Lusthaus, 1995, p. 383 - 384) states that:

> [in order to improve the quality of schooling, we] need to involve students in a variety of ways of thinking, to introduce students to concepts and not just facts, to provide situations that provoke and evoke curiousity, to develop in students concern for one's own performance in work and the satisfaction of meeting one's own standards, to cultivate appreciation of others through cooperative endeavours, and to be concerned about the traits of mind and character fostered in schools.

Many sources also recognize that the potential for student success – and for failure – is often more closely associated with the education system than it is with individuals' actions. Some definitions of school goals and effectiveness therefore include the responsibility of educators to provide an environment in which continuous improvement and quality education can be delivered.

The National LEADership Network Study (1993), for example, highlights five necessities for school effectiveness, including:

1. a commitment to improvement;
2. a philosophy of quality;
3. an end to a dependence on final products;
4. consistent training programs; and
5. leadership focused on helping people to improve upon what they do.

Eastersen (1991) provides a list of some of the characteristics commonly associated with effective schools and strong student performance, which represents a summary of a variety of sources. The characteristics she identifies include:

- strong administrative leadership;
- high expectations for student achievement;
- an orderly atmosphere conducive to learning;
- an emphasis on basic skills acquisition;
- frequent monitoring of student progress;
- a focus on fundamental learning objectives of the school;
- an efficient use of classroom time;
- fostering high levels of parental contact and involvement; and
- goal specific staff development programs.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 1993) also outlines the following characteristics of effective schools:

1. a commitment to clearly and commonly identified goals;
2. collaborative planning and shared decision-making;
3. positive leadership in initiating and maintaining improvements;
4. staff stability;
5. continuing staff development related to each school's goals;
6. carefully planned curriculum that ensures sufficient place for each student to acquire essential knowledge and skills;
7. high level of parental involvement and skills;
8. maximum use of learning time; and
9. a responsible education authority.

Finally, the preamble of the *BC School Act* states that:

> … it is the goal of a democratic society to ensure that all its members receive an education that enables them to become personally fulfilled and publicly useful, thereby increasing the strength and contribution to the health and stability of that society;

> … the purpose of the British Columbia school system is to enable all learners to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy, democratic and pluralistic society and a prosperous and sustainable economy.

The goals and visions of First Nations schools may share some of the characteristics of quality and effective education outlined above. However, the perspectives of First Nations people in terms of quality education will likely be somewhat different, reflecting their unique cultures, traditions and histories.

Appendix One -- Recommendations

Political

√ Discussions with the BC Teachers Federation and the BC College of Teachers should continue, followed by discussions with institutes offering teacher training programs, to consider issues of flexibility and alternate approaches. Discussions should also continue regarding appropriate recognition of teachers in First Nations schools.

√ The Chiefs Action Committee should continue its discussions with the Department of Indian Affairs regarding improved access to capital funding for the building of First Nations schools.

√ The Chiefs Action Committee should continue to pursue the need for resources to develop new appropriate and relevant curriculum.

√ Funding for special education must be pursued as a priority.

Research and/or Project Management

√ The FNSA should coordinate a library exchange for First Nations schools.

√ Fundraising for library resources should be pursued.

√ Research into practical examples of and analysis of the benefits and challenges of alternate school calendars should be initiated.

√ Research into copyright and ownership of First Nations language/ culture/ curriculum would be useful, including the collection of relevant sample agreements.

√ The issue of curriculum development requires substantial research, and should involve the development of a sample/template, and the creation of a list of people with expertise in this area. The FNSA should also organize a sharing of resources to develop new curriculum.

√ The Ministry of education should establish and share a list of existing curriculum resources relevant for First Nations schools.

√ The FNSA should begin the facilitation of staff/resource people exchanges between schools.

√ The success of alternate teacher training programs should be investigated, and research should be done regarding the incorporation of new philosophies into mainstream programs.

√ Special needs programs and services should be investigated and their success should be analyzed.

√ Sample school handbooks and newsletters should be collected and shared.

√ A forum to facilitate an exchange of ideas for fundraising and ways to use existing funding sources creatively should be organized.

√ More Best Practices in all areas of education should be collected and shared, including from First Nations in other provinces.

√ The First Nations Schools Association should organize training in evaluation, sharing ideas for different methods and approaches. The FNSA should also collect and share sample evaluations and possibly develop templates.

√ FNESC/FNSA should begin a process for researching child development / education from a traditional perspective, involving considerations of how to fit traditional practices back into education system. Research should also be done to investigate whether First Nations students have unique learning styles, and if so, the characteristics of that style.

√ More research should be conducted regarding how to bring students into the education system, and allow/enable then to take responsibility for their own education.

√ Possibilities for establishing economies of scale should be explored.

√ Research is needed regarding assessment tools for students that are culturally relevant/appropriate.

√ A comparative analysis of building requirements of the federal and provincial governments would be useful.

√ Possible governing authorities, and ways to increase First Nations leaders' commitment to and involvement with education should be considered.

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