SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY ENGAGED EDUCATION (S.C.E.E.)

FINAL REPORT: 2009-2012

A collaboration of:

York Centre for Education and Community (YCEC)
Faculty of Education, York University
and
Toronto District School Board (TDSB)

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Dedication

This report is dedicated to the school communities that participated in the SCEE project, in particular, the administrators, teachers, community organization leaders, students, parents, and community members who shared their experiences and learnings with our project team, and who contributed towards deeper understandings of what it means "to do equitable and inclusive education" in our diverse neighbourhoods. Through our collaborative journey, we explored approaches to "school-community engaged education", in which new and innovative forms of teaching and learning are grounded in the knowledge and intertwined in the support of school communities. Ultimately, we co-discovered that building strong school-community relationships is indeed a pivotal component in promoting student engagement and performance.

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Executive Summary

Situated within a collaborative approach for supporting schools, the School and Community Engaged Education (SCEE) project was a three-year university/school board partnership (2008-2011, culminating in the TDSB/YCEC 2012 Summer Institute), created to examine ways of co-developing more inclusive forms of curriculum that are appropriate for students' diverse needs, considerate of their cultural experiences, and supportive of their aspirations. Recognizing the critical links between inclusive and equitable teaching and learning scenarios, and student achievement and engagement, the project was an opportunity for five "high–needs" schools (Barrett, Ford & James, 2010) in the Toronto District School Board to examine ways that schools can integrate the histories, cultures, experiences and contributions of all students, thereby improving marginalized students' participation and achievement.

A community-referenced approach to the education of students contributes towards the creation of inclusive and equitable teaching-learning contexts that are culturally relevant and responsive to students' educational needs, interests, and aspirations. Such an approach begins with an understanding that the student exists in relation to his/her community, and gives attention to the relationship between school, parents, and community. It recognizes that the culture of the community in part, shapes the behaviour and structures of the students, and that the student's sense of self and possibilities are informed by the wider society's perceptions and media representations of community. It encourages the integration of knowledge from and of the community in strengthening relationships with students, and utilizes the backgrounds and experiences of students in building curriculum and pedagogy that are culturally relevant to students' learning contexts. It aims to establish positive connections with parents, guardians and caregivers, and is committed to strategies that seek to understand and reference local communities. It is in this way that schools and educators will have the opportunity to engage students and the wider school community in more meaningful and innovative ways, thereby leading to improved student outcomes and enhanced student engagement.

The project drew insights from York University Faculty of Education's twenty years of work with local schools, and was an opportunity for teachers, students, researchers, parents, and community members to engage in dialogue, professional development programs, institutes, and research activities. Throughout the study, researchers collected data to document the process of co-developing a more inclusive curriculum for the purposes of enhanced student achievement, engaged in evaluation on the successes and limitations of the project implementation itself, and gathered insights and recommendations from all members of the university/school board partnership. Key findings include emergent understandings that school/community relationship-building is crucial to developing inclusive and equitable approaches to curriculum; and that student engagement and achievement are dependent on school-wide and system-wide understandings of community, and that very importantly, such understandings in turn, are founded upon authentic and innovative forms of school/community engagement.

Program Activities and Implementation:

Aligned with the TDSB Urban Diversity Strategy "Framework for School Improvement," the SCEE program was founded upon five overarching objectives that framed the implementation of the project over the three years of its duration: Inclusive Approaches and Professional Development, Mentoring and Achievement Counselling, Parent Engagement, Community Engagement, and Research and Knowledge Mobilization. Within the framework of these five objectives, the project served as a vehicle through which to a) support teachers in their knowledge and understanding of inclusive practices; b) help

teachers in their development of local, community-informed, community-engaged curriculum; c) assist teachers in infusing inclusive practice into their classroom practices and pedagogy, and; d) share knowledge on the research findings related to such activities and related successes and challenges. At its core, the project provided a forum for teachers to discuss their teaching and learning vis-a-vis considerations of community engagement at their respective school sites.

Through the project, participating teachers and administrators focused on seven areas:
- Learning inclusive education practices for school effectiveness;
- Adopting strategies for infusing culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy into the Ontario curriculum;
- Linking inclusive practice to assessment and evaluation;
- Initiating discussions of difference: teacher understanding of students within socio-educational discourse and the impact on learning;
- Engaging parents and community as a part of inclusive practice;
- Examining identity and culture; and,
- Understanding the profile of the school-community, the learners and families within it, including such methods as community walks.

In a collaborative university-school-community approach, SCEE program activities were adapted to the particular school community context of each participating school, with SCEE teachers and project team collaboratively deciding the best ways to implement SCEE goals and areas of focus into their classrooms, schools, and wider community spaces. While the SCEE program varied from school to school, a common program thread was that all activities drew on inclusive approaches to education and professional development, mentoring and achievement counselling, parent and community engagement, and research and knowledge mobilization. Participating schools included Bala Avenue Public School (2010 to 2012); Brookview Middle School (2009 – 2012); Oakdale Park Public School (2009 – 2012); Shoreham Middle School (2009 – 2012), and Westview Centennial Secondary School (2009 – 2011). For an overview of programs by individual school, see Chapter 3: Program Activities and Implementation. For more detailed information on the SCEE program in its first and second year of its implementation, see *School and Community Engaged Education (SCEE) – Year 1 Report*, and *School and Community Engaged Education (SCEE) – Year 2 Report*.

Research and Evaluation:

By implementing SCEE project objectives of community-referenced, inclusive education approaches that support student participation and engagement, it was deemed critical that the SCEE project *concurrently* conduct research and evaluation activities. Thus, insights were gathered on the SCEE project as it evolved over the three years, and as it was experienced by teachers, administrators, community members and SCEE project team members. The goals of the research and evaluation were to document the changes that occurred within the schools as administrators, teachers and community members worked to improve student engagement in the five schools. Since the project was focused on a community-referenced approach, we sought to understand the existing and developing links between the school community and its surrounding community. Such relationships are best examined qualitatively, as they ultimately point to the culture of the school. The evaluation aimed to examine the value of the goals, contributions, and limitations of the SCEE project from the perspective of the participating schools.

Data sources for the research component of the project included field notes, focus groups and interviews, and school learning plans, which were analyzed within a four-phased data analysis approach. Data sources for the SCEE project evaluation included formal interviews and focus groups with SCEE teachers, administrators, community members, SCEE facilitators and graduate assistants; formal and informal observations, and in-depth document analysis. Details surrounding research and evaluation methodologies, with a discussion on findings per school, are in Chapter 3: Research and Evaluation.

Suggestions for Improvement:

As a component of the research and evaluation, participants' suggestions for improvement of the SCEE project were gathered. Suggestions were wide-ranging, and hold insights that are relevant for both the SCEE project, and to schools and school boards. For further discussion, see Chapter 4: Suggestions for Improvement. Selected suggestions to enhance the work and impact of the SCEE project at schools are highlighted below:

For the SCEE project:
- Increase the duration of the SCEE project beyond three years, to ensure sustainability;
- Provide teachers with "materials" and resources which "would provide a concrete way to change teaching practice and offer evidence of impact";
- Integrate the SCEE project into the school plans;
- Provide more direction about the SCEE project to administrator and teachers;
- More clearly define the purpose and role of the SCEE project in participating schools;
- Invite and recruit more teachers to collaborate with the project and with each other vis-à-vis SCEE goals;
- More fully tap into school board leadership so that the project has more support from the school board, schools and administrators;
- Conduct more SCEE activities that allow teachers to remain in their classrooms and schools while bringing parents and community members into such spaces.

For SCEE schools and school board:
- Invite someone in the school, other than the principal, to lead and take on the project within the school;
- Encourage staff to participate and become engaged in the project;
- Provide teachers with sufficient release time in order to share their learnings with other teachers, thereby creating professional development opportunities for all members of the school;
- Ensure commitment from higher administration, (e.g., at the school board level) and invite school board leaders to discuss their vision and support for the SCEE project and for community-referenced, inclusive education approaches;
- Invite parents on the School Council to recruit parents and community members directly into SCEE activities, as a way to mobilize community knowledge on the SCEE project and on the aims and approaches of school and community-engaged education.

Next Steps and Recommendations:

Taking our discussion from specific suggestions about the SCEE project into the wider realm of how to incorporate school and community engaged education approaches in all schools, recommendations arise that are relevant across the province, country, and internationally. We identify possible next steps for schools and educators who aim to incorporate community-referenced, inclusive education approaches

into their curriculum and pedagogy, using strategies that are culturally relevant and responsive to students' educational needs, interests, and aspirations. These recommendations are based on the project's research and evaluation activities.

Recommendations for a community-referenced education approach should be founded upon the recognition that strategies that strengthen the school-community relationship, and that seek to understand and reference local communities, will ultimately foster student success. This is particularly critical in high needs schools. It is important to note that strategies that address the complex array of circumstances intervening in student success in high needs schools must be comprehensive, but such strategies must also be coordinated and responsive. To be successful, such an approach requires several components:

- ⋏ Opportunity for open and honest dialogues within and between stakeholder groups
  - ◦ SCEE's greatest strength was its practice of creating spaces for different stakeholder groups to meet and engage in discussion about concerns, common goals and disparate perspectives. It is rare for parents, teachers, administrators, students and community members to meet together, yet such encounters are crucial. A format where each group can meet separately first and then come together seems to provide the best opportunities for all to participate. The relationships formed through these dialogues form the foundation for goal-setting and program-planning.

- ⋏ Grassroots goal development
  - ◦ Even within the same neighbourhood, each school has its unique challenges and strengths. It is also the case that unless a school community takes ownership of a given initiative to improve student engagement, positive outcomes will be limited and short-lived. Therefore, goals for students must be developed by the stakeholders themselves. When teachers, students, parents, administrators and community members meet, their purpose should be to set and modify goals together. This is why relationship-building is so integral to the process.

- ⋏ Cultivation of leadership within schools – of both teachers and students
  - ◦ Strong administrative leadership is an essential element of successful school initiatives because the principal's approach sets the tone of the school. However, in order for grassroots programs to be sustainable, stakeholders' and especially teachers' and students' leadership capacities must be developed so that they have the skills to facilitate discussion, plan implementation and monitor progress.

- ⋏ On-going PD designed to help stakeholders learn how to implement their initiatives
  - ◦ With open dialogue, grassroots goals and diffuse leadership capability in place, regular professional development and educational opportunities would ensure that, collectively, the school community has the skills to implement, assess and modify programs that have been put in place to support the school community's goals.

- ⋏ An integrated approach to evaluation of programs
  - ◦ There needs to be shared vision of not only what a school is trying to accomplish but what that accomplishment looks like. One possible framework for achieving this is a School Growth Team, a committee, with members from all stakeholder groups, whose purpose is to meet periodically to review extra- and co-curricular activities to see if and how they support the school's goals for student engagement.

- ✣ Time for periodic reflection on outcomes
  - ◦ In order for school initiatives to be flexible and responsive, stakeholders must be given the time and space to reflect on outcomes before modifying goals or programs or creating new ones.

- ✣ Time for each initiative to take root before moving on to a new one
  - ◦ While it is expected that several initiatives and many programs will be running in a given school at a given time, new programs need time to develop and work through the inevitable wrinkles. Thus schools must be realistic about the time and resources needed to get new programs started and make sure that existing programs that have proven to be effective continue to enjoy sufficient resources and support.

For a community-referenced, integrated approach to increasing student engagement to be successful, it must be predicated upon the understanding that it is a process, and that all activities will need to be flexible enough that they can be adjusted to respond to students' needs as they change and grow. Essential to this process are the following components: (1) on-going dialogue between all stakeholders, (2) diffuse leadership capacity and on-going leadership development, and (3) an integrated approach to implementation and evaluation. In this way, the best intentions of parents, students, teachers, administrators and community members can translate more effectively into increased student engagement and positive academic outcomes now and in the future.

SCEE Project Team members:

Project Leads and Oversight:
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Project Visual

Professional Development →

Mentoring and Achievement Counselling →

Parent Engagement →

Community Engagement →

Research and Knowledge Mobilization →

S.C.E.E

S - School &

C - Community

E - Engaged

E - Education
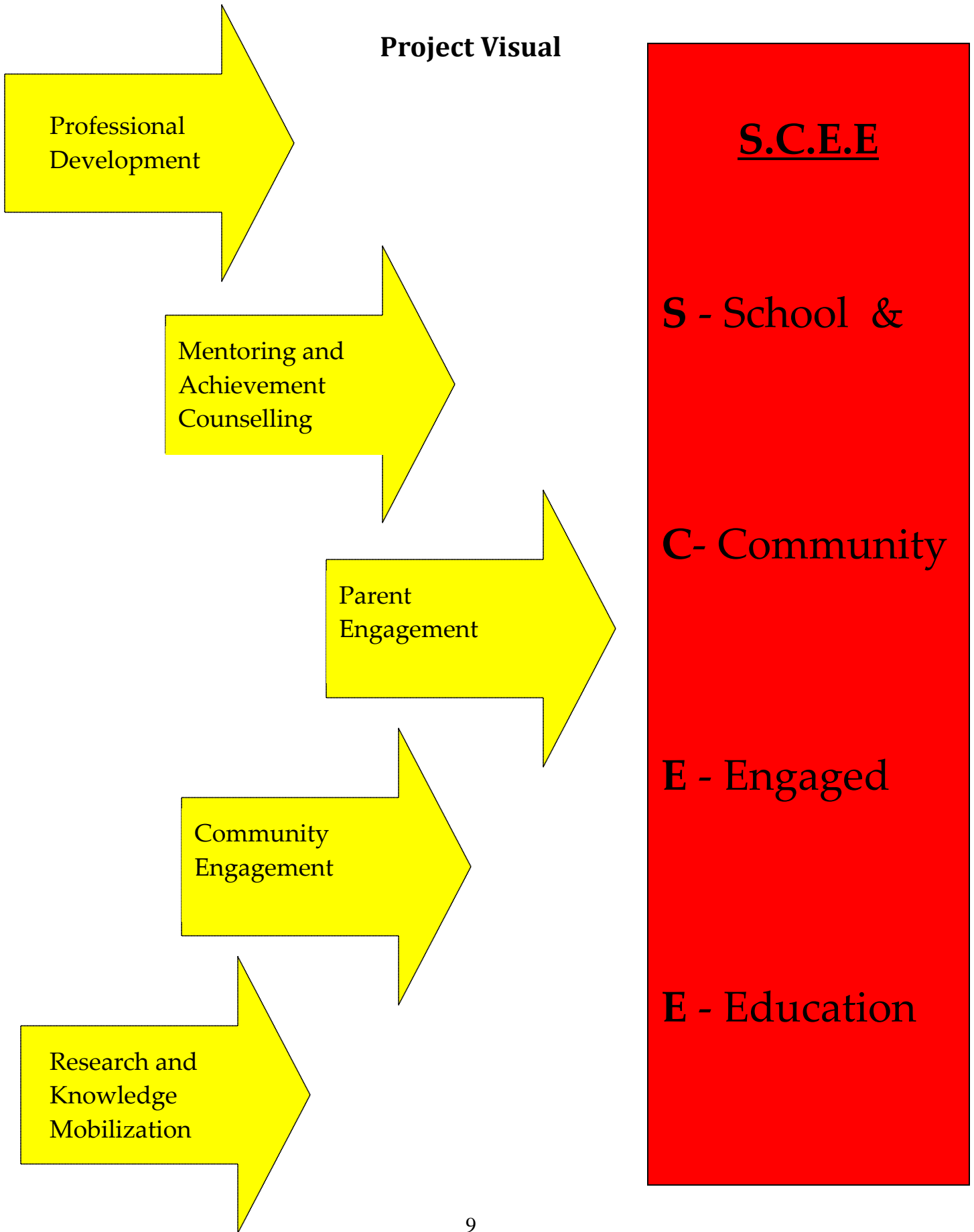
Chapter 1: Introduction – A Community-Referenced Framework

Schools are inseparably linked to the neighbourhoods in which they are located. As Witten, McCreanor and Kearns (2007) write, perceptions of a particular school, and of that school's performance, tend to be associated with the specific characteristics of the surrounding neighbourhood. As such, the "class position or the economic means of the people of a neighbourhood also helps to define the institutions such as schools, recreational centres and social service agencies that operate within it" (James, 2012, p. 123). Research indicates that the average income level of a neighbourhood has a significant effect on a school's ability to access funding, and in the case of Toronto, schools with the lowest amount of generated funds were found to be primarily in Toronto's poorest neighbourhoods (Winsa & Rushowy, 2011, A6). Insofar as the fate of schools and their communities are linked, and communities help to determine the reputation and financial status of a school, reciprocally, schools play a role in developing the fate and reputation of the communities where they are located.

Leistyna (2002) writes that community does not only refer to a geographic location, but includes "the different ethnolinguistic communities, the different institutions, businesses, and leisure activities that constitute a public or population" (p. 10). Community then, is neither unidimensional, nor consistently stable, but necessarily serves as a complex, changing, and often contradictory reference for individuals whose beliefs, relationships, values, and aspirations are informed by a diversity of circumstances. Teachers, principals, and educational workers need to appreciate and work with this complexity. Leistyna notes that "public institutions of education have historically promulgated 'normalizing' conceptualizations of community, and in doing so, they have reproduced an exclusionary model of participation in the name of public good and cultural commonality" (p. 11). As Leistyna also writes, educators must conceive of the community as a place of difference and diversity, encapsulating multiple publics, rather than as some single comprehensive and homogenous community. Thus, in order to engage with community, educators – especially those from outside of the communities in which they work – "need to become *local ethnographers* [emphasis added]. This would presuppose the need to dialogue with the very students in front of them in order to discover who they are and what they think, need, and desire" (p. 16).

According to Witten, McCreanor and Kearns (2007) schools become one of the primary sites through which parents experience neighbourhood, acting as "portals into neighbourhood communities" through which engagement becomes "a key mechanism through which specific acts and practices produce and reproduce a sense of belonging to the community" (p. 147). Parents will choose to live in certain neighbourhoods in order to place their children in "good" schools and will often "opt to school their children outside the area" if the area or neighbourhood is perceived to be disadvantageous to their children (Witten, McCreanor & Kearns, 2007, p. 142). Over time, this practice of parents can "alter the socio-demographic composition of a school's neighbourhood, contributing to further concentrations of advantage or disadvantage" (Witten, McCreanor & Kearns, 2007, p. 142).
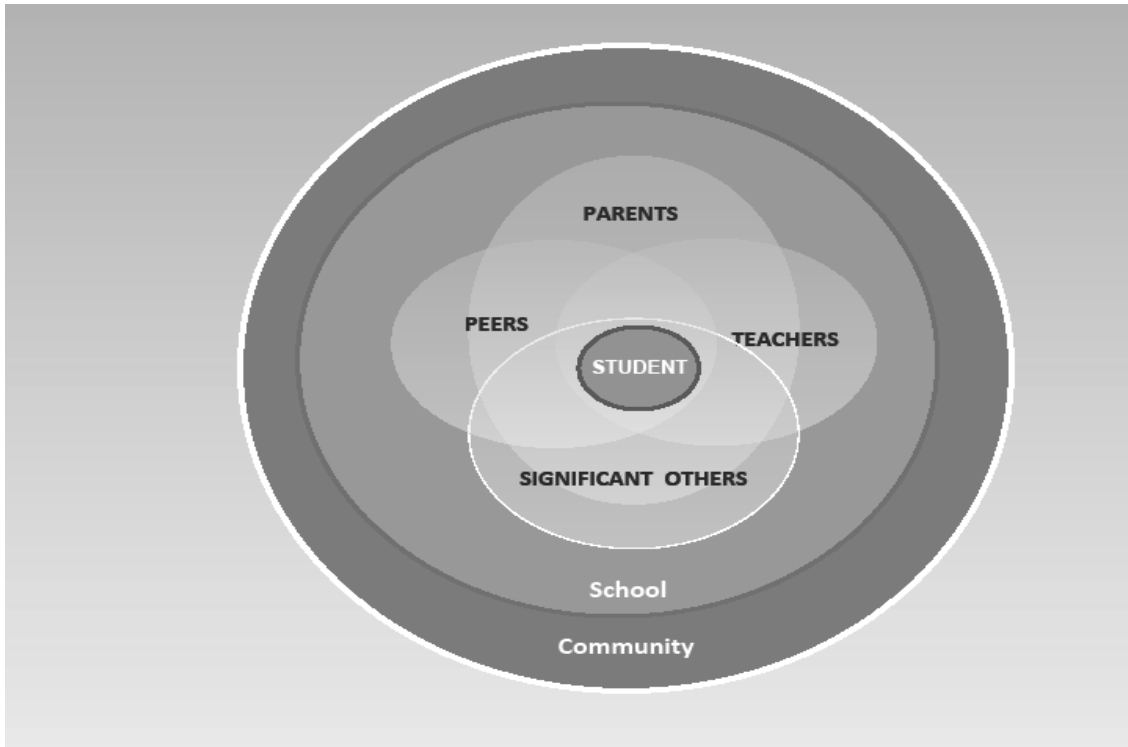
As the diagram suggests, schooling in marginalized communities needs to be premised on a community-referenced approach that takes into account barriers to achievement, conferring increased legitimacy to both the schools and the communities in which they are located. In working effectively with students, educators need to appreciate the structural, cultural, and social positioning of those students. This requires a familiarity with the various elements that work to structure students' lives outside the classroom. And while the role and influence of students' parents are quite significant to the social, cultural and educational development, performance and achievement of young people, the role and influence of parents are mediated by the ongoing relationships that the young people have with their peers and other significant people in their lives (e.g., coaches). Therefore, in any classroom or school at any given time, the student interactions with educators, their relationship to their schooling and education, and their understanding of their possibilities through education, are informed by the messages, sometimes competing, different, and contradictory, that they receive from the many people in their lives. While parents have primary responsibilities for guiding and supporting their children through these complex and layered structures of society, depending on their social, cultural, and economic circumstances, in their exercise of agency young people will make choices as to the relevance and appropriateness of the messages they receive from various sources.

In marginalized or disadvantaged neighbourhoods, there is often a perceived lack of parental involvement in schools. This is not new. O'Shea (1976/1977) note that suburban residents in American cities were able to participate more and thus exert more control on their schools because these neighbourhoods were made up of "predominantly white collar populations among whom organizational skills and related resources are well provided. These characteristics allow concerned parents to mobilize community support behind educational issues as need arises" (p. 1286). This school-community relationship in middle and upper class communities, which are

often ethnically or racially homogeneous, in part has to do with the fact that institutions are largely defined through a middle-class Eurocentric ethos with attendant principles, norms and values. Hence, in terms of schools, in order for students in marginalized communities to fully benefit from their schooling and education, the same type of community-referenced approach to education is needed (James, 2012, pp. 123-124).

Elias, Patrikakou, and Weissberg (2007) emphasize that there is a need for a more comprehensive understanding of students that links their school performance to their parental and community socialization.

> Teens' ability to address problems and meet challenges depends largely on their social and emotional skills. These skills are emotional, cognitive and attitudinal and behavioural. How can teens learn effectively if they lack the skill of being able to handle criticism from others and also learn how to self-monitor and self-correct? How will they manage intellectually or socially without the skill of being able to see both sides of issues and disputes or of being able to resolve conflicts and make effective decisions in various situations they face in school, at home and with peers. (Elias, Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2007, p. 543)

Further, these authors advocate developing approaches to community engagement that will "allow parents to feel efficacious, have a sense of mastery and control and then grow from there into more direct involvement in ways linked closely to education" (Elias, Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2007, p. 543). Rejecting the notion that families in marginalized neighbourhoods are less inclined towards school involvement, Elias, Patrikakou and Wissberg claim that this impression is due to the limited ways in which participation is structured, "either around providing academic assistance to children, fundraising or volunteering time at school-related events. These approaches tend to exacerbate… the 'we-they' distinction and tend to increase, rather than minimize, home-school distance among parent and guardians who do not feel themselves to be part of the mainstream culture of education" (p. 542). Leistyna (2002) offers a similar assessment, claiming that efforts to increase parental and community participation in schools often "do not go beyond the inclusion of a few token parents" (p. 4). And as Miller's (2000) research demonstrates, in the absence of more deliberate efforts to engage community, certain voices can dominate, erroneously becoming seen as representing all parental interests. In such instances, efforts must be made to recognize the community context that influences students' lives and aspirations through the "ordinary life interactions, events, and settings with family, friends and at school" (Herbert, Sun & Kowch, 2004, p. 232). By doing so, schools can help students achieve their greatest potential.

> Building a strong foundation for positive adaptive outcomes requires an emphasis on the promotion of youth development and youth engagement in their communities and societies. This entails focusing on areas of strength such as the high hopes and aspirations of less privileged parents for their children's welfare and future development, the effects of which can be strengthened through teacher-parent interaction. (Herbert, Sun & Kowch, 2004, p. 241)

In their report *The Strength and Challenges of Community Organizing as an Educational Reform Strategy,* Renée and McAlister (2011, p. 2) argue that collaboration and partnership between youth, parents, community members and educators working within institutions such as schools and universities can alter resource and power inequities that produce failing schools in marginalized communities. Such collective actions can create "accountable, equitable, high-quality schools for all students by challenging the patterns of inequity that are built into the rules [or policies] and laws that guide the school." Respecting and acknowledging the agency of students, parents and community members through partnerships with schools can certainly enrich the teaching and learning experiences of students. What is relevant here is the need for educators to constantly re-examine and revise how they construct students as learners and the expectations that they hold of them. In such a context, value and emphasis must be placed on family and community engagement. In doing so, educators must reframe how neighbourhoods are conceptualized and mediated, not as a space and place from which individuals are expected to move, but rather as a community that serves and will continue to serve as home to a significant number of Canadian children and families. Indeed, a strong school-community relationship has the "potential to advance equity [and] create innovative solutions that reflect the interests and experiences of disenfranchised communities" and, in the process, build the needed social capital of these communities and schools (Renée & McAlister, 2011, p. 2).
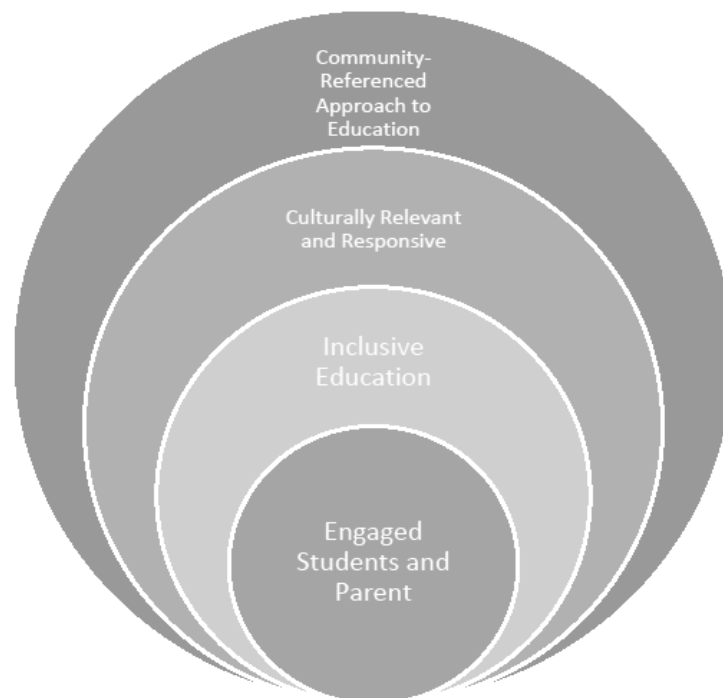
In sum, a community-referenced approach to the education of students – all students – will contribute to a teaching-learning context that is culturally relevant and responsive to students' educational needs, interests, and aspirations. To engage students and parents, we must first appreciate and understand the uniqueness of the contexts in which they reside. It goes without saying that inclusive approaches to education both stimulate and result from student and

parental engagement, but efforts must be made to ensure that education and engagement are culturally relevant and responsive. There is no ready-made template to ensure this relevance, however. Rather, it stems from a continuing and engaged commitment to the types of approaches that seek to understand and reference local communities. It is in this way that schools and educators can increase their legitimacy, and begin to engage students and their parents in more meaningful ways, thereby maximizing learning outcomes.

A Community-Referenced Approach:
- Begins with an understanding that the student exists in relation to his/her community;
- Gives attention to the relationship between school, parents and community;
- Understands that the student's sense of self and his/her possibilities are informed by the larger society's perceptions and media representations of the community;
- Recognizes that the culture of the community in part, shapes the behavior and structures the perceptions of students;
- Encourages the integration of knowledge from <u>and</u> of the community in building relationship with students;
- Utilizes the backgrounds and experiences of the students in building curriculum and pedagogy to meet the students' needs, interests and aspirations; and,
- Establishes positive connections with the parent, guardian or other adult caregiver.

Chapter 2: Program Activities & Implementation

Program Overview

The School and Community Engaged Education (SCEE) project was aligned with the TDSB Urban Diversity Strategy "Framework for School Improvement," and was founded upon five overarching objectives that framed the implementation of the project over the three years of its duration: Inclusive Approaches and Professional Development, Mentoring and Achievement Counselling, Parent Engagement, Community Engagement, and Research and Knowledge Mobilization. Within the framework of these five objectives, the project served as a vehicle through which to a) support teachers in their knowledge and understanding of inclusive practices; b) help teachers in their development of local, community-informed, community-engaged curriculum; c) assist teachers in infusing inclusive practice into their classroom practices and pedagogy, and; d) share knowledge on the research findings related to such activities and related successes and challenges. At its core, the project also provided a forum for teachers to discuss their teaching and learning vis-a-vis considerations of community engagement at their respective school sites.

Through the project, participating teachers focused on:
- Learning inclusive education practices for school effectiveness;
- Adopting strategies for infusing culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy into the Ontario curriculum;
- Linking inclusive practice to assessment and evaluation;
- Initiating discussions of difference: teacher understanding of students within socio-educational discourse and the impact on learning;
- Engaging parents and community as a part of inclusive practice;
- Examining identity and culture;
- Understanding the profile of the school-community, the learners and families within it, including through such methods as community walks.

The schools that participated in the SCEE project were: Bala Avenue Public School (2010 to 2012); Brookview Middle School (2009 – 2012); Oakdale Park Public School (2009 – 2012); Shoreham Middle School (2009 – 2012), and Westview Centennial Secondary School (2009 – 2011).

Inclusive Approaches and Professional Development: Teacher Institute Professional Development sessions (usually on a monthly basis) led by SCEE Project facilitators, faculty, guest experts were held to address topics related to equity and inclusive practice. TDSB-YCEC Annual 3-day Summer Institutes in 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011 were mounted that explored inclusiveness in the curriculum and classroom. Drawing from contemporary research and innovative cases, the Teacher Institutes articulated effective curriculum and pedagogical practices around inclusion, and co-constructed models of student engagement for improving student achievement. Teachers from participating schools were invited to the Teacher Institute Professional Development sessions in which participants examined approaches that work, both

from theoretical and practical lenses, and reflected on how such approaches were successful (or not) in their own school community contexts. Discussions were launched on such themes as:

- What is Community? Mapping the Community
- Inclusive Curriculum
- Student Engagement
- Parent\Guardian & Family Engagement
- Community Engagement

Each participating school, in collaboration with their SCEE team, created school learning plans that drew both from school improvement plans and SCEE objectives, keeping in mind Ontario's Inclusivity, Equity, and Diversity framework.

Mentoring and Achievement Counselling: Participants collaboratively sought to enhance student engagement, achievement, success and retention. The research literature reveals that mentoring and achievement counselling, through which academic support is provided and regular benchmarks are established (in collaboration with students), contribute significantly to improving academic outcomes. Participating teachers adapted the teaching and learning according to the grade levels of students in participating schools throughout the three-year period.

Parent Engagement: At each of the participating schools over the three years, parents and guardians were invited to participate in a series of discussion groups that provided a forum for them to explore issues of mutual concern, and to interact with Toronto District School Board resource personnel, school officials, teachers and teacher candidates. Such initiatives helped to remove cultural and institutional barriers, facilitate dialogue, and enhance students' academic performance and adjustment to schooling. The SCEE project provided participating schools with substantial support for connecting with parents at the local level, and helped schools to ensure that parents have the skills, knowledge and tools necessary to fully engage with their children's educational journeys and school lives.

Community Engagement: Project activities deepened the familiarity of teachers, teacher candidates and school administrators with the environment and neighborhoods within which schools are situated and brought families into the schools; however, it went beyond such outreach to also take educators into the community itself. Opportunities were provided for teachers to interact with agencies and organizations that are present in children's lives (e.g., athletic, religious, recreational, social service etc.), a process which helps to dismantle cultural barriers and cultivate relationships between school and community. York University's Faculty of Education, through such programs as the Westview-York University Partnership, its satellite (off-campus) sites, and its community practicum placement program, has established strong relationships with a variety of community organizations in the Northwest quadrant, and this SCEE project built upon these initiatives.

Research and Knowledge Mobilization: Over the three years, the project used an ethnographic case study approach to highlight the complexities inherent in any attempt to deal with student engagement using a community-referenced approach, and thereby contributed

valuable research insights on programs for improving achievement for marginalized and vulnerable students. The research first identified and assessed what works, and second, provides a means to share that knowledge. Furthermore, all project activities included an active research component that drew from York University's expertise in research and evaluation of inclusive education strategies and programs. Such knowledge continues to be shared and mobilized through York University and TDSB communication channels, including, for example, through presentations at the Ministry of Education Ontario Education Research Symposium (2010), YCEC/TDSB Summer Institutes, and in other conferences and workshops.

As noted above, the project drew insights from, and was aligned with, the TDSB's Urban Diversity Strategy "Framework for School Improvement." This was achieved through the following actions:

Actions to Increase Student Support and Intervention
1.   Enhanced student voices through focused leadership opportunities and extra-curricular participation in after-school activities.

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Actions to Increase Student Capacity for Success
1.   Improved instructional practices in classrooms through staff development and sharing best practices;

2.   Established a network of schools, including Toronto Intermediate and Secondary Intervention Program (TISIP) schools to share best practices among TISIP schools and also with schools across the system.

Actions to Improve Equity and Inclusive Schools
1.   Staff received school-based professional development focused on equity and inclusivity.

Actions to Improve Parent Engagement
1.   Best practices were shared in improving parental engagement.

Actions to Improve Partnerships
1.   Continued to work with the agencies and different levels of government to continue to advocate for greater integration of services and better co-ordination of funding and services.

Program in Each School

Program at Bala Avenue Public School

Inclusive Approaches: Over the three years, an important SCEE goal for Bala was fostering Inclusive Approaches. Participants entered the discourse of decolonizing and indigenizing education by looking at challenges, opportunities, and limitations. The aim was to use critical analysis to develop locally-based curriculum through a culturally responsive and relevant lens situated in community and diverse Aboriginal populations. It was important to increase reciprocal engagement and achievement levels by looking at the opportunity gap and by challenging systemic barriers. Goals also included identifying what learning success means for Aboriginal communities and to provide a framework of indicators to track progress in redefining how success is measured.

School Improvement Plan and Action Partnership Team goals were aligned with the SCEE program, and with the principles of "Aboriginal Education for All – Building Allies and Coalition" as part of fostering a deeper understanding of shared history and contemporary contexts. The SCEE program at Bala Avenue Public School aimed to address how educators and educational institutions can meet challenges and can foster a more informed awareness of the historical and contemporary relationships between Aboriginal cultures and mainstream educational systems, including issues arising from colonization and ant-racist/anti-oppressive frameworks.

At Bala Public School, "the four R's" formed a SCEE inclusive education conceptual framework. These four R's are 1) **Respect:** the cultural knowledge, traditions, values, and activities that individuals bring with them; 2) **Relevance** occurs when respect is embedded in the curricula, instruction, and policies; 3) **Reciprocity** refers to a relationship between student and instructor that is focused on mentorship. In this way both individuals are viewed as learners, and 4) **Responsibility** demands that the instructor share responsibility for change, even if not personally disadvantaged by the barriers of the learner. Throughout the program, educators acted within the four R's framework to be agents of social change through the lens of equity, diversity, and social justice – as well as to be organic learners themselves.

The program at Bala Public School included Inclusive Learning Communities (composed of parents, guardians, community organizations, post-secondary institutions, and educators), wherein internal and external partnerships were created and fostered. SCEE facilitators and educators worked with Aboriginal Elders, families, community organizations, artists, and the TDSB Aboriginal Education Centre. In addition to increasing the Aboriginal resources available to Bala Avenue Public School, the program also supported the Aboriginal Girls Group and Aboriginal Arts-based approaches. Bala teachers attended SCEE Teacher Institutes and then went back to their schools to share experiences and information with the equity team, and then co-constructed curriculum that was community-based.

The SCEE project contributed support to the school's National Aboriginal Day Assembly in order to bring an impact to parents, teachers and students, and thereby increase parental attendance, foster sense of belonging, and create a safe space for students to voluntarily self-identify and explore their Aboriginality. In addition, Aboriginal student leadership opportunities

were increased, in order to nurture a sense of belonging and well-being. Parent engagement was highlighted, e.g., a parent was hired as a lunchroom supervisor in Year 3. Professional development offered through SCEE and the resources purchased were part of the SCEE program that encouraged the mindset for inclusive education. In year 1, signage (e.g., the Welcome sign) was changed to include the Ojibwa language, and a culturally sensitive mural reflective of the diversity of the community was created.

There were a number of challenges to the implementation of the SCEE program, however. For example, it was not easy to find Aboriginal languages instructors. Other barriers included funding, and recruitment of teachers with the skills to teach Aboriginal languages. Fortunately, Ojibwae language classes were reinstated by year 3.

Parent Engagement: Another key SCEE Goal for Bala School over the three years was Parental Engagement, for the program needed to create strong and trusting parent/guardian/school/community relationships within the broad context situated in a local community based approach, realizing the impact of colonization and the legacy of residential schooling for Aboriginal students and families. Monthly meetings were held at the school, through Inclusive Learning Communities, where parents' and community members' ideas were welcomed and acted upon. Within a focus on parents and literacy, Aboriginal parents/guardian/community stakeholder recommendations were followed up on. Building relationships within a program does take time, however, and staff turnover creates challenges vis-à-vis sustainability.

Community Engagement: A SCEE goal over the 3 years was to enhance community engagement because it is essential that First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students and families feel welcome in schools, and that they see themselves and their cultures reflected in the curriculum and the school environment/community. To do this, SCEE teachers and facilitators worked closely within internal and external partnerships, such as TDSB Aboriginal Centre, Model Schools for Inner Cities; York Centre for Education and Community (YCEC), Faculty of Education, York University; Aboriginal community organizations, and Aboriginal families and artists. It was implemented through various foci:
 a) conducting arts-based projects in tandem with SCEE teachers and facilitators, the Association for Native Development in the Performing & Visual Arts, and the TDSB Aboriginal Education Centre, and,
b) working closely with community support workers, SCEE facilitators, Inclusive Learning Communities, and summer institutes hosted by the SCEE project. Such opportunities created spaces of possibility for future learning and inquiry, and helps to put the Aboriginal community at the forefront of the school. The goal of the program at Bala Avenue Public School was to heighten visibility of how integrated Aboriginal perspectives need to be not only in the curriculum, but also are crucial for examining the larger social, economic, and political factors impacting Aboriginal Education today.

Professional Development: Another SCEE goal at Bala Avenue Public School over the three years was staff development. The goal was to collaboratively develop and coordinate professional development and activities that support inclusive curriculum as it relates to Aboriginal Education, and that disrupts the marginalization of racialized and vulnerable

communities. This included Restorative Justice Training facilitated through SCEE and Peacebuilders International , and professional development half-day sessions, for primary and for junior, for which the school provided teacher release time. The SCEE facilitators provided professional development on infusing Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum, with a focus on challenges and opportunities. The SCEE facilitator provided ongoing professional development to the entire staff, and then worked in the classroom to help teachers to infuse the curriculum with Aboriginal perspectives. Staff development also occurred within the Inclusive Learning Communities which were made up of educators, parents/guardians, community members and community organizations). Upon the recommendations of parents, the traditional Seven Grandfather Teachings given by the Creator, about what is important, in order to live "a good life," were incorporated into the curriculum. Staff development focused on holistic approaches to teaching and learning, which brought about a school-wide arts-based project, that is, a mural that was celebrated at the National Aboriginal Day.

Program at Brookview Middle School

Inclusive Approaches: Throughout the 3 years, Inclusive Approaches was a key SCEE goal at Brookview Middle School. It was collaboratively decided to explore ways to include the histories, backgrounds, and community identity of the students and their families within the curriculum. This was done through multiple activities:

a) *Trip to Windsor for Black History Month*: In Year 1, students travelled to Windsor for Black History Month, which was an impactful learning excursion;
b) *Video Project*: To integrate the idea of stories about the students' lives within the community, a SCEE teacher co-planned a unit on perceptions of the Jane and Finch community. The students completed a series of activities (evaluation of Jane-Finch.com website, discussions about activism, letter writing, discussions about violence in the media, brainstorming on their perceptions of Jane and Finch, "I Am" poems about themselves, "I Am" poems from perspective of community). Students were then asked by the teacher to interview someone within the community about their perceptions of Jane and Finch. Interviewees included parents, teachers, siblings, friends, and a librarian who has worked in the community for over 20 years;
c) *Poetry Book*: Within the same unit on the perceptions of the Jane and Finch community, one of the SCEE teachers and the Graduate Assistant did a poetry activity with two grade 7 classes. The students typed the "I am" poems, their pictures were added and given to a graphic designer to publish in the form of a book; and,
d) *Responsibility Book*: One of the teachers from the Brookview/SCEE team collaborated with a graphic designer and her grade 6 class to publish a book about responsibility. This was seen as an inclusive approach, which enhanced student engagement in their learning.

In order for the above program to be smoothly implemented, it was critical that educators made the effort to get to know their students, as one of the first and ongoing steps towards valuing and integrating students' lives and backgrounds into their learning. A key component of the Inclusive Approaches program is support from administrators (i.e., planning time, resources) in order to successfully integrate and value students' lives and backgrounds.

Mentorship and Achievement Counselling: In Year 2, a mentorship program was established as a partnership between Brookview Middle School and Westview Centennial Secondary School that allowed 3 to 5 Brookview students at each grade level to be mentored by a Westview student through the Co-op Program. Coordinated by the guidance department in both schools, the objective was for students to be mentored by older peers with respect to their academic, emotional, and social life experiences.

Parent Engagement: Over the three years, parent engagement was another key SCEE goal at Brookview. A plan was implemented to hold parent engagement programs in which parents and guardians were invited to participate in discussion groups to explore issues of mutual concern, and to interact with Board resource personnel, school officials, teachers and teacher candidates. This included EQAO Parent Information Night and Social Justice Workshop in Year 2 in which parents were provided with a space to learn and talk about how they could support their children within this aspect of the curriculum.

It was collaboratively decided that a Parent Resource Centre would provide access information to parents about services offered in the community, (e.g., health, education, housing) and be a space for parent workshops on topics of identified interest e.g., resume writing, computer skills, health issues, parenting, financial planning, debt management). Furthermore, the Resource Centre offered computers for parent use. A survey for parents was created and administered by a SCEE team of teachers, community workers, SCEE facilitator and Graduate Assistant, in order to gauge interest in a Parent Resource Centre, and to ascertain what kinds of services should be offered through this space, which was created by portioning off part of the staff room. A Community Breakfast launch was held to introduce the room to parents, and to become familiar with the services offered. The Parent Resource Centre was open during the school day for at least 3 days a week, and was open 2 days a week after school. Although surveys of parents indicated high interest, there was less than anticipated take-up by parents, due in part to the staff time required for outreach and programming with parent engagement programming.

Community Engagement: Over the three years, an overarching key SCEE goal was to enhance community engagement in Brookview Middle School, and to do so, it is critical to deepen the familiarity of teachers, teacher candidates and school administrators with the environment and neighbourhoods within which the school is situated. The SCEE program provided opportunities for teachers to interact with agencies and organizations that are present in children's lives (e.g., athletic, religious, recreational, social service etc.), a process to help to dismantle cultural barriers, and to cultivate relationships between school and community. The following activities formed part of the Brookview Middle School Community Engagement program:

a) *Action Team Partnership* – An Action Team Partnership (ATP), consisting of community members, parents, Brookview Middle School administration and staff, and students, was established. Among other activities, this Action Team Partnership advised and reviewed the School Improvement Plan (SIP). In addition, the ATP hosted an "Education in our Community" panel discussion, in which caregivers, community workers, teachers,

students and administrators shared their perspectives on education in the Jane and Finch community.

b) *Community Walk* – A Community Walk was planned in which all Brookview teachers would visit community agencies, and discuss issues and possibilities concerning how best to serve the 10 to 14 year-old youth population in the Jane and Finch community. Although interest was high, there was not sufficient support for implementation, and the Community Walk did not actually occur. However, a Community Walk plan was created which included consideration of possible locations such as SPOT, Caring Village, PEACH, Black Creek Community Health Centre, Driftwood Community Centre, Feeder Schools, and Westview Secondary School.

c) *Community Breakfast* – In Year 3, over 30 community members and parents met for a Community Breakfast to explore opportunities for community/school partnerships, provide input related to the school improvement plan, and begin the establishment of the Action Team Partnership (ATP).

d) *Monthly Staff Meeting Presentations* – The SCEE team, and the Community Support Worker held presentations at monthly staff meetings, including a debrief about the Community Breakfast meeting, a discussion about next steps, and an invitation to staff member to become participants in the ATP. (Eight Brookview staff members signed up indicating their interest in the ATP).

While the program was overall successful, challenges occurred in the implementation, especially with respect to the teacher release time necessary for staff to participate, as well with time and resource challenges that limited administration involvement.

Staff Development: Brookview Middle School's SCEE goal of staff development was founded upon the principles of Inclusive Approaches, and therefore, professional development included Teacher Institutes on the subject of inclusiveness in the curriculum and in the classroom. Drawing from contemporary research and innovative cases, the Institutes articulated effective curriculum and pedagogical practices around inclusion, and developed models of student engagement which promote student achievement. The Staff Development program included the following activities:

a) Monthly meetings were established after school, and within a schedule that tried to be conducive to SCEE teachers' schedules. In these meetings, the Brookview SCEE action plan was reviewed and goals revisited for next steps.

b) Community Social Worker (CSW) from the Model School for Inner Cities Program was invited into the SCEE team, and was a key lead support person for community and family initiatives.

c) SCEE teachers participated in Teacher Institutes led by the York University SCEE team.

Key to staff development is administrative support, and there also must be a clear link between professional development opportunities and practical applications in the classroom.

Program at Westview Centennial Secondary School

Inclusive Approaches: As in the other schools, the Westview SCEE goal of Inclusive Approaches over the three years was to recognize the importance of valuing community perspectives in students' teaching and learning interactions. One example of Inclusive

Approaches took place in Year 1, through the Ballet Creole project, in which 25 Grade 10, 11, and 12 Westview students participated in a unique arts project, led by York University Professor Kathy Gould Lundy, with Ballet Creole, one of Canada's most recognizable dance companies, through an initiative of York's Faculty of Education. This project focused on traditional and contemporary performing arts of the Caribbean and Africa, while working to establish a dynamic new artistic tradition in Canada of diverse dance and music traditions. The students, under the direction of Ballet Creole creator and artistic director Patrick Parson, and the teaching of Tanis Engesser-Chung, learned challenging choreography which they presented in the cafeteria at Westview, for their peers, teachers, and Brookview Middle School students.

Parent Engagement: A SCEE project goal at Westview was to encourage parent engagement by starting the process of working towards enhanced parent communication. Among other activities, specific efforts were extended to increase parent communication in one of the SCEE teacher's geography classes, in order to strengthen relations between home and school. The practical method chosen was through direct telephone calls from the SCEE teacher to all parents/guardians, and through email to all parents/guardians who had shared their email addresses. Although not all parents/guardians speak English and access to a translator was not available in the evenings or on the weekends when the SCEE teacher called, this outreach method was successful in increasing attendance for Parents' Night and for the parent/teacher interviews. Contrary to some assumptions about a school such as Westview, with a large population of immigrant, English as a Second Language speakers, it is indeed possible to make connections with parents, and encourage communication between the school and the community. It requires a willingness on the part of school staff to personally reach out to parents, on multiple and varied times, and on occasions that are convenient for parents/guardians. Ideally, to increase parental engagement, translators need to be available beyond the traditional Monday to Friday, 9 AM to 5 PM workday, in order to support teacher-parent communication.

Mentorship and Achievement Counselling: As described in the section of the report on the program at Brookview Middle School, a mentorship program was established in year 2 as a partnership between Brookview Middle School and Westview Centennial Secondary School. Approximately 3 to 5 Brookview students were matched with 3 to 5 Westview Centennial students for mentorship on academic, social, and emotional matters.

Community Engagement: In Year 2, the SCEE team collaborated with and interviewed three community organizations that work in the school with administration, parents, and students. The three community organizations include: Friends in Trouble Youth Initiative, The Spot: Jane/Finch Community and Family Centre, and the Caring Village – Promoting Excellence project (now called Success Beyond Limits).

Professional Development: In addition to teacher participation in SCEE Institutes, staff development goals focused on supporting staff in thinking more broadly about inclusive practice in a selected subject area, and in exploring inclusive ways to implement the curriculum in order to engage students. In Year 2, the SCEE project facilitated two discussions on race, discrimination, stereotypes, etc. Another example involved the SCEE teacher who after learning at SCEE meetings, revamped specific lessons in her Grade 9 geography curriculum to increase student engagement, and be more inclusive of students' histories, cultures and understandings.

Although finding resources and materials that are community and culturally responsive was challenging, a community-based approach to education, where the teacher takes the time to get to know the student and thinks about how to connect the curriculum to their lives, is more likely to engage students than simply following the prescribed content in the textbooks.

Program at Oakdale Public School

Inclusive Approaches: SCEE teachers at Oakdale engaged in Teacher Institutes professional development that was focused on exploring ways to infuse inclusive pedagogy into their daily teaching and learning scenarios. In Year 2, a number of activities were undertaken including:
   a) Celebration of Literacy in which parents were invited to engage in student work;
   b) Celebration of Nations – participating classes selected a country, displays of artifacts were constructed as visual arts projects by students, classroom tours followed;
   c) African Heritage – door-design contest for participating classrooms.

Parent Engagement: A key SCEE goal at Oakdale Public School was to explore ways to enhance parent participation in school improvement activities, e.g., the literacy program. SCEE Team members and Oakdale school leaders organized and participated in parent engagement forums held at the school. Levels of discussions between parents and SCEE staff were deep and productive, as issues of discipline, safety, and homework were addressed. The SCEE project provided organizational support and a welcoming space for the Parent Engagement forums, thereby helping teachers to engage with parents in ways that are more meaningful than usual school-based parent-teacher interactions allow.

Community Engagement: A SCEE goal at Oakdale Public School was identifying and coordinating services connected to the school that support student engagement and community development. The SCEE facilitator and teachers engaged in the identification of services that provide the greatest potential for mutuality, that is, student engagement and reinvestment in the community. This focus was to streamline engagement and avoid uncoordinated over-servicing to the school. SCEE teachers used Teacher Institutes for planning and coordinating school areas of focus with community services, and determined next steps for initiating new community support services, or revisiting existing relationships. The planning for this program activity led to the acknowledgement that a process is needed to coordinate services prior to the beginning of the school year, so that services are integrated into classroom programs and in community organizations' plans for development.

Professional Development: SCEE teachers engaged in Teacher Institutes, and in particular focused on defining and understanding inclusive practice in a selected subject area, and in implementing such practices for enhanced student engagement. SCEE teachers selected a program area where they had previously observed poor levels of student engagement, and implemented arts-based strategies learned in the Teacher Institutes in order to improve student participation levels, sustained attention, and the quality of their completed work. It was collaboratively deemed important to pursue further longer-term gains through inclusive, arts-based strategies in other subject areas.

Program at Shoreham Public School

Inclusive Approaches: In Year 1 of the SCEE project, the SCEE facilitator and teachers focused on exploring inclusive approaches through professional development on the Banks Model of Multicultural Education. Teachers examined how they would describe their school in terms of the Banks Model, and what strategies were needed to move forward. By Year 3 of the SCEE project, it was collaboratively decided to focus on parent engagement more than inclusive approaches, as time and resources were limited.

Mentorship/Counselling: In Year 1, the SCEE project began a partnership with the Boys and Girls Club, initiated by a SCEE teacher. This provided mentorship and counselling opportunities. By Year 3, it was collaboratively decided to instead focus on Parent Engagement.

Parent Engagement: While Parent Engagement was a goal throughout the three years of the SCEE project, it received particular attention in Years 2 and 3, and included holding meetings in Year 2 to discuss decisions made by the TDSB Accommodation Review Committee, as well as hosting Parent Engagement Initiatives through Model Schools for Inner Cities. The aim of the Parent Engagement program was to increase parental involvement and presence in classroom activities. In Year 3, the dual language book-making project, initiated and developed by the Community Support Worker, received support from the SCEE team. The grade 2 team took on this initiative and the students were given a booklet to complete at home. The booklet contained questions about their daily lived experiences. The students answered the questions in English and the parents answered the questions in their home language. The students chose one page to include in a class book published by Arnel Scott from 2wice a Child Publishing Company, who also provided parents and students with a workshop on the editing process.

Community Engagement: At Shoreham Public School, the SCEE program of community education was implemented through various activities, such as,
   a) Further strengthening of Shoreham's partnership with the TD-York Community Engagement Centre. This included expanding the role of members in the Shoreham school community in the implementation of the Good Food Market which runs weekly from July to October. The SCEE facilitator attended the Good Food Market meetings with Food Share and TD-York Community Engagement Centre, and invited parents from the Shoreham community to participate.
   b) Establishing a partnership with York University, Faculty of Education, Urban Diversity Consecutive Teacher Education program, and in particular the SHINE project. The SHINE program, based at the school, was an opportunity for Grade 4/5 students to participate in a free, after-school drama arts program. Facilitated by York University Professor Kathy Gould Lundy and by Graduate Assistant Raymond Peart, the SHINE program offered a series of process drama workshops on the theme of "Who am I?" Highly positive feedback was received on the SHINE program, however, continuing the implementation of an after-schools program in a community with issues of food security and poverty, can be limited by the need to have a budget for snacks.

Staff Development: In addition to SCEE teacher participation in Teacher Institutes, the SCEE goal for staff development over all three years at Shoreham Public School focused on enhancing staff understanding of the context of faith in schools. While Shoreham has a large population of Muslim students, many staff members had not had an opportunity to meet faith leaders from this community. Furthermore, there was substantial confusion over the appropriate implementation of religious accommodation for Muslim students in the school. In year 2 of the SCEE project, SCEE members wanted to reach out to faith leaders, so a questionnaire identified the major faith groups and places of worship. With the support of the Shoreham administration in collaboration with all teachers and support staff, a Faith Panel was organized in year 3. A minister from the nearby church, and an Imam from a community mosque were well-received by staff. During the faith panel, the TDSB document "Guidelines & Procedures for the Accommodation of Religious Requirements, Practices and Observances, 2nd Edition" was also discussed. These professional development opportunities encouraged fruitful dialogues on faith learning and were fully supported by administration throughout all 3 years of the SCEE project.

Teacher Institutes and Inclusive Learning Communities/Parent Engagement Sessions

In Years 2 and 3, Teacher Institutes and Inclusive Learning Communities/Parent Engagement Sessions were held on themes of relevance to school and community-engaged educational approaches, including:
- Supporting Resilience in our Children;
- Connecting for Coherence;
- Supporting Aboriginal Success;
- Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario's Equity Strategy;
- SCEE Film Viewing *Family Motel*;
- Parents and Teachers – Making Connections Conference;
- A Research-Based Approach to School, Family and Community Partnerships;
- Examining Approaches that Work: Using Narrative to Engage Students;
- Parent/Guardian/Family Engagement;
- Community Engagement (Looking at the work of John Ippolito and Marcela Duran);
- Community Walk/Mapping Activity (for teachers to understand the importance of knowing their students' community);
- Data Information Session (TDSB Researcher Rob Brown) – for teachers to understand the ways data might represent their students' neighborhoods and the possible meanings of this data.

YCEC/TDSB Summer Institutes
In all three years of the SCEE project, 2-3 day YCEC/TDSB Summer Institutes were held in the second last week of August. By Years 2 and 3, attendance included 80 to 100 participants, composed of teachers, school administrators, community workers, parents, student mentors, students, environmentalists, artists, and other participants.

In 2008 and 2009, YCEC/TDSB Summer Institutes were held to explore inclusive pedagogy and community-based learning, and to provide a launch for SCEE activities in the five participating schools in the subsequent school year.

In Year 2, SCEE project coordinators Donna Ford and Alison Gaymes San Vicente facilitated the YCEC/TDSB 2010 Summer Institute, with the objective assessing the past year's program of activities and research, and to start planning a new program geared towards providing teachers and administrators with support to promote community engagement and parent involvement, both key elements to ensuring student achievement. Speakers included Professor Joyce King, the Benjamin E. Mays Chair of Urban Teaching, Learning and Leadership at the College of Education at Georgia State University; Professor Scot Wortley, University of Toronto, Department of Criminology; Dr. Chris Spence, TDSB Director; Dr. Lesley Sanders, York University; and Mr. Ainsworth Morgan, TDSB/Pathways to Education.

In Year 3, YCEC and TDSB teamed up with the Faculty of Environmental Studies to host the YCEC/TDSB 2011 Summer Institute, *Envisioning Communities and Schools: Art, Equity & Environmental Education*. This collaboration brought together teachers, educators, community members, and artists to explore ways of teaching and learning, focusing on the inter-relationships of art, environmental knowing and social justice. The speakers and workshops highlighted participatory pedagogical practices for inclusive and sustainable education in our communities and schools. Keynote speakers included Itah Sadu, Joanna Brown and Maria Trejo, Amos Key Jr (Elder Prayer Invocation), Susan Dion, and Beverly Naidus.

Although no longer housed within the SCEE project, the YCEC Summer Institute has become a favoured tradition, popular with educators, community members, artists, health professionals, and students. In 2012, YCEC teamed up with two community organizations, Nia Centre for the Arts, and Educational Attainment West, to host the YCEC 2012 Summer Institute entitled *Learning Beyond the Walls: Education Done Differently*. Numerous SCEE participants learned about the wide range of opportunities available to schools through collaborative work with community agencies; and community agencies learned directly from schools about their challenges, needs, and successes – all with the aim of further strengthening school/community connections. The YCEC 2013 Summer Institute, *Community and School Collaborations: Supporting Student Educational and Social Well-Being*, was also a collaborative event that advanced understandings of how enhanced school-community relationships can foster student success. YCEC project partners for the 2013 Summer Institute included TDSB, TCDSB, YRDSB, the Ministry of Education, Success Beyond Limits, Black Creek Community Health Centre, and York University (Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies, Faculty of Environmental Studies, Harriet Tubman Institute).

Chapter 3: Research and Evaluation

Methodology

The goals of the research and evaluation were to document the changes that occurred within the five schools as administrators, teachers and community members worked to improve student engagement. Since the project was focused on a community-referenced approach, we sought to understand the existing and developing links between the school community and its surrounding community. Such relationships are best examined qualitatively, as they ultimately relate to the culture of the school. The evaluation aimed to examine the value of the goals, contributions, and limitations of the SCEE project from the perspective of the participating schools.

Participants

School administrators, teachers, parents, community members, and students from within the five schools and the surrounding community participated in the research through focus groups, interviews, informal conversations and observation of activities within and outside of the schools. For the evaluation component, we interviewed teachers, administrators, and community members for each school. Ethical approval for data collection was received in January 2009 and data collection occurred between February 2009 and June 2011.

Data Sources and Analyses:

Research: Data for the research were collected throughout the life of the SCEE project using the following strategies:
- *Field notes* made during observations of classroom and school-wide activities, meetings of teaching staff, activities at other sites associated with the schools, and workshops at the schools and the University;
- *Focus groups and interviews* conducted with key informants throughout the two years, including teachers, parents, community leaders, and students. All interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded (unless the participant felt uncomfortable with this) and partially-transcribed;
- *Learning Plans* developed by stakeholders at annual conferences at the university.

Data analysis consisted of four phases:

- The research team examined a common sample of field notes and audio-files for emergent themes using a constant comparative method of analysis. Each member of the team came up with a list of broad themes.
- The research team consolidated these themes to verify that our understanding of them was consistent. This phase was repeated periodically throughout the two year study.
- Throughout the study, two members of the research team re-examined each of the field notes and audio files for emerging themes. One member of each pair was the researcher who had gathered the specific data.
- The research team identified evidence of changes in discourse (speech/text, actions, body language, associations, institutional structures) across the two years.

Evaluation: Additional data for evaluating the goals, approach, impact, and limitations of the SCEE project were collected from various sources and perspectives throughout the life of the project using the following data sources:

- Formal interviews conducted with participants from each school at the end of the SCEE project. These interviews involved teachers, administrators, and community members and asked participants about their perceptions of the SCEE project and its goals, and their assessments of the goals, impact, and limitations of SCEE activities at their school;
- Formal interviews conducted with teachers before and after attending the Teacher Institute, about their conceptions of inclusive education, their learnings and experiences in the Institute, the impact of these experiences on their knowledge, beliefs and practices in relation to inclusive education and the role of community in the education process, the limitations of the Institute and their suggestions for improving the Institute;[1]
- Interviews with SCEE facilitators and research assistants' notes and observations are also used to shed light on the contexts, activities, outcomes, and challenges of the SCEE project;
- Data collected throughout the project by means of formal and informal observations, interviews, and conversations in and outside the schools, focus groups and document analysis.

These data provide description of the processes and activities of the SCEE project at each school as well as insights into each of the schools and its culture, community, and concerns, participants' perceptions of the SCEE project and its impact, as well as the successes and challenges encountered.

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[1] Two teachers participated from each school, but teachers from Shoreham and Westview were not able to attend all the Institute sessions. Consequently, we were not able to interview teachers from Shoreham and Westview at the end of the Institute.

Main Findings

We have organized the main findings in terms of the remaining four facets of a community-referenced approach to pedagogy. Data are presented as quotes from interviews, focus groups or field notes with additional commentary. These data are meant to provide representative snapshots of what was observed in schools.

Professional Development:

Each participating school collaborated with their SCEE team to create school learning plans that drew from school improvement plans, SCEE objectives, and Ontario's Inclusivity, Equity, and Diversity framework. Detailed information on project achievements in the first and second year are in the *School and Community Engaged Education – Year 1 Report*, and *School and Community Engaged Education – Year 2 Report*.

> *A PD session on* Seven Grandfather Teachings *was organized for junior teachers on April 20, 2010. During the session several topics/themes were discussed, including: inclusive education, arts-based learning, character education, learning about Seven Grandfather Teachings, the need to move beyond tolerance to acceptance, First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) framework, importance of locally developed curricula, and Aboriginal teachers' understanding of their culture and the diversity within FNMI communities. In order for the teachers to attend the PD session, administration arranged supply teachers. Teachers were engaged and reacted positively to the session. A similar session has been organized for for primary teachers at Bala on April 22, 2010.* [field notes, April 2010]

Support from the school administration for the SCEE project was highest at Bala amongst the 5 schools since Bala was the only school that explicitly requested to be included in the project and the only school that provided release time for its teachers to attend the Professional Development (PD) sessions. Their enthusiasm was also evidenced by the high number of staff and community members who attended the various PD sessions held on York University's campus.

Throughout the partnership, Brookview teachers were eager to use the SCEE team as a resource.

> *Teachers requested information or research on social justice, peer mentorship, etc.* [field notes, January 2011]

They also provided positive feedback about the PD sessions held on campus.

> A *teacher made remarks, during a Brookview/SCEE Meeting, on how effective the workshop was and that her participation in the workshop in the previous school year influenced her in deciding to be head of the Social Justice Committee at the school for the current school year (2010-11). She asked for the workshop presenter's contact*

information so that she could have the presenter come in to do work with the students in the Social Justice Committee. [field notes, October 2010]

It was common for teachers to ask about potential speakers or materials in order to share this information with their colleagues. This indicated an eagerness on the part of the teachers at Brookview to improve their knowledge and skills. Brookview teachers were well on their way to understand their learning needs regarding their community. They were committed to teaching inclusively; however they need to continue to make greater connections with the community for the on-going dialogue that community-referenced pedagogy requires.

Oakdale

After attending a few PD sessions, some teachers began to re-evaluate their efforts to teach inclusively:

> *I'm also the chair of the equity committee…what we're going to try to do is empower students. Traditionally our school has just looked at Asian Heritage and Black History Month and focused only on those two elements of the diversity of the school. We are now going to take a new focus and start in September and ensure that equity and multiculturalism starts in the beginning"* [At this point we are] not even at stage one. [Oakdale Teacher, Interview, Inclusive Learning Community Session, Fall 2009]

Plans to build on current practices were often expressed at the PD session, presumably because the sessions were designed to provide time for planning.

Shoreham

Shoreham teachers had already organized an Equity Committee but attending our PD sessions, gave them additional language to better discuss their work:

> *I take education with a sociocultural approach so I look at things that happen outside the classroom that really make the students engaged. Curriculum is an important thing however there is the issue that it is Eurocentric or westernized. But that's only one factor. Other times there are things going on in student lives that they may not or cannot explain what is going at home and they're just not interested in learning. This applies to everyone; there are just some days when you are just not up for it.* [Shoreham teacher, March 2009]

Members of the Equity committee consistently came to PD sessions at York to discuss their work.
> *Kathy Lundy ran a professional development session on using the arts to engage students. It was well-attended and teachers expressed appreciation for the opportunity to participate, in spite of being quite tired.* [field notes, February 2010]

Having facilitators visit the school also was a successful approach, for example, Kathy Lundy's visit to the school in 2010 was an opportunity for participation of a larger group of teachers.

Shoreham was engaged in initiatives to make the school more accessible for parents. The success of the Reading Buddies program builds students' enthusiasm for reading. However, community connections need to continue to be further developed and teachers will benefit from more opportunities for PD.

Mentoring and Achievement Counselling:

Participants collaboratively sought to enhance student engagement, achievement and retention. Mentoring and achievement counselling are processes that significantly improve academic outcomes, provide academic support and in collaboration with students, also establish regular benchmarks. Teachers adapted the teaching and learning according to the grade levels of students throughout the three-year period.

Shoreham

> *Students really look up to their buddies. It makes them feel special and are always waiting for them to come.* [Shoreham Teacher, October 2009]

Shoreham was one of the few schools that implemented a Mentorship program. The program was several years old, and some suggestions were made for improvement, as noted by one Shoreham teacher.

> *From the workshop, it was noted that they felt…that being Buddies should not be part of a course requirement, as students are then more concerned with their course grades and passing their course than really wanting to be a part of this program.* [field notes, October 2009]

Nevertheless, some students expressed great enthusiasm for the program, as shown in quotes from June 2010 student focus groups.

> *You feel like you are going on an adventure, some stories are kind of nice and funny and they cheer you up when you are sad or like that. Sometimes books teach you a lesson like if you [look] different... It doesn't mean that you are different from everyone just because of the [way you] look*

> *When I got my reading buddy I always read with her and when I read she tells me to write the pages I read. It is a lot of fun and she always picks nice games and nice books.*

> *It is not fun....[when] I don't get to play with my reading buddy.*

> *I feel like I am going to miss her. She teaches me a lot. [She lets] me read all the books which is fun because you get to learn more what's in the books and what's happening.*

> *If my reading buddy weren't coming any more I'd feel sad a lot because she is a lot of fun to hang out with, and I only hang with her once a week and that's all. And if she leaves it's really sad because you won't learn anymore because she was teaching about something we aren't going to learn anymore.*

If my reading buddy leaves I won't like school anymore and on Thursdays I won't be excited.

Yes I improved a lot. I got a C on my reading, on my report card and my reading buddy helped me and helped me. Now I can describe more freely and I got an A+ on it that was really good. She helped me a lot

My reading buddy helped me with explaining the book. Before I got a B, now I got a A. I am explaining better.

Detailed description from students and teachers were obtained through confidential focus groups – such anonymity encouraged students and teachers to be honest in their praise and criticism of a popular and effective program. These comments show how community-referenced pedagogy can work to engage and support students in their education and schooling, and can help organizers improve the program.

Westview

A number of community organizations work with students at Westview, with a particular focus on mentorship.

When FIT [Friends in Trouble] was called into the Westview Girls mentorship program, teachers were having a hard time in connecting to the girls. They didn't understand what their problems were, and were having a hard time with "attitude" and felt girls were disinterested... in workshops. With both groups [teachers and girls] we saw the issue was lack of communication, a lot of taken for granted ideas flying around, walls were up with the girls.... It was a challenge for FIT as well, but building a relationship was easier with us. We understood the issues... .Teachers appreciated our session we did with them and for sharing the girls' perspective. [Community Member, June 2010]

Peer mentorship can make a valuable contribution, not only because of the connection between people of similar ages, but in terms of shared histories, particularly the common experience of living in the same neighbourhood for many years. Inviting community members into the school for this purpose has been common practice at Westview for many years. Co-teaching with the teacher has potential for increased student engagement, although such opportunities were becoming less frequent.

Parent Engagement:

Over the three years, parents and guardians at each of the participating schools were invited to participate in a series of group discussions to explore issues of mutual concern, and to interact with resource personnel, school officials, teachers and teacher candidates from the Toronto District School Board. Such initiatives helped remove cultural and institutional barriers, and facilitate dialogue, which lead towards enhanced student academic performance and smoother student adjustment to schooling. The SCEE project provided schools with substantial support for connecting with parents at the local level, and helped schools to equip parents with skills, knowledge and tools for engaging with the educational journeys and school lives of their children.

Bala

> *Two parents attended the Epstein PD session....Bala recently hosted a literacy night for grade 1&2 classes. Teachers modelled portions of lessons and between 40 and 50 parents attended the event.* [field notes, March 2010]

> *At the opening of the parent resource centre, approximately 30 adult guests attended between 2:30-3:30pm representing parents, Aboriginal Education Centre, school staff, school board officials. In addition, 10-15 more parents came to the centre between 3:30 and 5pm* [field notes, May 2010]

> *At the National Aboriginal Day Assembly at Bala...approximately seven parents attended assembly; this is considered a large number of parents by teachers.* [field notes, June 2010]

The SCEE project provided numerous forums for teachers, parents and community members to meet together. There was no visible body language or participation of individuals in these forums that appeared to betray discomfort or the feeling of being out of place, indicating that parents and other community members felt comfortable in the different venues that SCEE helped to create.

Brookview

During PD sessions, the importance of interacting with parents and providing a space for listening to and acting upon their suggestions was discussed in terms of creating inclusive learning environments. Parents are a valuable source of insights for further strengthening of inclusivity.

> *Now, I was talking to some parents who were highly educated, Masters and Poverty Management and all the good things they were showing me in the interviews, and they were saying "Why don't we involve other schools such as Catholic schools, Islamic schools, Jewish schools; speakers from those schools should come and talk to our kids." And she gave me an example. She said "Kids can learn about those who created the*

Second World War but cannot learn about the prophets they believe. Why is it so? And if we have equity, there should be opportunity to discuss both topics." So these are some concerns parents have [that] they don't [say] openly in the meetings. They don't say but once they know you personally [they do]. – [Brookview Teacher, October 2009]

While the issue of religious diversity was raised as important by teachers in all five schools, however, this quote suggests that parents may support this issue as well, but would only discuss potentially divisive issues if they feel comfortable with the teachers or school.

In addition to consulting parents, some Brookview teachers noted that inclusivity is also about helping students to understand their place, and their community, in the larger city.

> *You remember when Mohammed, one of my students, we were going skating and he had never been on a subway before and he forgot where he was and said 'Oh my god, this is the first time I've ever been on a subway...' and the kids said what? You've never been on a subway before? You don't go anywhere? And he's like, 'Oh, I mean, umm, I think I've been on before, I was just thinking that maybe (pause)'...but the fact is on the subway and going downtown, a brand new place, I could see his mind expand. So its really nice to see and to build on that as much as you can.* [Brookview Teacher, October 2009]

Brookview teachers have a solid grasp of the potential for pedagogy which is community-referenced.

Consulting parents is important, but so is helping them to feel comfortable enough to initiate these discussions with teachers and schools. Part of this process involves providing parents with reasons to come to the school, particularly reasons that relate to their own learning.

> *There were ESL classes for adults, so I was teaching my ESL class in the daytime and classes were bigger at that time, like 25 or so. In the evening, I would teach their parents in Brookview. That was a wonderful way of engaging students and parents; to be able to walk around the building and talk to me: "What [did] my child do today? Did they complete homework?" And I find very strong relationships. So when I discussed with some other colleagues at York, they said this was a very powerful way. I think we should continue with these kinds of programs where they find the value of community...where they learn, they can economically gain something out of it, then they can take time off and they come.* – [Brookview Interview, Teacher, October 2009]

Some of the teachers at Brookview recognized the need to use the approach. However, most of the teachers were uncertain about how they could create such opportunities, given their limited time.

> *[With] society in general, as soon as you say you're a teacher it becomes a power issue. They put you up here [places one hand high up in air] and you have to bring them down and say, "No, I'm a person."* – [Brookview Teacher October 2009]

If you have a good relationshipwith parents, people would not be fearful or [they would] want to come in to see what is happening in the class. But what is happening is people don't build a relationship between parents and students and so they're not open to coming in."- [Brookview Teacher, October 2009]

Oakdale

Plans were being made to implement the "Curriculum Learning Celebration" in December/09 to bring together the parents and community while showcasing students' work. Similar events were organized for each grade (6-8). The event was perceived by teachers and VP as a success in engaging parents and students, despite only a few parents attending. [field notes, December 2009]

Teachers had expressed a great deal of pride in the success of the Curriculum Learning Celebration. However, some less positive sentiments were revealed during a PD session which included parents and community members.

When we met at York U in October, and we were talking about our celebration of learning, one of the people at our table...She was representing the community.... and she said, "Well did you ask the parents if they thought that it was a good idea to do this?" ....Then the other thing is how do you get to the parents? [Oakdale, Interview, Teacher, Fall 2009]

This highlights the importance of initiating and maintaining a dialogue with parents and community members when planning events. Teachers clearly had good intentions for engaging parents and probably succeeded in engaging student learning to a much higher degree. However, parents and community members could have enhanced the students' engagement further through their knowledge of the students, the neighbourhood and identifying what resonates with parents.

Some of that is parental pressure – just engaging parents to push for those resources. I don't know how much we can do from the inside" [Oakdale Teacher, October 2009]

Shoreham

There is active participation of parents in the newly opened Parent Literacy centre at Shoreham. Having low participation initially, the centre became very popular for parents with young children. As word spread in the community more parents were seen coming to the program. And towards the end of the year, the centre saw more parents than any average class does. Parents felt comfortable dropping in and spending valuable time to receive quality time with their children. It also provided opportunities to network with other parents and receive information on services available in the community [field journal, January 2011]

The Parent Literacy Centre was quite successful. It brought parents into the school and provided a space where teachers and parents could interact in a much less formal environment than a Parent-Teacher interview. The idea of a Parent Resource room came up in all of the elementary schools in the project but actual rooms existed only in Bala and Shoreham.

While these venues helped parents feel comfortable in the school, ideally, community-referenced pedagogy would also consider and make use of parents as co-creators of curriculum.

Some teachers consulted with parents about some curriculum materials, such as, sharing with parents the book they intend to or were using with the students:

> *I have a couple of reading books and some are culturally descriptive. So, for example, I have a book on Somalia in French, and before reading it I give it to parents who I'm on good terms with, to read, and they tell me if there are any biases. Some read the book and say it's great, others say it doesn't represent Somalia. This is important in building relationship with parents.* [Shoreham Teacher, Interview, May 2009]

This is an excellent example of starting to see parents as co-creators of curriculum.

> *Getting them involved in reading at home, helping children with doing journals, having children write down with their parents about Eid, or Ramadan for example. Sometimes getting parents involved in class activities makes them more involved with the class.* [field notes, March 2009]

> *When I talk to parents apart from talking about their kids I ask them about themselves, about back home about the schools they attended. To me that's a big thing because some parents have a very different perspective on schooling in North America and that is why a lot of them are apprehensive in becoming part of the school community.* [Shoreham Teacher, may 2009]

Westview

The issue of parent engagement manifested differently in high schools than in elementary schools. For instance, contacting parents was not as easy for teachers:

> *I don't worry about calling parents. Half the time we don't even have a phone number on record.* [Westview teacher, June 2010]

In a follow-up discussion with this teacher, it was possible to see the complexity below the seemingly simple statement. The teacher recognized that he was working with young adults who were sensitive about calls home and that he was able to work with them with or without their parents' input. A student focus group revealed that the teacher understood this matter from the students´ perspectives:

> *If parents go on a trip, you're not going to focus. You're going to be thinking about [what they're] going to do to you.* [Westview student, June 2009]

> *Because, some parents, if you bring them to some special event, when you come back, "Oh, my baby, you did so good." That's so embarrassing.* [Westview student, June 2009]

Westview staff were careful to avoid alienating students who they knew were keen to begin finding their own way as emerging adults less dependent on their parents.

Community Engagement

Project activities deepened the familiarity of teachers, teacher candidates and school administrators with the environment and neighborhoods within which schools are situated. It also brought families into the schools, but equally important, it brought educators into the community. Opportunities were provided for teachers to interact with agencies and organizations who work with children (e.g., athletic, religious, recreational, social service, etc.). This process helps dismantle cultural barriers and cultivate relationships between school and community. York University's Faculty of Education has established strong relationships with a variety of community organizations in the Northwest quadrant, through such programs as the Westview-York University Partnership, its satellite (off-campus) sites, and its community practicum placement program. This SCEE project built upon these initiatives.

Bala

> *In one grade 4/5 teacher's class, student artwork was incorporated into a heritage blanket where students were drawing visual representations to reflect their heritage. As part of this activity, students were observed openly talking about different cultural traditions.* [field notes, 2009]

Bala sought to highlight the cultural heritages of student and had success with this approach. To acknowledge the Aboriginal population in the school, community members helped the students create a mural:

> *At the National Aboriginal Day Assembly at Bala (June 21, 2010), many Aboriginal students decided to take the day off school. We observed that at least half of the student body had their hands up to respond when asked what the* Seven Grandfather Teachings *were and they were able to list them correctly. Since many girls from Girls Group were away, it was decided that the Girls Group leader would teach the school the* Strong Women's Song *while boys were taught the drumming part. The audience fully participated to learn lyrics and sang it together.* [field notes, June 2010]

Our observations revealed much about teachers' efforts to be more inclusive of cultures of Aboriginal students. All students, regardless of their own heritage, were happy to learn about and participate in Aboriginal traditions.

This is an example of how a community-referenced approach to pedagogy can broaden the horizons of students. In a school, such as Bala with such a high level of cultural diversity, it would be impossible to cater to the heritages of all students all the time. Bala took the approach of teaching students the value of learning about each other's heritages.

One issue for teachers' planning was that, in the past, many Aboriginal students were unwilling to self-identify. This posed problems not only for assessing how many Aboriginal students were in the school but also to make sure efforts to highlight First Nation cultures did not inadvertently leave out a reference to any specific cultures of any of the students of First Nation in the school. However, students are increasingly self-identifying as Aboriginal which will help teachers target their efforts more specifically to emphasize the cultures of particular First Nations.

> *In 2010, a mural was created by the students, in partnership with parents, the Arts for Children and Youth, and the Aboriginal Education Centre. The mural was dedicated to the parents and families in the Bala Community, in recognition of their role in providing cultural strength, history, and life-long teachings: "This mural is a gift from the students at Bala Avenue Community School, to their parents and the community. The totem pole welcomes you with open arms and invites you to enter. The animals and symbols represented here, and carried throughout the mural, are from many parts of the world and reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity of our school. It is our hope that everyone sees some part of themselves and their cultural heritage in the animals and symbols represented within.*

> *"The Tree of Life is a symbol used in many cultures. The roots represent cultural heritage and history. The trunk represents personal strength. The branches represent the gifts each person has to share with their community. Families are an important part of our school. Through the teachings of the medicine wheel, we learn that each of us is at a different stage in the life cycle, (child, youth, adult, senior), with unique gifts, strengths, and perspectives which we can contribute to the community"* [plaque on Bala mural].

The mural is a culmination of a year of building bridges between stakeholder groups. The problem of making distinctions between the diverse cultures within the First Nations was a concern. Students were not necessarily aware of which traditions were from their particular Nation and which were not. For example, the totem pole is part of the traditions of West Coast First Nations, yet many students saw it as representing First Nations in general. This is an opportunity for adults in the community to provide guidance to these young students about both the similarities and differences between different cultures. Carabala was another celebration that exposed students to other cultural practices.

> *Carabala: a celebration of our diverse cultures and backgrounds – we relied heavily on parent leaders to research and prepare educational displays. The students rotated through centres to learn about many cultures.* [field notes, June 2010]

Carabala is an example of working with parents to learn about the cultural heritages of all the students in the school and is thus an example of community-referenced pedagogy. The school's efforts to represent the Aboriginal cultures represented in their student body would benefit from this approach of inviting parent leadership.

Brookview

> *The principal instructed each grade team to organize activities or events for students to "give back" to their community - this was his conceptualization of community engagement.* [field notes, January 2010]

Brookview administration acknowledged community engagement as a priority especially in regards to school volunteering in the larger community; however, some community members advised that its efforts needed to expand into the fuller type of community-referenced pedagogy that the SCEE project was advocating.

> *There is no such thing as community engagement from the perspective of what TDSB is talking about because in order to engage community, they [the community] need to be at the beginning of every single process. Community engagement cannot happen without community because then it goes back to that Eurocentric view of I'm telling you of how you should behave.* – [Brookview Interview, Community Member, August 2009]

Importantly, a community-referenced approach recognizes the need to begin with and have on-going dialogue so that community members, teachers, parents and students all become co-creators of curriculum and program activities.

> *Teachers and administrators are highly educated….The community is not. So there's a sense of respect. How can the community talk about something that they're not really educated on? It's a lived experience. Whereas the people in the school are educated on the experience, they may not live the experience? But, there's that sense of power…it's very hard to bridge that gap* [Brookview Community Member, December 2009]

Oakdale

One of the factors, generally speaking, that causes teachers and parents to rarely meet to co-create curriculum is quite simply, a lack of opportunity for spending time and space together. Recognizing this, the SCEE project provided these venues through on-campus PD sessions. This proved to be productive:

> *Oakdale Community Member: Is it possible to have a resource room where we have to welcome parents to [go]there and about other social issues?*
> *Oakdale Teacher: This would be a goal to create a parent resource section...and part of the teacher-librarian responsibilities is to [be a] liaison with the community as well.* [August 2009]

This was the first time community members had a chance to talk and plan with school staff. Community members expressed the wish to work with the entire family of schools in a similar manner:

> *Since our last meeting here [with York] we are kind of establishing a good working relationship with Oakdale…principal and vp opened the doors to let us in…Inviting*

parents to come to the school…. We are talking about parents in a neighbourhood that is marginalized. People work day and night just to pay the rent. People have social issues and financial issues so …you can have us there to provide that support…We are there to help you, to help the parents with their other issues, and that way they will come…We have mentors ready to work with Oakdale or Brookview and they are Westview students…We have the resources you can use…Allow us to work with you – that's all we are asking from the community. [Community Member, October 2009]

Oakdale is improving its connections with community partners and parents, although work needs to continue to be done with respect to the ways in which teachers are engaged in this process. This was a common theme amongst schools.

Shoreham

Students shared their perspectives about inclusivity. They did not have the language to describe what it means for school to be inclusive or community-referenced, however, they did have interesting ideas about difference. For example, one student seemed to equate being Canadian with speaking English:

> *When I was little, I was in my country Bangladesh. So I know to speak Bengali, I knew how to write in Bengali now I forgot. You know because I learnt a lot of English, I started being Canadian. I forgot Bengali, but I can speak it.* [Shoreham student, Focus Group, June 2010]

This student apparently saw the loss of her mother tongue as positive, raising the question of how the school can encourage an appreciation of linguistic heritage that gets set aside for English. Are teachers, in encouraging students to learn English inadvertently encouraging a rejection of students' first language? A community-referenced approach might allow teachers to consult with parents about how best to handle this common and well-documented experience.

Some students raised issues that surprised us. For example, mode of dress of the Reading Buddies was mentioned by some students:

> *She could wear more appropriate things, like.... not tight pants*

> *My reading buddy she is Muslim but.....I want her to wear proper clothes. She wears tight jeans and her back shows*

> *She took her off her sweater and her back was showing*
> [June 2010]

These comments speak to the need for cultural sensitivity within the participants of Reading Buddies but they also highlight an opportunity for the students to learn more about diversity within their own cultures:

My friend told me that my reading buddy doesn't look like Muslim because she wears that stuff and her back shows, and I said "She is Muslim inside. It's okay to wear. [Shoreham Student, June 2010]

Community-referenced pedagogy has the potential to broaden students' perspectives via peer-to-peer exchange. The Reading Buddies program, in particular, helped students to gain confidence for teaching other children:

Yes, I would [teach other children]… I would teach someone like an ESL kid so she can get a good mark on her report card so her mark can go up. [Shoreham Student, Focus Group, June 2010]

Shoreham attempted to make connections with the community via a written survey designed to identify community leaders, especially religious ones, distributed on Parents' Night. However, some parents were suspicious of why the school would want such information which resulted in poor returns on the survey. School staff and SCEE project members came to understand some of the political issues related to religion that affect their communities. Hearing about the ways in which some Muslims had been targeted in Canada, helped the SCEE project team recognize the importance of context in any community-referenced approach to curriculum and pedagogy.

Westview

Access before was really difficult - schools seemed to be closed spaces. If you're not an admin., teacher, or student you don`t belong. It's a common approach to education in the city. I went to high school in Scarborough and Richmond Hill was the same thing. A school like Westview that has been under so much scrutiny and spotlight that's on it – student transfers, safe schools incidents, test scores, socio-economic situation of students and families – so much under a microscope. People [administration] were scared of taking risks, fear to involve the community and have more resources. The relationship was adversarial; lots of blame going around -parents to admin, mischaracterization, assumptions of community – it made it very difficult for either part to feel they belonged together. [Westview Community Member, March 2010]

Many participants suggested in order for Westview to implement a community-referenced pedagogy, first, they would need to overcome the historical years of mistrust between community members and school staff. However many community organizations do in fact have access to the school and seem to be working with school staff to meet the best interests of the students, so the "years of mistrust" may not be as important in the current situation. What appears to be missing in the conversations between community members and the school staff is a recognition of the ways in which students view the school and their neighbourhood, especially in regards to safety issues.

For example:

I don't think the area we live in can improve the school, because it is not a safe place…Like, stop the violence; too much people getting killed every day. [Westview student, June 2009]

You know, like small kids that get hurt. They could make them go outside less, so that they could be inside home studying instead of playing like half the day, and they would not get hurt. Someone could be firing a gun and they are the one that ends up getting hurt instead. [Westview Student, June 2009]

Some students have low opinions of their community and therefore any attempt at community-referenced pedagogy might require helping students to become more comfortable with and feeling safer in the neighbourhood in which they live.

Key Findings from the SCEE Evaluation

Interviews with teachers, administrators, and community members at the five participating schools were conducted towards the end of the SCEE project. The results are presented for each school in relation to participants' conceptions of the SCEE project, its mission and goals, and its impact in their school. Conceptions are "specific meanings attached to phenomena which then mediate our response to situations involving those phenomena" (Pratt, 1992, p. 204). They "act as a framework through which [an individual] views, interprets, responds to and interacts with [a phenomenon]" (Brown, 2004, p. 303). As such, participants' conceptions of the SCEE project act as the basis for their attitudes towards the project and its goals, as well as their assessment of project impacts, successes and limitations. Additionally, participants discussed the factors and limitations that have affected the implementation and success of the SCEE, and they made suggestions for improvements.

Bala

Participants believed that the aim of SCEE was "to help address several issues" at Bala, including the high drop-out rates among Aboriginal students, complicated by reduced levels of student self-identification, making it challenging to support Aboriginal student empowerment and enhance Aboriginal student achievement through community partnerships and parental involvement. Participants expressed their vision of SCEE as working "to expand how educators see the curriculum and to encourage them to think of the environment and how representative the school is of the cultures and communities around it." Overall, participants perceived the SCEE mission, activities and impacts on Bala to be highly positive. They highlighted several SCEE contributions including increased parental and community engagement both within the school and within the curriculum, which aligned with the school's focus on character education and a locally-based curriculum.

Several half-day professional development workshops for staff, plus working directly in classrooms with teachers and students to incorporate the Seven Grandfather Teachings, supported teachers in adding Aboriginal perspectives to their lessons. Involvement in the SCEE project was described as "a transformative experience." The SCEE project was referred to as "a catalyst for learning," because it promoted passion for "infusing Aboriginal culture" into the curriculum by encouraging "a mindset of inclusive education." It was felt that the environment allowed for reflection and "buy in". This, along with the capacity of the SCEE project to respond to several initiatives within a short time period, made the project successful.

> *Well, I think that the value in this project is the people that work for it and the people were absolutely amazing that supported the Bala project. They were amazing because they allowed us to understand that we were in a process, they were very supportive and non-judgmental. They respected the mistakes that we made. They honoured them and allowed us to work through those mistakes so we never felt at all like we weren't able to take some of the risks that we did and I think that was the amazing thing about it. [...]*

And I know looking back that we made tons of mistakes but those were never the primary things. But when we look back, we never really thought of them as mistakes as much as we thought of them as part of the learning. (Bala Teacher)

SCEE project team members, along with parents and students, were involved in the creation of the mural in the front entrance of the school which aimed to represent the diversity at Bala. As a result of the mural project, teachers at Bala were encouraged "to think critically about their practice" and to "ask tough questions of themselves." As one participating teacher reported, "teachers thought on the surface they were being inclusive, but because of the mural project, teachers were able to reflect and to see where Bala needed to move."

The Mural project was led by a Bala teacher involved in the SCEE project as well as students, parents, staff and community members. It infused Aboriginal teachings and aimed to represent the community as a whole. The creation of the mural was a transformative experience. [...] Teachers were not resistant to the idea of supporting the Aboriginal culture, but they certainly weren't engaged and involved. This [mural project] increased their engagement and involvement because they became blatantly aware of how they were behaving, even though they weren't, didn't know they were behaving that way. And secondly it put the Aboriginal community at forefront and that hadn't happened yet in the school. People had commented that you could walk through the school prior to this project and you would not know there were Aboriginal students. [...] We began to realize that our role as a school was also to support our students in understanding their culture and that we can't just sit back... That we actually have a place to play in helping families reconnect so that led to many other great parent engagement activities throughout the course of the year with the primary focus on helping students and their families and the community with parts of their culture that have been lost. (Bala Teacher)

The SCEE approach and activities enhanced parent engagement at Bala, indirectly encouraging more parents to be involved in the school. In particular, because of the SCEE initiatives at the school (e.g., Community kitchen, Aboriginal Drumming), it was reported that parents felt more comfortable and welcome at the school and "are more involved, even getting employment at the school." One participant noted that the SCEE project helped the school build its capacity for engaging parents. She reported, "we have built this capacity in our parents, so parents are advocating for needs so,….I think this is the biggest part of this project. I think we built it."

SCEE activities promoted student self-esteem and well-being and were attributed to have indirectly "helped children become less shy to say they are Aboriginal." Specifically, it was reported that more Aboriginal students now "feel comfortable about coming to school, they are proud of their heritage, their culture, and they are just soaking it up, they really want to learn more." It was also felt that, over the long term, SCEE activities and impact would contribute to increasing student engagement and achievement. In particular, the infusion of local community in the school led students to more fully embrace their culture and values, and also led to increased student "willingness to share about their backgrounds and their traditions and their experiences."

SCEE project members partnered and interacted with a variety of programs inside and outside Bala that sometimes blurred "the lines between SCEE and these other programs." For example, while the relationship between Bala and the Aboriginal Education Centre (AEC) was present prior to the SCEE project, it was felt that the SCEE project deepened this relationship. Another example of this strengthened relationship was SCEE members' participation in Carabala, a school-wide celebration of all the communities represented in Bala, and which involved the collaboration of parents, teachers and students. The SCEE project was directly and indirectly involved in several successful initiatives at Bala such as the Girls Club, an Aboriginal cooking club, drumming classes, and a Parent Resource Room that was set up to reflect different cultures in the community. All these initiatives and activities linked the school to community partners enabling teachers and administration to work effectively.

> *Each event led to another … The community started coming forward to state needs such as not knowing how to cook Aboriginal food. The Community Kitchen started where Aboriginal families came to Bala. [...] The Bala parent had come to know the school as a place where you could express your needs and that the school would help to make it happen... We see the Aboriginal community reflected in every aspect of the school, from the parent resource room, to the libraries, to the hallways, to the classrooms. So I think that we have made it more inclusive. I think that at this school in particular, we recognize that equity and inclusion is a process; it's not an end result.* (Bala Teacher)

Two teachers attended the Teacher Institutes and came back to share experiences and information with other teachers, including the equity team, at Bala. These two teachers reported that their understandings and practices of inclusive education changed as a result of attending the Institute. In particular, they became more aware of the important role of the community and now believe that "it [inclusive education] could work." One teacher reported that "the institute has definitely changed my practice of inclusive education. It has given me more resources and tools to use when planning and implementing my lessons." Both teachers described several positive experiences and outcomes related to their participation in the Institute such as participating in community walks and community mapping activities, which were felt to be "extremely effective [...] because understanding where your students come from and what their community looks like, is a key part to building an inclusive program." Other positive experiences include participating in discussions about parent engagement, and how parents might feel intimidated to work with teachers and how teachers might feel intimidated to speak with parents; participating in initiatives to align various plans, such as the School Improvement Plan and the Action Team Partnership plan; and co-creating a food justice curriculum to be the focus of the upcoming year with promotion of FoodShare boxes. The Institute has given teachers "new tools and experiences that have had a positive impact on [their] students' engagement and learning." As one teacher explained, "when students see themselves represented in what they are learning about, they are far more engaged. This increase in their engagement also leads to greater student success." Both teachers felt that participation in the Institute will impact their student learning and their efforts to motivate them to be agents of change. They also described how they have been trying to promote inclusive education to their colleagues through sharing what they have learnt in the Institute.

Brookview

Participants believed that the SCEE project aimed to promote parent and community engagement, to generate "mindfulness about the community" from schools, administrators and teachers to get students interested in their learning, and "engage parents, your community, yourself, your school in thinking, in looking at inclusivity. How to make it, like, make the lesson or make the classroom so the kids want to come to school." These goals were felt to be "in the right place." The participants perceived the SCEE mission, activities and impact in Brookview to be highly positive. Participating in the SCEE activities, particularly the Teacher Institute, was perceived to be informative and empowering for teachers and students. For example, the session on mental health was felt to be "the most impactful" in that it changed the way some teachers thought about student behaviour.

> *Well for me, it has opened my eyes to a lot of things and changed my practice... And if it is changing, if I am empowered, then my students are empowered. [...] So to me, it has changed my practice, it has changed the way I see things, it has changed the way how I plan, how I get the kids more involved in their own learning... It has helped me in that manner.* (Brookview Teacher)

> *One of the most impactful one for me was one of the summer institute and the man talked about mental health issues. And a lot of time we bypass that. We say, chock it up to their behaviour and it's this and that. And we don't really look at, and when he was talking, [...] I could just see and I feel that teachers, all of us who are teachers, we should really, really, really, now I left there thinking that we really, really, really need to get an understanding of some of the mental issues […] At least if you have some information then you can work with it. I think that a better understanding of what is really happening with this child if this child is behaving in a certain manner* (Brookview Teacher)

The SCEE supports the school by helping teachers make connections with community agencies. It was reported that the SCEE has "given the school, the staff in the school anyway, the ability to know that they're supported. [...] And it's hard, it's a challenging environment but any time there is a little bit of support from somewhere, it's appreciated."

The SCEE work was empowering for teachers to promote parent and community engagement. As one participant explained, "I would say that [promoting parent and community engagement and inclusive education] came out strongly… What you were doing with the teachers is certainly empowering and supports that." It was also felt that the "larger benefit" of the project was the "relationship that's starting to develop with some community agencies [and the school]", which can enhance parent engagement too.

> *Where I see the larger benefit is probably not the fact that parents have been involved, it's the relationship that's starting to develop with some community agencies that might like to come in and work with our kids and I think maybe that the value in involving our parents may be in that way, through the community and SCEE's work with our kids. (Brookview Administrator)*

SCEE stimulated interest in parent and community engagement, evident in how teachers at Brookview speak about improving student achievement. It also facilitated collegial dialogue and planning around parent engagement and the possibility of establishing a parent resource room (see SCEE learning plans). The SCEE helped to establish Brookview's first paid parent support worker, who is responsible for connecting with parents, engaging them in the school, and being a liaison between parents and staff. SCEE also established a parent resource room with computers for parents, information on community programs, workshops for parents, free coffee on Fridays, etc.

Although the SCEE did not involve a large number of parents, "at least the seed is planted." Parents attending events such as parent resource room, community breakfast, and the Teacher Institute, were seen as positive steps. Since the SCEE started, more parents come to the school and administrators have become more open to parents and community agencies entering the school. For example, SCEE encouraged involving parents in EQAO night at Brookview. Consequently, a larger number of parents attended the event compared to previous years. Administrators also tend to discuss parent and community involvement more frequently which, in turn, appears to affect teachers' perspectives about parent and community engagement. Another positive outcome is that the SCEE project allowed participants to learn more fully about the talents and resources available within the community. However, some initiatives (e.g., parent resource room) would have benefited from more support, including support from administrators.

> *I think I've seen more parents then I've seen in years coming in and out, coming in and out, not just once; they feel comfortable coming in and that's a direct result of administration being open to agencies coming in, loads, it's a busy school... I think changing teachers' perspective as well, [...] If that's the only thing that's changed for some, that's huge!* (Brookview Teacher)

> *I think the plan to try to involve some community agencies that came out of this community breakfast was excellent. I mean I think that that was...fantastic. To try to get some community agencies, you know we had the community partner breakfast and people came in and it's the first time we're hearing about ideas in terms of what they would like to do, or what they could do for us.* (Brookview Administrator)

> *I think that finding a way to utilize those community talents and those specific skills that the community has and those resources is I think something that will help us an awful lot. And I think its something that right now that we're lacking in because we've sort of exhausted all of our existing resources and yet there's more issues that we have to address.* (Brookview Administrator)

> *I feel that it [Parent Resource Room] didn't go well; [...] There was no commitment to the belief about this kind of activity, right? And I'm not saying it was personally from the administration standpoint, it's just that I believe there had been no viability demonstrated about this kind of room, this kind of project... Plus as I learned over the year, there really was a deep seeded belief system in place about the community already. I think that it's really important to acknowledge that administrations, schools and teachers, the*

> *experience is that "these" parents are not interested, "these" parents don't care.*
> (Brookview Community Member)

It is difficult to directly connect the SCEE activities and specific outcomes, but during the life of the project there were several improvements in staff-parent relationships and in student behaviour leading to a reduction in suspensions and reduction in absences.

> *I think it's very difficult to draw the parallel and be able to say you know, you have a parent, that has you know, that there has been an improvement in a child's academic performance as a result of an increase in parental engagement... "I think you've gotta find some way of measuring parental engagement first, which is not to say that the parents aren't involved, which is not to say there hasn't been improvement. Yeah, overall, broadly speaking there has been an improvement in terms of academic performance in our school, there has been an improvement in, you know sort of, positive behavior in school, there's been a reduction in suspensions, there's been a reduction in absences, a reduction in lates. Our staff seem to be having less issues with parents that we may be dealing with in the office because they have more positive relationships between parents and the teacher, so I think that yeah, that has all improved, how to measure that, I don't know.* (Brookview Administrator)

As a result of participating in the SCEE activities, participating teachers felt that their perspective on who is involved in students' education and learning has changed. They reported that they now think more broadly (inclusively) about engagement and realize that they can partner with community and parents to create experiential and learning outcomes for all students. For instance, participants now believe that building relationships with organizations outside of the immediate community can be successful in engaging students in activities to which they might not otherwise be exposed.

SCEE provided workshops that addressed various instructional strategies, inspiring and motivating teachers. Following a request by teachers at Brookview, the Social Justice workshop focused was received positively. One teacher reported that the workshop was very effective and that her participation in the workshop influenced her decision to be head of the Social Justice Committee at the school. Participating in the Teacher Institute broadened teachers' conceptions of inclusive education. Teachers are now aware that inclusive education goes "beyond the materials that are used in the classroom" and that it "encompasses parents, the community and significant people in the life of the students." In particular, the Institute made the participants aware of the important role of the community in becoming an inclusive school. They felt that going on the community walk was "a wake-up call" about the importance of "knowing the community your students come from" and that the Institute was "very informative regarding what's happening in the community, programs and services offered, and curriculum resources." Other positive experiences included opportunities to collaborate with like-minded people; learning about inclusivity and what's going on at other schools; and meeting community agency members. In particular, the institute provided "a time for teachers to get together and collaborate… and have like-minded people collaboration and build on what we had started off with, a better knowledge of community and inclusivity around the community and inclusive ed." Participants reported also that they now see making learning relevant to students' lives as the

way to increase student engagement and achievement, and that planning more consciously is the way to achieve that increased engagement and achievement.

> *This is the piece where I think the Institute has helped me because I knew, I know, I always had ... parent, child and teacher, the triad. I didn't have the square. Even in teacher's college it was more the triad I think and now there's the push for the square, including the community.* (Brookview Teacher)

> *Inclusivity means the bigger picture, the broader picture, its broader than what I had in my head... And the many organizations in the community that I guess some people take for granted are there to be utilized and there to support us as teachers...you don't feel isolated and also including them in your practice so they feel included cuz from what I've learned is that they don't feel included, they feel there's a 'them and a us'. And of course acknowledging people's cultural backgrounds, abilities, all of that is inclusivity.* (Brookview Teacher)

> *Most of them [Institute sessions] were informative because you know what happens, you learn a lot about what is happening in the community and what is out there for you as educators and you get to see different people perspectives and different people's point of view and certain things, because it was all, different, different groups of people coming in and sharing and see what they have to offer and a lot of it is very close.* (Brookview Teacher)

> *You plan more consciously, you put a more conscious effort into your planning... And you're thinking now how relevant is this to what, to what you're doing to their own learning? It's more planning to find ways to tie it together to see how what they're learning in class translates to their everyday life. I think that is one of my conscious thing I take from [the Institute].* (Brookview Teacher)

Westview

The participants understood the SCEE as focusing on both school and community and on trying to explore "how community can inform practice", "to bring community and schools together to find a way in which to help students, to promote inclusive education" and "to problematize things that might be accepted." It was also felt that the SCEE aimed to "give information as to where teachers can get information on inclusive education, get support, and share experiences of how they incorporate inclusive education in classrooms." These goals were seen positively by the participants. One teacher explained: "I think the idea is excellent, to bring teachers together, I think the concept is wonderful. I don't think no one would state that they don't support it. Makes sense to every sensible educator, question becomes how do we practice it or do we do it, sometimes it can be uncomfortable for teacher to do it."

Although the SCEE project was not able to implement many initiatives at Westview, the participants mentioned some positive outcomes in relation to the work of the SCEE at their school. In particular, SCEE meetings and presentations were perceived to have been

"informative" and helped raise awareness among teachers. For example, one teacher described how she used material from a SCEE institute, sharing it with other teachers, and analyzing the information. In addition, information provided to teachers by the SCEE project was deemed to be useful. One teacher reported that she enjoyed and benefitted from the experience of being in the SCEE project. She explained: "The amount of learning that has taken place for me has been fantastic … From what I see teachers are learning a lot, great speakers, lots of information, and other teachers in other schools. I know Bala improved attendance of native schools, and just educating teachers. I think it was a very valuable project."

Oakdale

The conceptions of Oakdale participants of the SCEE projects and its mission were mixed, with evidence of a misunderstanding of the project and its goals and context. For example, some participants thought that the SCEE project is related to the Afro-centric curriculum. Similarly, the participants' evaluation of the SCEE and its impact at Oakdale were mixed. They had a positive reaction to the SCEE overall, but evaluations of the specific aspects of the project were not always positive.

The participants agreed that the professional development activities organized by the SCEE (e.g., Summer and Teacher Institutes) were especially beneficial to teachers. These activities supported professional development and created awareness, among both teachers and community members, about the need to improve student and community engagement. The SCEE instigated conversations to revise understandings of engagement. These conversations helped teachers connect their revised understanding of engagement to classroom practice and strategically plan how to do this in their work. For example, one teacher reported that the SCEE encouraged teachers "to think more broadly about engagement" and made them aware that community partners and parents can help create experiential and learning outcomes for students. The SCEE activities (e.g., Summer Institutes, Curriculum Learning Celebration) have also helped teachers learn new approaches to engage students and to enhance their inclusive teaching practices.

> [Curriculum Learning Celebration] was so good... That event was so successful. One, it makes, because the community was going to look at what we've been doing in class, teachers and students were all involved. [...] I had a chance to display my work, what I've been teaching my students, so not only myself and my principal, but the community came. (Oakdale Teacher)

> …Especially the summer [Institute], I learned a lot. [...] It was an eye-opener, getting an insight. Because as a teacher you need to learn from other's experiences and this SCEE project gave me a chance to meet people who, as a teacher-educator, who also gave their experiences, spoke about various things. For example, that mental health – the kind of students we are dealing with and we think it's behavioural, we think it's this thing, but these kids really need a chance to assess some students and it dawned upon me…'wow', so one has to be very careful the kind of kid because mental health comes in different forms and different shapes. (Oakdale Teacher)

Participants felt that SCEE enhanced collaboration among grade 7 teachers, gave teachers confidence and confirmation about their existing teaching practices and beliefs, and enhanced inclusive practices at the school. For example, the SCEE project brought guest speakers and resource materials to the school directly and through the Summer Institutes. Clear efforts were made in the last two years of the SCEE project to increase equity in the representation of cultural events and issues in the curriculum beyond limited celebrations at the school. Overall, participants felt that the SCEE project positively impacted the work of the equity committee, especially in the last two years.

The Teacher Institute was described as the most effective and organized initiative among those organized by the SCEE. It was felt to be extremely beneficial to teacher practices, particularly as a way to become aware of other organizations and resources available to them. Participants in the Institute reported that their understanding of inclusive education broadened to include the community. The Institute also helped teachers "see that there are so many community programs available" and strengthened their commitment to make the school more inclusive. The participants found activities particularly significant in affecting their beliefs and practices about inclusive education. These included community walks, community mapping, work with Kathy Lundy, community groups coming in and sharing their successes, and the session on the empowerment of parents

> *At one point, I figured inclusive education meant incorporating everything that involved the students, meaning the diversity that they come with, their academic abilities, reading skills, in terms of race, nationality, that kind of thing. But now I'm beginning to appreciate it's a little more than that in terms of seeing not only where they come from, the perspective of race and nationality, but also seeing where they come from in terms of their community and how that - the parameters of the community- impact them in terms of as families and as individuals.* (Oakdale Teacher)

Participants indicated that the SCEE shows "a strong commitment from university to improve education" and that years 2 and 3 of the project were "better than year 1." Year 3, in particular, "was good because a lot of the preliminary discussions had been had and people were able to get down to business." The main goal of SCEE in Year 1 (and part of Year 2) was to get to know the participants and culture of the school in order to then be able to complete more focused work. However, some participants experienced this as "a lack of continuity" in the SCEE work across the three years, which was detrimental to the project and its work at Oakdale. In addition, there was a general dissatisfaction with the lack of specific outcome measures (e.g., tests) of student improvement and engagement in the SCEE project. Participants felt that the SCEE focused on raising awareness, but not concrete changes in the school. Meetings and discussions with SCEE members, at Oakdale and York, were "really good", however, "transferring that into the classroom, that's where there was this was kind of this fogginess." Finally, there was a dissatisfaction with the limited amount of time and resources provided by the SCEE to the school. This last point exposes an important misunderstanding of the role of the SCEE in the school. The SCEE members understood their role as facilitators and supporters of the work of the school: to guide the school and teachers to access resources and facilitate programs for themselves. Participants at Oakdale, however, expected the SCEE to bring more resources and provide time in the school.

There wasn't connectedness between these three years. That is an important piece. I mean, all these things, if you think individually, yes they worked very well. I mean it was a great opportunity for us. But if you ask me 'how did it affect your student achievement?' I have no answer. How do I know? (Oakdale Administrator)

And I think where we struggled with it as a Grade 7 team, was that we were being told, and I don't know who was giving us this information, that we were gonna be given materials to use. So we were waiting for these materials and we were like, okay, what are these materials? And then I remember when we went to those meetings at York, it was like okay there aren't any materials. [...] Like I think it was just, these are some great ideas... This is what we should do... And then that was it. You know what I mean? (Oakdale Teacher)

Shoreham

Participants believed that the SCEE was "a partnership program between schools, parents and community" that is "trying to find a cohesive means to which all these various institutes in a child's life can work together to build success" with a goal "to address what could be done to the life of the school so students, teachers and parents feel validated." The participants saw the goals of the SCEE as highly positive and they felt that the project "validated people of different backgrounds, was understanding of the needs of different communities, and offered how school can be open, made more relevant and open to the needs and life of students."

[It is] about having students, communities and teachers all get a better understanding of who they are, where they are positioned, what sort of influences they are positioning about the different beliefs they have, biases that they have; their perspectives on cultural, religious, social, economic and political. It is an ongoing learning process for all stakeholders, but ultimately the goal is to have students feel a stronger connection of who they are and what is their learning and why it's important, to feel validated. But also for teachers to understand how important it is to make students feel validated and to make students feel represented and bring out their rich histories to life. So it's not that the curriculum has changed; curriculum is still the curriculum, but it's finding ways through their voices, through their histories AND bringing in parents. That's another big piece with the SCEE that it is a huge, rich source of information and ideas for teachers to build upon not just to see parents are partners. Well, parents should be partners, but it's going beyond the framework of 'parents just help kids with homework.' It is 'parents help us understand your children better, help us understand your religion better, your faith better, your culture, but become partners in the teaching process much more actively and sort of going along the journey with them of what it is that they themselves are trying to do. [...] It is bringing everyone together to help the child learn better. (Shoreham Administrator)

Participants highlighted several positive aspects and outcomes of the SCEE-Shoreham partnership. They felt that SCEE shifted the focus from involvement to engagement of

community and parents. While the school has "always tried to have parents involved", the SCEE aimed:

> *to make parents actively engaged, where they are not participants, but they are very integral people in the education journey. You hear that a lot, parent involvement, community involvement, and then community engagement. That's what SCEE represents, an engaged community, an active community, an involved community and ultimately a community that is part of the education journey.*

It was felt that the SCEE helped teachers "move forward and broken the barrier between teacher and child and teacher and parent." Participants indicated that the SCEE project improved "teachers' level of comfort on issues of equity." While a large number of staff were not directly involved in the SCEE project, "they are very respectful of the work done by the SCEE around community engagement and social justice." In addition, teachers who participated in SCEE activities have shared their learnings from the SCEE at staff meetings, making presentations at forums and have spoken to administration about issues discussed. The impact of these learnings can be seen "in the questions that teachers ask and those that children ask about representation, identity, and faith." The Dual Language Books provides a good example of the positive impact of the SCEE.

> *One good example is having kids and parents work together on the dual language books... I saw parents shift from being involved to being engaged [as they] worked with their children, wrote books with their children and had them published... Having educators and teachers understand and showing the shift from deficit model of thinking of what kids don't know or what kids can't do to validating what kids do know, what skills they have, what linguistic histories and linguistic richness and culture richness they have and what can be used in classrooms is all evident from the dual language book experience. [...] The parent piece offered a different experience of how parents can become partners and active participants and portrayed a different relationship between teachers and parents.* (Shoreham Administrator)

At the end of the SCEE project, participants felt that there is room for growth and improvement and a need for more people to expand their understandings around community engagement and the changes required to achieve it. Engaging the community is an ongoing process. It was generally felt the SCEE was successful in helping "the staff, the kids and parents in their journey", but that "the learnings, the understandings, the experiences" and "SCEE values and beliefs in around community engagement" are not fully part of every teacher's practice and pedagogy. It was felt that by embedding the SCEE in the school "rather than as a separate entity", everyone would stop understanding this as *the SCEE project* but rather the way we do education, the way we do community engagement, the way we validate students and families."

Some participants emphasized that the SCEE project "has rich ideas and excellent ideology and foundation", provided "excellent literature" and an "enlightening and enriching" experience, and gave participants "an opportunity to consider different ways of doing things." However, some felt that the project lacked concrete outcomes. One participant complained that the project "turned out to be lots of meetings that dragged on" and that it "did not bear the results [she was] hoping for." Consequently, she felt that "in the end the project lost its zeal partly due to disenchantment and partly due to meeting fatigue" which she felt was "overwhelming."

Although she emphasized that "the project is good but has to be ongoing, that is, continuously happening." The SCEE was "a good start but has a long way to go." She continued, "the concern at the beginning of the program when drawing out the plan was to reach out to those parents who are never represented at school, but in the three years this goal did not materialize. Although there were some parent initiatives that took place, like the food market, the same parents that always participated were involved… There is a wider clientele out there that we have not been able to reach out to."

Factors and Limitations Affecting the SCEE and its Work

Several factors seem to have affected the implementation and success of SCEE at the five schools. These factors are discussed below under two categories: SCEE-related and context/school-related.

SCEE-related Factors

The SCEE project had many goals, was ambitious and lacked a clear focus, particularly in Year 1. Absence of a clear directive for some of the SCEE events and activities was also noted. Participants felt this was a limitation of other initiatives at the school as well. One teacher reported,

> *we have all these interventions and then a lot of times these teachers just go back to their rooms and they just do whatever they've been doing. And whether that's working or not, it's... And I think a large majority of that, and I'm gonna include myself in that, where's the accountability? What proof are you giving me that you're being successful?*

"The work of the SCEE was a job in itself" and "to implement these initiatives was a lot to demand" of busy teachers. To expect teachers to be actively engaged in these initiatives did not seem realistic to some. Finally, the SCEE's attempt to involve different educators from different schools and the variability in how the SCEE was implemented in different schools make it difficult to gauge its impact.

> *I think it was a lot of PD for teachers which resembled any PD that teachers are actively participating, that part was effective. But I don't think it was successful beyond that. I don't think the tools or the timelines.... I think it takes a lot of human power, a lot of advocating and working on the frontline to get these parents involved to figure out some of the difficulties of why they are participating, what are barriers, what is going on and I think you need a lot more people and a lot more resources.* (Teacher)

Participants felt that the goals of the project were not explained well to administrators and teachers from the onset of the project. Consequently, many teachers did not know about the project or were not sure about its goals. Some participants felt a lack of clarity regarding parent involvement (how, why, what) or the rationale for some activities. For example, although the idea of a parent resource room was good, the model that it followed was not clear. In particular, although the parent resource room was a place for parents to come in the school to access resources, there are already similar places for parents in the community and therefore the Parent Resource Room was not necessarily needed. Other participants misunderstood the goals of the SCEE and/or failed to see the link between the different activities of the SCEE and its overall goals. For example, some participants expected the project to provide them with specific teaching/learning materials.

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I think one of the biggest challenges right now is that you know we [administrators] need to have a clearer sort of definition of what the project's purpose is and we need to have a sort of a clearer understanding of what its role is [...] I think the people from the staff perspective, from the staff are involved are very competent, they're very capable and I think they want to see an improvement and increase in parental involvement as well and they want to see it for all the right reasons, but I think we might need a clearer idea of what the purpose of the SCEE project is and what the purpose of this relationship is because I don't think that what we've accomplished in a relatively short period of time, over a two or three year period has been that huge. (Administrator)

There was a problem with lack of publicity of the SCEE and its activities at some schools. Some teachers did not join the SCEE project because they did not know about it; they were not invited to participate in it from the beginning; or when they tried to join the project, they were "a little late." Similarly, there was a lack of clarity about "who was making which decisions regarding programming", lack of communication with administration about the decisions that were made, and a lack of dissemination of information about the SCEE in some schools. Participants felt that the SCEE was not effective in informing school administrators about decision making processes regarding changes in the focus of the work.

Some participants felt a "lack of continuity" in the SCEE activities since the project initiated new ideas and activities each year (e.g., PD in year 1, community engagement in year 2 and Teacher Institute in year 3). Other teachers felt that the discussions held within or with the SCEE "did not go anywhere practical." Consequently, some teachers chose not to further participate in the SCEE project. One teacher raised the issue of "buzz words" that change arbitrarily over time; some terms or concepts are "hot" but do not last within the school teaching repertoire. Teachers in Oakdale, in particular, may consider 'inclusive education' and 'community engagement' to be such 'buzz words'.

Finally, the SCEE was described as too short, "to me one year is not enough to engage the community to make sure… And also to measure how much we have achieved… We need time to implement, monitor and then evaluate." Participants also felt that after only three years, it is too early to be able to identify and see the impact of the SCEE.

Context/School-related Factors

Lack of time for teachers and administrators to be involved in the project and to "put ideas and theory into practice" limited the impact of the SCEE project. Often there are "many things going on at different levels of the school" and some teachers found it difficult to commit to attending all SCEE meetings and activities. In addition commitment was lacking among teachers and administrators who saw SCEE as yet another "add-on."

Busyness in school, like for my school, busy, busy school, too busy, too busy, too busy, cuz sometimes you plan things and it does not work out because we have this doing and sometimes when Administration should come on board, its not that they don't want to

come on board, but sometimes they get caught up in all different kind of things and all of that. (Teacher)

There's so many other things that they [administration] have to deal with up there, that curriculum is like, a back seat...and it's funny, so, cause this is hearsay, but this is, next year will be Timothy Thomas' 3rd year, and he said to one of the teachers recently, 'next year I really wanna focus on curriculum'. And it was like, well what about the first two years, we didn't do curriculum then?...curriculum should be a priority... but because we've got so many needy children here, and I mean were talking not education needy, we're talking everything else, right, that there's no time, none. And, I do have to say this, even though we're professionals...we still need to have somebody overlooking what we're doing, and that's really not happening. (Teacher)

Because it started off with 25 [teachers] and ended with 2. (laughing) I think somewhere, just like kids you know, you don't think they're getting it, but they get it, somewhere things trickle down. The problem is that it [the project] is seen as an add-on... by administration, by teachers. They thought it was a good thing, but I don't think they saw how to include it somehow, as we talk about inclusivity. [...] one of the things for me was the teachers. Some of them start and quit, you know, and drop out (Teacher)

Parents face several challenges. It is very difficult for some parents, "because just the nature of their lives and the nature of [schools] jobs." Parents have other full time responsibilities which is different than what is needed for involvement in school.

The parent resource room is great but ... I don't know if parents are necessarily seeing the school as the centre of the community. So if we can change that perception maybe we'll increase the amount of parents that come through our doors. But you know parents are also busy I mean they don't have time to come here and sit around, and the issue is I think is...we have network resources, we have computers and stuff, but I'm beginning to see that there are an awful lot of other places that have these resources and an awful lot of parents that have these resources. (Administrator)

There was also a problem of perception in regards to multiple organizations having involvement in school activities. Because of the close relationship between the SCEE project and other initiatives at some schools, as well as the large number of initiatives at the schools, "sometimes events organized by the SCEE were not recognized as such."

Pressure from administration to attend some of the SCEE events was perceived negatively by some teachers. Attending some SCEE events was described by one teacher as being "more of a mandate from Admin, 'you have to do this,' and I don't think the teachers were very pleased with the way that went." Power dynamics between teachers and the administration at some schools seem to have affected the way teachers were approached by SCEE project team members. Specifically, the SCEE researchers and facilitators had to approach teachers through the administration, which later was found to be a barrier to a real integration of teachers in the SCEE project, as some teachers felt their participation was imposed on them by the administration. This might have led to some resentment and resistance to the SCEE project in some schools. Some teachers might have seen the SCEE project as being aligned with the

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administration and therefore have been cautious about engagements with the SCEE project for fear of being evaluated. For this reason, we focused on the Teacher Institute in Year 3.

Negative perceptions of schools and teachers within the board, and a perceived "lack of professionalism" at the school could have affected the work of the SCEE and contributed to a lowered level of morale among some teachers.

> *See, I've heard, you know people say, 'oh, a school like that, you get like the dregs of society teaching here cause nobody wants to teach there,' right?...and I don't know if I can….well I can say, well I'm here. But see, I came here on a transfer, so they placed me in this school. And another thing that I hear is that once you're at a school like that, you can never get out because no other schools want teachers from that school because of the quality of them... On the one hand, you know I'm talking about professionalism of teachers. On the other hand, it is so challenging that sometimes you're just surviving. And when you don't feel like you're being supported then you think you'll just drown. So then they just do whatever they need to do to survive.* (Teacher)

It was reported that many projects are already operating at the schools, and some without an obviously clear structure, and without a visibly organized framework to uphold accountability. Some participants complained about the "lack of evidence, evaluation and accountability within the school" which was perceived to be a major shortcoming to identifying the success of the work of any project, including SCEE. There was also a perception that "the university doesn't have a good reputation in serving the interests of the school" (Teacher).

Teachers' "fear of change" was identified as one of the barriers to SCEE work and success. Teachers are "skeptical of taking suggestions from outside stakeholders since frontline experience is valued more than theoretical reasoning."As a result, it is likely that "when the SCEE project is done, teachers will get back to the real world." "There is always the challenge of resistance. Some teachers are view changing how they teach as ineffective because they believe in the old saying 'Why fix what isn't broken." On top of that, several teachers changed schools during the life of the project. This affected the continuity of the project.

Finally, in some cases, a perceived lack of support from school administration and school board towards the teachers vis-à-vis the SCEE project limited the effectiveness of the project. For example, administration did not often attend SCEE events. Limited involvement of school administrators, and school board staff/decision-makers in SCEE activities was described as having negatively impacted the effectiveness of the SCEE in achieving its goals at some schools.

Chapter 4: Suggestions for Improvement

The participants made several suggestions to enhance the impact of the SCEE project at their schools. These include:

For SCEE Project:

The SCEE project should be longer than three years to ensure sustainability. We need to continue the project "so we do not lose momentum." Sustainability would also be supported by having the project and participation mandated by the board (i.e., a top-down approach): "Get the go from the board to the superintendent to the office to the principal, and if super can direct the principal" (Teacher). Additionally, focusing on schools at the same level (e.g., elementary schools), instead of schools at different levels (i.e., elementary, middle and high schools) would help. As one teacher explained, "problems at elementary school level it's important for middle to know about, but at the same time, it's hard for high school issues to be understood by those who are not in that experience. Focus on each level of schools would be helpful ... to share same issues and concerns, and then meet up with all schools in the region to discuss larger issues, and community issues." Conducting activities with teachers in their classrooms, such as in-house activities at the schools with students and parents would help teachers continue the efforts. Conducting activities at the schools and involving all partners can "help bring the goals of the project to life, rather than sending teachers to meetings not knowing what the outcomes will be after coming back from these meetings."

Various support materials are needed. The project should "recommend professional readings to parallel participants' learning journey" (Teacher). Providing teachers with "materials" and resources which "would provide a concrete way to change teaching practice and offer evidence of impact."

More direction from SCEE project team members to administrators and teachers is needed, including a clearer definition of the purpose and role of the SCEE project especially for teachers at the beginning of the project. A clearer mandate is needed, with the adoption of one clear focus for the project, such as focusing exclusively on community and parent engagement for three years and integrating the project into the school plans.

Greater involvement is needed and could be achieved by inviting students to participate in the SCEE activities. More efforts to invite more parents would similarly be beneficial. For example, schools can provide opportunities for parents to be seen as valuable to their kids' learning: "[Have a] symposium at school where parents can come as speakers, maybe they will tell their success stories, coming to Canada, or any of the experiences they've had, any knowledge they can share, so parents come as a resource person into the school" (Teacher). Related to this, more commitment by the facilitator for more action, more outreach, and more networking in the community would be helpful. Additionally, school teachers and administration should be more frequently and more explicitly invited into the decision-making process about the focus and

activities of the project "because they know the school." This could convince teachers to be on board and to collaborate with the project and each other.

For the Teacher Institute, participants recommended similar types of improvements:
- o Including more hands-on and interactive activities;
- o Inviting more teachers to enhance learning;
- o Greater administrator superintendent and principals, vice principals) commitment and involvement in the Institute, "even if it is only attending a few of the sessions, [...] cuz if we don't have the administration on board you're on your own ship;"
- o Having a forum specifically for parents with the purpose of increasing parents' awareness and developing their understanding of inclusive education and giving them the opportunity to voice their ideas about how inclusive practices can be a part of the school and community;
- o Including more students' perspectives in the sessions as well as "police perspective and legalities around things like taking kids into the community;"
- o Holding Institute meetings at the different schools represented by teachers at the Institute to engage teachers and the community since people could participate in sessions more easily.

For Schools and School Board:

More involvement from school administrators and school board staff would enhance school-wide involvement in the SCEE project which would lead towards enhanced student outcomes. This could also ensure stronger commitment from higher school board level administration in terms of sharing their vision and lending their support for the SCEE project and the theme of inclusive community education.

While greater administration involvement is needed, having someone in the school, other than the principal, lead and take the project on within the school may encourage staff to participate and become engaged in the project. Providing more manpower and time could be accomplished through providing teachers with release time in order to train other teachers in the school, which would also make Professional Development accessible and beneficial throughout the entire most school. This might help to ensure teacher commitment and accountability: "You need to ask teachers to participate and commit to three years from the start" (Teacher).

Engaging parents from the parent council (e.g. teachers eliciting parents directly) would improve the recruitment and engagement of more parents and from more diverse backgrounds.

Chapter 5: Next Steps and Recommendations

A community-referenced approach to the education of students – all students – creates inclusive and equitable teaching-learning contexts that are culturally relevant and responsive to students' educational needs, interests, and aspirations. Such an approach begins with an understanding that the student exists in relation to community, and gives attention to the relationship between school, parents, and community. It recognizes that the culture of the community in part, shapes the behaviour and structures of the students, and that the student's sense of self and possibilities are informed by the wider society's perceptions and media representations of community. It encourages the integration of knowledge from and of the community in strengthening relationships with students, and utilizes the backgrounds and experiences of students in building curriculum and pedagogy that is culturally relevant to students' learning contexts. It aims to establish positive connections with parents, guardians and caregivers, and is committed to strategies that seek to understand and reference local communities. It is in this way that schools and educators will engage students and their parents in more meaningful and innovative ways, thereby enhancing student engagement and improving student outcomes.

All schools involved in this project were well-motivated. We did not encounter any teachers, parents or community members who did not see student engagement as a priority. The schools had many programs designed to address this problem; however, we believe that the success of these programs was uneven because of an emphasis on dealing with individual problems rather than looking at the bigger picture.

Strategies to address the complex array of circumstances intervening in student success in high needs schools must be comprehensive but they must also be coordinated and responsive. Such an approach requires several components to be successful.

- ⚔ Opportunity for open and honest dialogues within and between stakeholder groups
    - ◦ SCEE's greatest strength was its practice of creating spaces for different stakeholder groups to meet and engage in discussion about concerns, common goals and disparate perspectives. It is rare for parents, teachers, administrators, students and community members to meet together, yet such encounters are crucial. A format where each group can meet separately first and then come together seems to provide the best opportunities for all to participate. The relationships formed through these dialogues form the foundation for goal-setting and program-planning.

- ⚔ Grassroots goal development
    - ◦ Even within same neighbourhoods, individual schools have unique challenges and strengths. Unless a school community takes ownership of a given initiative to improve student engagement, positive outcomes will be limited and short-lived. Therefore, goals for students must be developed by the stakeholders themselves. When teachers, students, parents, administrators and community members meet, their purpose should be to set and modify goals together. This is why relationship-building is so integral to the process.

- Cultivation of leadership within schools – of both teachers and students
  - Strong administrative leadership is an essential element of successful school initiatives because the principal's approach sets the tone for the school. However, in order for grassroots programs to be sustainable, stakeholders' and especially teachers' and students' leadership capacities must be developed for them to facilitate discussion, plan implementation and monitor progress.

- On-going PD designed to help stakeholders learn how to implement their initiatives
  - With open dialogue, grassroots goals and diffuse leadership capability in place, regular professional development and educational opportunities would ensure that, collectively, the school community has the skills to implement, assess and modify programs that have been put in place to support the school community's goals.

- An integrated approach to evaluation of programs
  - There needs to be a shared vision of what a school is trying to accomplish, and particularly what that accomplishment looks like. One possible framework for achieving this is a School Growth Team, a committee, with members from all stakeholder groups, whose purpose is to meet periodically to review extra- and co-curricular activities to explain how they support the school's goals for student engagement.

- Time for periodic reflection on outcomes
  - In order for school initiatives to be flexible and responsive, stakeholders must be given the time and space to reflect on outcomes before modifying goals or programs or creating new ones.

- Time for each initiative to take root before moving on to a new one
  - While it is expected that several initiatives and many programs will be running in a given school at a given time, new programs need time to develop and work through the inevitable wrinkles. Thus schools must be realistic about the time and resources needed to get new programs started and make sure that existing programs that have proven to be effective continue to enjoy sufficient resources and support.

In summary, if any community-referenced, integrated approach to increasing student engagement is to be successful, it must be predicated on the understanding that it is a process and that all activities will need to be flexible enough that they can be adjusted to respond to students' needs as they change and grow. Essential to this process are the following components: (1) on-going dialogue between all stakeholders, (2) diffuse leadership capacity and on-going leadership development, and (3) an integrated approach to implementation and evaluation. In this way, the best intentions of parents, students, teachers, administrators and community members can translate more effectively into increased student engagement and positive academic outcomes now and in the future.

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