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Biwaase'aa/Maamaawisiwin Education & Research Innovation  
~2016-17 Final Report~



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Maamaawisiwin  
Professional



Teacher  
Development

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## Background

In 2007 the Ministry of Education released the *Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (the Framework). In this document, the Government of Ontario promised all Indigenous peoples that their children attending provincially funded schools “will have the *traditional* and *contemporary* knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to be socially contributive, politically active, and economically prosperous citizens of the world” (p. 7).

For a generation, Indigenous researchers (Cajete, 1994; Battiste, 2013; Bishop, O’Sullivan & Berryman, 2010; Castellano, Davis, & Lahache, 2000; Hampton, 1995) around the world have found that Indigenous school success generally depend on the successful integration of,

- Daily access to *traditional knowledge* by being immersed in a *cultural continuum* and,
- Access to teachers educated to impart *contemporary knowledge* through a *culturally responsive and relational pedagogy* that supports the learning needs of Indigenous children in their classrooms.

A widespread integration of both knowledge traditions in Ontario schools has yet to be fully realized. In order for the promise to be realized, effective approaches need to be identified and then adapted to other contexts. This report examines two promising initiatives that serve the needs of Indigenous students in Thunder Bay schools.

## The Biwaase'aa Program

The first is the Biwaase'aa Program operated by Shkoday Abinojiiwak Obimiwedoan for over fifteen-years in partnership with elementary schools in the Lakehead Public District School Board and the Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board. During the 2012-13 school year, Drs. Julian Kitchen and John Hodson were contracted to conduct a program review of Biwaase'aa.

The resulting study (Kitchen, Hodson, & Hodson, 2014) identified a positive impact on Indigenous learners. Most significantly, the narratives from Biwaase'aa students, parents/caregivers and Youth Outreach Workers triangulated to reveal remarkably similar positive assessments of the program’s impact in-school, at home and in the community. Quantitative data, while limited, confirmed nascent evidence of a positive relationship between Biwaase'aa and the academic indicators of participating students. The 2014 study established a useful baseline for further study of how participation in Biwaase'aa’s traditional knowledge program may be linked to school success with contemporary knowledge, as well as improved socio-economic prospects.

The 2014 report highlighted the benefits of Biwaase'aa, and recommended ways to expand its impact locally. The promising findings prompted the Ministry of Education to make a three-year financial commitment to maintaining the program in elementary schools and expanding it to a senior elementary school (grades 7 and 8) in 2014-15 and a high school in 2016-17.

# The Maamaawisiwin Professional Teacher Development Program

While the Biwaase'aa Program offered integration of *traditional knowledge* in elementary schools, it did not address a yawning need for professional development to support teachers in integrating *contemporary knowledge* with the *traditional knowledge* of Indigenous learners.

Mounting anecdotal evidence collected by the authors from in-service teachers and principals began to reveal a pattern that can be best described as growing frustration with the “cultures, histories and perspectives” (Ontario Ministry of Education, p. 18) focus of professional development. While teachers welcomed this focus on expanding knowledge within the curriculum, they increasingly called out for pedagogical guidance: “But, tell us how to teach your kids!”

The Maamaawisiwin Professional Teacher Development Program (MPTDP) was developed to support mainstream educators through pedagogical approaches suited to integrating *contemporary knowledge* with the *traditional knowledge* of Indigenous students. It was inspired by Dr. John Hodson's residence in Aotearoa/New Zealand in 2010 as a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) post-doctoral fellow. He worked in Te Kotahitanga, a highly-regarded, Maori led in-service professional teacher development program designed to provide support to educators working with Maori high school students. This experience, combined with his doctoral research, resulted in the creation of MDTDP as a culturally responsive and relational means for supporting *contemporary knowledge* educators serving Indigenous learners in Ontario schools.

## Biwaase'aa/Maamaawisiwin Education & Research Innovation

Working with Shkoday Abinojiwak Obimiwedoan and the Lakehead Public District School Board, the authors proposed the *Biwaase'aa/Maamaawisiwin Education & Research Innovation* project as a means to improve practice and expand research knowledge. This proposal that was accepted and funded by the Safe Schools and Well-Being Branch of the Ontario Ministry of Education.

Throughout the second half of the 2016-17 school year, researchers spent many hours visiting Biwaase'aa partner schools gathering further evidence of the impact on Indigenous learners. At the same time, they provided extensive professional development support based on MDTDP to a dedicated group of secondary school teachers who volunteered to participate; data was collected throughout the process. This report chronicles the research on both projects.

## Overview of the Report

This report has two purposes. First, it provides an analysis of the data collected to date from *Biwaase'aa/Maamaawisiiwin Education & Research Innovation* project. Second, it outlines a series of recommendations relevant to Biwaase'aa, the Lakehead District School Board and the Ministry of Education.

New to this report is the inclusion of a number of vignettes that spotlight some of the stories that have been collected throughout the school year. The purpose of the vignettes is to provide a fuller flavor of the realities – sad and joyful – that impact Indigenous children and youth in Thunder Bay schools.

The *Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (2007) expressly commits to an integration of both *traditional* and *contemporary* knowledge in the school experience of Indigenous students. Indigenous student's well-being absolutely depends on the successful integration of both knowledges in their school experience.

This report mirrors the complexity of integrating both knowledges by presenting the impact of teaching *traditional knowledge* through the Biwaase'aa program presented in chapters one through five and the impact of Maamaawisiiwin Professional Teacher Development Program on the teaching of *contemporary knowledge*, presented in chapters six through eight.

Chapter 9 integrates both knowledge traditions into a comprehensive scaled-up strategy that brings both Biwaase'aa, Brock University, the Lakehead District School Board, Maamaawisiiwin and the Ministry of Education into a closer relationship, designed to improve the experience of Indigenous students in elementary, senior elementary and high school in Thunder Bay.

Finally, overall, this report identifies promising practices for Indigenous education within public schools and makes a case for maintaining the project's momentum.

## Acknowledgements

The *Biwaase'aa/Maamaawisiwin Education & Research Innovation* is one of a number of initiatives designed to support Indigenous students attending schools in the Lakehead Public District School Board (LDSB). The authors thank LDSB educators and staff for their support of this study. We also thank LDSB's Aboriginal Education Advisory Committee (AEAC) for reviewing and approving this research.

We extend our sincere thanks to the Youth Outreach Workers and the assistants of Biwaase'aa for their limitless patience and openness during the weeks of visits.

Many thanks to Shkoday Abinojiiwak Obimiwedoon for the photos included in this report that visually remind us of what is important.

We acknowledge and thank the Safe Schools and Well-Being Branch of the Ontario Ministry of Education for encouraging and funding this study.

We gratefully acknowledge and say *chii miigwech* to Elder Brenda Mason for her tireless support of Biwaase'aa students, parents/ caregivers and YOWs, as well as Maamaawisiwin teachers and principals. Her unflinching hope for a better tomorrow inspires us in our ongoing practice and research!

Finally, we thank all the students, elementary and high school, who trusted us and welcomed us to be a part of their educational experience. Their honesty about their lives, needs, and hopes inspire us to continue our work on their behalf.



# CHAPTER 1:

## The Biwaase'aa Program

The Biwaase'aa Program, initiated in 2004, through the Thunder Bay Urban Aboriginal Strategy, is administered by Shkoday Abinojiiwak Obimiwedoan. Biwaase'aa includes In-School, After-School and Food Security components to Indigenous and non-Indigenous children attending partner schools in Thunder Bay Ontario.

The Biwaase'aa Program is an innovative education model that has effectively serves Indigenous children and their families in Thunder Bay schools. Over its fifteen-year existence thousands of children have benefited from a Biwaase'aa *traditional knowledge* education. Biwaase'aa has created spaces within their schools that reflect their identities, fed them, supports them academically and most importantly, promote well-being in a population of children that is only two-decades removed from the closing of the last residential school in Canada.

The presence of Biwaase'aa in schools both normalizes and positions *traditional knowledge* education as fundamental to the school success of Indigenous students.

Research completed in 2012-13 school year (Kitchen, Hodson & Hodson, 2014) affirmed the value of this program to Indigenous people living in Thunder Bay. The findings led the Ministry of Education to renew its financial commitment and fund an expansion of the program into grades 7 through 12 (see [shkoday.com](http://shkoday.com) for full report).

During the 2016-17 school year, the Biwaase'aa program was active in five elementary public schools and one high school in the Lakehead District School Board.<sup>1</sup> Indigenous youth represent one-third (32.5 percent) of the student population in participating schools (see Table 1.1).

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<sup>1</sup> Biwaase'aa also operates at a number of elementary schools in partnership with the Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board.

**Table 1.1. Indigenous Self-Identified Populations in Biwaase'aa Participating Schools 2016-17**

#	School Name	Year Biwaase'aa Program Started	Total School Pop. 2012/13	Indigenous Population 2012/13	Indigenous % of Total Pop.	Total School Pop. 2016/17	Total Indigenous Pop.	Indigenous % of Total Pop.
1	McKellar Park Elementary	2004	300	180	60	179	125	70
2	Ogden Community Elementary	2009	204	144	60	201	109	54
3	Sherbrooke Elementary	2004	124	84	68	124	96	77
4	Sir Winston Churchill Collegiate	2016				547	145	27
5	St. James Elementary	2012	170	70	41	165	86	52
6	Vance Chapman Elementary	2016				270	66	24
7	Westgate Collegiate <sup>2</sup>	N/A				775	109	14

## The Biwaase'aa Pedagogical Model

Each Biwaase'aa school has a dedicated Indigenous Youth Outreach Worker (YOW) and up to two assistants who manage the Three Core Components that include a number of Activity Elements (see Table 1.2) that occur throughout the school day.

Biwaase'aa Activity Elements represent four major foci – Cultural Activities, Structured Activities, Academic Activities, and Food Security Activities. Each of these Activity Elements is designed to align with a Traditional Medicine Wheel Teaching, often referred to the *Four Aspects of Self-Medicine Wheel Teaching*:

1. Cultural Activities = Spiritual
2. Structured Activities = Emotional
3. Academic Activities = Mental
4. Food Security Activities = Physical

<sup>2</sup>Westgate CVI was not a Biwaase'aa school in the 2016-17 school year. The school data is included as a reference for Chapter 9, Implications & Recommendations.

**Table 1.2. Biwaase'aa Core Components and Activities**

Core Components	Activity Elements
<b>In-School Component</b>	Role modelling, mentoring, cultural teachings/ activities, parent/caregiver liaison, Pow Wows, cultural workshops, literacy/ numeracy supports and supplement cultural curriculum.
<b>After-School Component</b>	Physical activities, cultural learning to increase self-esteem, homework support, improving leadership / life skills and cultivating friendships.
<b>Food Security Component</b>	Healthy food supplements, traditional teachings related to food, hunting, gathering & harvesting.

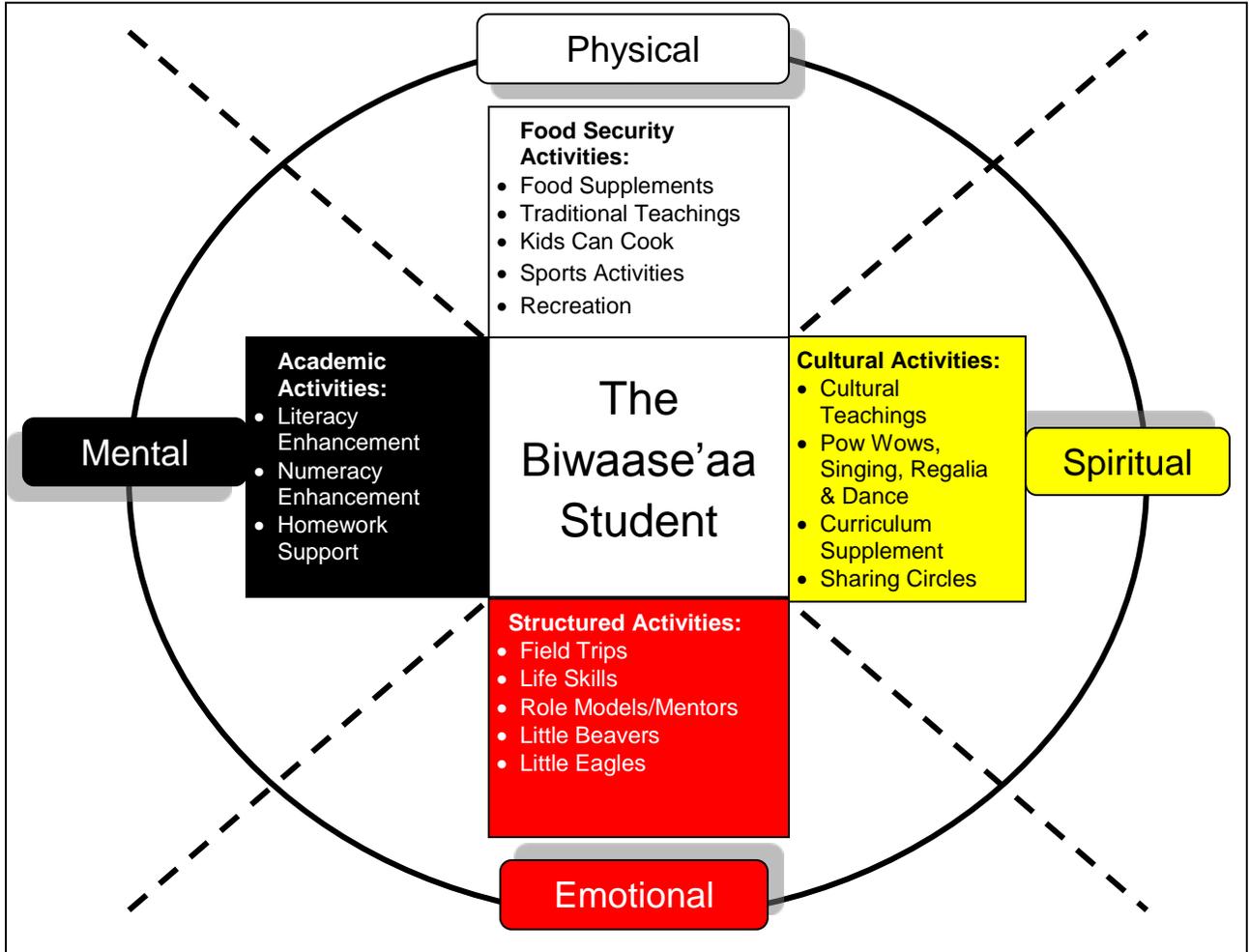
The *Four Aspects of Self-Medicine Wheel Teaching* contends that a human being has a Spiritual, Emotional, Mental and Physical reality that must be in balance if that individual is to be in balance.

This *traditional knowledge* is commonly referred to in this Anishinabe territory of Northwestern Ontario and shapes a distinct Anishinabe pedagogy, or indigagogy, that recognizes that a student is most engaged and therefore most successful when the education experience addresses each of these four realities (see Figure 1.1).

Biwaase'aa is open to all students in partnering schools in grades 4 through 6 in elementary, grades 7 and 8 in senior elementary, and 9 through 12 in high school. For minor to attend Biwaase'aa, parents/caregivers must complete a formal registration form.

Biwaase'aa is provided with its own dedicated space, as well as access to a kitchen, a gymnasium, and sports equipment through co-operative agreements with the LDSB.

Figure 1.1. The Biwaase'aa Pedagogical Model



## The Biwaase'aa Youth Outreach Workers

The key people in the Biwaase'aa program are the Youth Outreach Workers (YOW). YOWs are responsible for managing the diverse student population and often challenging relationships within and without their schools. All YOWs demonstrated strong *traditional* spiritual/ cultural backgrounds and identified as visual artists, Pow Wow dancers, singers, drummers, drum keepers and/or pipe carriers. This *traditional knowledge* served them well in their work with children, youth and their schools. Among them there was a wide range of Anishinabe language fluency, with a minority describing themselves as fluent in an Indigenous language.

An overview of the Biwaase'aa Youth Outreach Workers (YOW) working during the 2016-17 school year in the six participating schools include:

- Five women & one man.
- All were of Anishinabe descent.
- All were parents with children of their own.
- Averages 3+ years in the program.
- All reside in Thunder Bay.

Today YOWs are generally better trained and educated from a Western perspective, with many holding college diplomas, or part of a college diploma in various associated disciplines. YOWs also participate in ongoing professional development in various areas pertinent to their position in schools including, Building Biwaase'aa Youth Outreach Worker Capacity 1 & II. Generally, YOWs are more confident in expressing their *traditional knowledge* and as a result are seen increasingly as an important resource and connection to the Indigenous community by school leadership. Overall YOWs are increasingly recognized as a classroom resource by teachers who may not be comfortable teaching *traditional knowledge* or as a support for individual Indigenous students. Through this enhancement of YOW capacity, Biwaase'aa has expanded its reach and influence in schools without diffusing the primary focus of *traditional knowledge* educators.

YOWs were incredibly dedicated to the needs of all students and adept at negotiating the challenging space within schools and with some teachers who occasionally struggle with the relevance of *traditional knowledge* in schools that are responsible for *contemporary knowledge*.

## Biwaase'aa Schedule & Curriculum

Biwaase'aa is open to Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Each month, registered students receive a calendar of events - recreational, cultural, health/wellness, cultural crafts, fun days and field trips - to take home. The In-School Program typically runs over three days per week and YOWs act as “volunteers” in classrooms providing curriculum supplementation or literacy/numeracy to all students or offer the Little Eagles Program. The After-School Program runs each Monday through Friday generally from 3:20 p.m. to 5:20 p.m.

While Biwaase'aa has a dedicated *traditional knowledge* curriculum that aligns YOWs efforts, each has discretion to adapt the curriculum based on local needs and realities. For the most part that curriculum is aligned with the Seven Grandfather Teachings in the Anishinabe culture:

**1. Wisdom**

To cherish knowledge is to know *Wisdom*.

**2. Love**

To know *Love* is to know peace.

**3. Respect**

To honour all of Creation is to have *Respect*.

**4. Bravery**

*Bravery* is to face the foe with integrity.

**5. Humility**

*Humility* is to know yourself as a sacred part of Creation.

**6. Honesty**

*Honesty* in facing a situation is to be brave.

**7. Truth**

*Truth* is to know all these things.

Traditionally the Seven Grandfather Teachings offer students a culturally responsive approach to nurturing and sustaining a good life or *mino-bimadziwin*, in Anishinabe mowin. These central teachings are reinforced by the iconography present on the walls of the Biwaase'aa classrooms. Each class is richly decorated with in a distinctly Anishinabe manner, including language, pictures, and contributions by children in the program. Of special note is the inclusion of expectations co-constructed as *behavioural treaties* between YOW and Biwaase'aa students each year; these detail behavioural expectations for all and are a point of reference for children and YOWs alike. All these elements are appropriate to both elementary and secondary students, with the lessons adapted to their cultural, emotional and academic development.

Over the years Biwaase'aa has strategically expanded its involvement in schools in ways that are designed to build cultural awareness across schools through multiple initiatives offered to partnering and non-partnering schools.

## The Biwaase'aa Student Population in Focus Schools

As of June 2017, the number of registered Indigenous and non-Indigenous students registered in Biwaase'aa was approximately three-hundred across the six schools. A statistical audit of student registrations, completed in June 2017 by the researchers and the Biwaase'aa program manager, sought to identify Biwaase'aa students who had maintained continuous registration from the point of entry into the program. The audit of Indigenous registered students identified approximately half (N=40) of the one-hundred student goal. The long-term goal of this six-year study is to follow one-hundred Biwaase'aa continuously registered students to reveal the impact on those critical academic indicators of school success while in elementary until the completion of high school. This year the researchers identified a group of forty Biwaase'aa students with continuous registration:

- Twenty-nine were female (72.5 percent),
- Eleven were male (27.5 percent),
- Fifteen (37.5 percent) had attended Biwaase'aa for one year.
- Fourteen (35 percent) had attended Biwaase'aa for two years.
- Eight (20 percent) had attended Biwaase'aa for three years.
- One (2.5 percent) had attended Biwaase'aa for four years.
- Two (5 percent) had attended Biwaase'aa for five years.



## CHAPTER 2:

# The Biwaase'aa Research Study's Purpose, Objectives & Methodology

## The Purpose & Objectives of the Study

*Biwaase'aa/Maamaawisiwin Education & Research Innovation* is guided by a commitment to enacting the vision articulated in Ontario's *First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (2007). In this section, we focus on assessing the impact of Biwaase'aa's *traditional knowledge* Program's Cultural, Structured, Academic and Physical Activities on Indigenous students registered in the program.

The objectives of the Biwaase'aa study are:

1. To **qualitatively** assess the impact of the Biwaase'aa Cultural Activities - including Cultural Teachings, Pow Wows, Singing, Regalia & Dance, and Curriculum Supplementation - on the spiritual well-being of participating students.
2. To **qualitatively** assess the impact of the Biwaase'aa Structured Activities - including Field Trips, Life Skill Courses, Role Models/Mentors, and Little Eagles Program - on the emotional well-being of participating students.
3. To **quantitatively** assess the impact of the Biwaase'aa Academic Activities - including Literacy Enhancement, Numeracy Enhancement, and Homework Support - on the mental well-being of participating students.
4. To **qualitatively** assess the impact of the Biwaase'aa Food Security Activities - including: Healthy Supplements, Traditional Teachings, Kids Can Cook, and Sports Activities - on the physical well-being of participating students.

## The Research Study's Methodology

This research methodology is both qualitative and quantitative in design with culturally responsive, relational, quasi-experimental dimensions.

It primarily involves a detailed qualitative assessment of the school success for students as determined by Talking Circles of students, parents/caregivers, and YOWs as well as researchers attending the after-school program as observers.

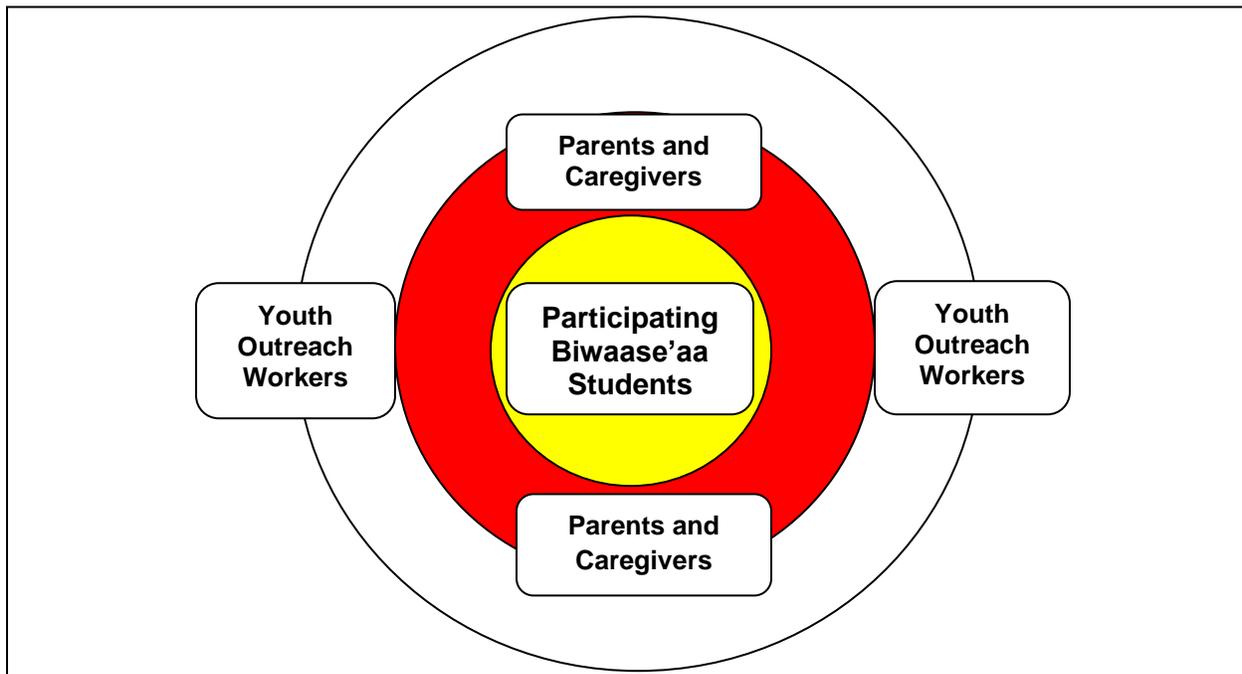
These data are triangulated through a quantitative assessment of student academic indicators as determined by an aggregate review of Ontario Student Records.

Before beginning the study, the researchers met with the principals of the six participating schools to introduce the project in detail, answer resulting questions, and establish a Biwaase'aa visiting schedule. These initial visits helped principals understand the importance and scope of the research. As a result, they approved frequent visits, which enabled researchers to understand Biwaase'aa holistically as experienced by participants.

Regular visits also helped demystify the study, encourage participation from stakeholder groups, and foster authentic relationships with Indigenous students, their parent/caregivers and Biwaase'aa Youth Outreach Workers.

As of May 2017, researchers have completed approximately one-hundred school visits, setting the stage for participant recruitment to stakeholder Talking Circles scheduled to take place early in June of that same year.

**Figure 2.1. The Wildfire Research Method: A Culturally Responsive Relational Model**



## 1. Qualitative Assessment of the Biwaase'aa Community

The qualitative method relies on the Wildfire Research Method (Kompf & Hodson, 2000), a culturally responsive relational design that includes Biwaase'aa students and two circles of informants that have supportive relationships with those students. The inner circle includes the parents/ caregivers of participating students and the second outer circle includes the Youth Outreach Workers (see Figure 2.1.).

### The Wildfire Research Method

The Wildfire Research Method (Kompf & Hodson, 2000) creates a communal and often sacred research environment that is respectful of the traditions and cultural beliefs of Indigenous people. This culturally responsive relational research method includes:

- Developing relationships between the research team and the many circles of participants that make up the community in which the research is situated.
- Complete transparency, ongoing consultation, and meaningful engagement between the research team and the circles of participants that make up the community.
- A series of individual Wildfire Sessions dedicated to each circle of participants within the community.
- Inclusion of traditional concepts within the research study such as prayer, ceremony, tobacco offerings, honouraria and/or food offered to each individual in the Circle.

Wildfire Sessions (a form of Talking Circles) are semi-structured discussions that invite each circle of participants to share their experiences and observations about the focus of the research study. In this study dedicated Wildfire Sessions were organized for circles of students, parents/caregivers, and Youth Outreach Workers, held at private locations and orchestrated by an experienced facilitator on the research team. Sessions were digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed; each participant received their personal contribution as part of validation through a member check process. Researchers then followed-up with telephone communication with individual participants to assure accuracy of the transcription.

The questions that guided the discussions in each of the Wildfire Sessions were developed to compliment the Biwaase'aa Pedagogical Model and the associated Medicine Wheel Teaching that supports the program model.

As cultural norms dictate, all participants in the Wildfire Session received an honourarium (a \$25.00 gift certificate, courtesy of Shkoday Abinojiiwak Obimiwedoan, redeemable at a local retail store).

## 2. Quantitative Assessment of Student Academic Indicators

A comprehensive statistical analysis was conducted on academic indicators for Biwaase'aa registered Indigenous students (grades 4 to 12) in 2016-17. This data were compared to similar data from the year preceding their registration in Biwaase'aa; in essence, participating students acted as their own control group.

These academic indicators employed to assess school success include:

- The academic progress (language & mathematics) of the student, as recorded in their Ontario Student Record.
- The total number of days the student was absent, as recorded in their Ontario Student Record.
- The total number of occasions the student was late, as recorded in their Ontario Student Record.
- The total number of behavioral referrals the student received (suspensions only), as recorded in their Ontario Student Record.

In an effort to enhance the privacy of the circle of students, principals stripped the data of personal identifiers before sharing it with the to the research team.



## CHAPTER 3:

### Analysis of the Qualitative & Quantitative

#### 1. Qualitative Analysis of Wildfire Sessions

Members of each circle of participants collaborated during Wildfire Sessions to develop individual and collective responses prompted by the questions that complement the Biwaase'aa pedagogical model and the associated Medicine Wheel Teachings.

Those Wildfire Sessions of student, parent/caregiver and YOW participants were digitally recorded and transcribed, then shared with individual participants, who then verified their responses.

The final transcripts then underwent a rigorous analysis shaped by Patton's (1990) three-stage approach that includes:

1. Content analysis to make the obvious, obvious;
2. Interpretive analysis to make the hidden obvious; and
3. Critical analysis to make the obvious and hidden dubious.

In this study, the analysis identified patterns within the individual Circles, and those that were held in common with other Circles. Those resulting patterns were then coded and categorized into key idea units. The idea units were then collapsed into categorical clusters and themes that reflect the collective experiences.

#### 2. Quantitative Analysis of Student Academic Indicators

One of the few criticisms related to the 2012-13 Biwaase'aa study was the limited number of students (N=17) that met the selection criteria and were included in the analysis of the Academic indicators. Rarely do local innovations generate the big-data sets necessary to develop meaningful statistical analytics. Instead, most localized Indigenous innovations generate micro-data that is both relevant and representative of those local populations.

In part, the longitudinal goal of the *Biwaase'aa/Maamaawisiwin Education & Research Innovation* is to follow one-hundred Biwaase'aa students over a period of six years through the collection and analysis of the academic indicators. The 2017 Report has more than doubled the number of students (N=40) that met the selection criteria to be included in the quantitative analysis of academic indicators.

In addition, the expansion of the Biwaase'aa program into senior elementary (grades 7 & 8) and high school (grades 9 to 12) has resulted in an emergent group of Indigenous students that have been part of Biwaase'aa for the majority of their school years. As a result, the academic indicator data can now be expanded to include students that have been continuously enrolled in Biwaase'aa for as many as five consecutive years. The analysis of the corresponding micro-data can now reveal stronger and more reliable evidentiary trends that provide a strong rationale for continued investment in the innovation.

### **The Power of Asemaa**

First Nation cultures hold that *asemaa*, or tobacco, is a Sacred Medicine used in numerous ceremonies and as an offering when one is asking for assistance. Like all medicines, when abused, *asemaa* can have serious health implications and that is what has occurred in contemporary society.

Within the Maamaawisiwin Professional Teacher Development Program, traditional notions of spirituality underscore much of the work of the researchers and to a lesser degree those teachers that work with us as well, although participation in the ceremonial aspects is optional for all.

What was not optional was a small gift of *asemaa* offered to all teachers who attended the first Learning Circle in the winter of 2017. Before that *asemaa* was offered, teachers were provided with a detailed understanding of what the balance of the school year would entail, their commitment, time involved, and what they might do with that offering. Then and only then was that small, seemingly insignificant bundle of tobacco offered to them and to our joy, was accepted by all.

In our teachings, those who take up that Sacred Medicine can smoke, burn, or offer it to the waters in a prayerful way but, the basic idea was that they would know what to do when the time was right.

Later that year, a group of teachers and students went on a school trip to Europe and part of that trip was to visit the historical battle grounds of the First and Second World War and many of the cemeteries commemorating the Canadian war dead.

One Anishinabe high school student, with support of her First Nation, was able to attend that school trip and it was arguably a transformational experience that was covered extensively by local media.

Before leaving for Europe, the student visited her grandmother who on reviewing the itinerary realized that she would be visiting a cemetery where an uncle, one of the numerous First Nation men who made the ultimate sacrifice for the freedom of all Canadians was buried. The grandmother asked that if her grandchild did find the grave that she leave some *asemaa* to honour that relative.

The granddaughter did travel to the cemetery and did find the grave of her relative but had no *asemaa* to fulfill her grandmother's request. She turned to one of her teachers and with tears in her eyes recounted the story. The teacher waited patiently and when the student finished her story, reached into the same backpack she had with her during the Learning Circle and drew-out the small *asemaa* offering she accepted many months before.

# CHAPTER 4:

## Findings of the Biwaase'aa Study

This chapter presents the results of the study from a number of narrative sources - the Circles of students, parents/caregivers, and Youth Outreach Worker's (YOW) Wildfire Sessions. In an effort to complement the Biwaase'aa pedagogical model and the four objectives of the study, this chapter is presented in four sections that include the impact of Biwaase'aa on the spiritual, emotional, mental and physical well-being of students. This is achieved through the review of statistical data from Ontario School Records, (OSRs) research team field notes and other related documents and the various participant narratives. All of these sources are interwoven to provide a comprehensive representation of the impact on Indigenous students registered in Biwaase'aa as it existed in 2016-17.

For many, the Biwaase'aa Program Model of caring for a student's "spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical realities" through a framework of "well-being" that supports school success may seem to clash with much of contemporary education theory in Ontario. From an Anishinabe educational perspective attending to each of the four aspects of a child is a critical prerequisite to school and life success.

### Objective 1: Spiritual Well-Being

*To qualitatively assess the impact of the Biwaase'aa Cultural Activities - including Cultural Teachings, Pow Wows, Singing, Regalia & Dance, and Curriculum Supplementation - on the spiritual well-being of participating students.*

Biwaase'aa has been operating for well over a decade in Thunder Bay public schools with large populations of Indigenous children. This consistent presence has resulted in an emergent population of youth that have been in the program for the majority of their school years. During the 2016-17, many of this population were enrolled in senior elementary and a minority in various grades at Churchill Collegiate and Vocational Institute.

In the two Circle excerpts below, a senior elementary student and a high school student, enrolled in Biwaase'aa from the early elementary years, provide a thoughtful analysis of the value of the cultural activities to increase the school success of those students from remote northern communities.

**High School Participant:** I had a couple of [Northern] students [in my classes]...but most of them...would stop attending because they were really, really shy. [S]ome of them are too shy to ask questions to the teachers, like to

raise up their hand if they're speaking too quickly...[T]hey don't want to] feel dumb to ask questions. Plus, they're really shy, like I see it all the time. But I don't have a problem with it. Because I asked questions. But that is just me. But for them they must have anxiety or something, because I'm used to talking to people and maybe like they aren't, so that's probably a big step for them to talk to other people. Especially going to a big city like this.

**Researcher 1:** Do you think those kids [should be] involved in Biwaase'aa? Do you think it would help?

**Senior Elementary Participant:** I think kids, people should be involved with the Biwaase'aa program that come from up north because it's a big step to come all the way to a big city with different people. Like they're used to being around you know on the reserve [with] just mostly family and they are around that all of the time and then coming to a place where they don't know people. They should include Biwaase'aa because that's a place where you feel comfortable. Like I feel comfortable being around Native people and like I feel like they should [be] involved...because they need a place to be comfortable and they can't be comfortable in a classroom. [T]hey just don't even know these people and they are comfortable around the same people.

**Researcher 2:** Do you see a lot of [Northern] kids...dropping out?

**High School Participant:** Yeah, dropping out of class and not attending. Like, they're really shy.

Another student, a senior in high school, with little spiritual/cultural knowledge explained a similar relationship with Biwaase'aa.

**High School Participant:** [I participated] regularly in the program. I used to participate in the aspects [that]...helped give me more of an understanding of my culture. Yeah, I guess mostly the cultural aspects of it like the drumming and the teachings, the pipe and then most of the other cultural stuff like the sewing, the beading, making the lanyards. Also participating in that Little Eagles program that was set up as well.

**Researcher 2:** What happened to you?

**High School Participant:** The way I can describe it was, there was something that...I have never experienced before...[G]rowing up as a First Nations kid I was always taught my land-based teachings. [Y]ou know the hunting the fishing

the trapping, I never really experience the culture side of it. The drumming, the songs, the dancing, the pipe and the teachings, behind that. So, when I entered the Biwaase'aa program with [YOW name]...was able to teach me all of these things. And it opened up a whole new view of my culture for me and held me up to new experiences, new feelings...[It] broaden my horizons a little bit, if that makes sense.

These observations of Biwaase'aa students, two long-term and one newly involved, are linked in a way that is not often discussed in the research literature: the loss of spiritual culture - traditional teachings, ceremony, drumming, singing, dancing - a direct result of assimilationist policies is profound and deeply rooted in this generation of young people. They, and their families, may still maintain a physical presence on the land through traditional practices - hunting, gathering, fishing, trapping - but their traditional spiritual connection to those traditional practices has become lost, or is tenuous at best.

Re-acquiring that connection to traditional spirituality is a minefield for Indigenous students but is implicate in Biwaase'aa programming that aligns all activities with the Anishinabe - Seven Grandfather Teachings.

Key to the expression of traditional ceremony is the Pow Wow.

## The Pow Wow Tradition

An important cultural practice in Biwaase'aa is the Pow Wow, a traditional culture experience that speaks to the heart of Indigenous students of all ages along with the presence of a Grandmother and/or Grandfather Drum at these events. A number of afternoon Pow Wows organized by Biwaase'aa were held at partnering and non-partnering schools. These are cultural events complete with large numbers of experienced community performers - dancers/singers - and a pre-determined educational program, Biwaase'aa student involvement and a YOW master of ceremony to explain the dancing styles and singing tradition.

These occasions are an opportunity for a school to open their doors to surrounding community and share Indigenous traditions. Often this is the first time Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and parents/caregivers are exposed to the Pow Wow. For Indigenous students and community dancers/singers, this is an opportunity to demonstrate their proficiency, and in some instances, their newly created regalia or, in the case of student drummers, their singing abilities. The program ends with all student, educators and, parents/caregivers joyfully dancing together in a great and unifying circle.

Drumming and singing are often part of the daily activities of Biwaase'aa. In some instances, elementary students construct hand drums, receive the associated teachings and practice various

songs. At Churchill CVI the Biwaase'aa students constructed a large Pow Wow drum that is central to the greater program and to the school.

**Researcher 1:** So, is it fair for me to say the thing that you like the most was the drumming and the singing piece?

**High School Participant:** [Being] up there [at the Drum] is one of my most favorite things. I love to do in there, yeah. Yeah that's fair. I love the singing and the drumming. Just the power behind the songs and what the team [of singers], it's not just within the song that said it doesn't mean exactly what set in the song. Each song has a deeper meaning than what is actually said within it that, if you get what I mean. And it's not just that it's with the beat...and learning the other old ways to. It's mostly that part that I really, I really like.

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**Senior Elementary Participant:** ...I like the drumming [I] like you can hear it.

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**Researcher 2:** Yeah? You like the drumming, because you can hear it throughout the school?

**High School Participant:** Yes. I think it's important that to just show interest to have a better understanding for the Aboriginal students especially for the Northern Communities. When they come down. Just...[to]...feel...welcomed a little because they already have a bunch of emotions from staying away from their families and like being isolated place to come out in a big city like this.

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**Parent/Caregiver:** [A]nd then when the kids started drumming, you [Researcher 1] are a drummer, eh? Well I appreciate you inviting my two boys to come down. They were reluctant. Well I don't blame them...They don't know how to drum but they have to learn somewhere. I'm so happy that they were accepted at the drum.

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**YOW:** At the beginning of the year we were drumming, the big drum. And a couple of boys showed up, a couple of high school students showed up and they poked their head in the room. And I called him to come and sit at the drum. And after we sing the song I said how come you guys came here? What made you guys come to my room? I was just asking them questions and they said we heard the drum. We heard the drum from the other side of the

school so it was like we were sitting on the south side of the school and they were way over on the east side of the school and the heard the drum and that's what brought them to her room.

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In a city where Statistics Canada (in CBC News, 2017) reports that, “one-third of reported hate crimes in Canada in 2015 were Indigenous people where the victims occurred in Thunder Bay,” it is difficult to name an initiative that does more to combat hate in the next generation of citizens than the Biwaase'aa school Pow Wows.

## The Feasts

Throughout the school year, Biwaase'aa YOWs and students - Indigenous and non-Indigenous - organize feasts for parents/caregivers and teachers at least once a year. Food is prepared by volunteers or in the school kitchen, served by the students and includes some level of ceremony - prayer, drumming, smudging - before the Feast begins.

Feasts are an occasion where Indigenous parents/caregivers, teachers and principals have an opportunity to meet in a non-threatening, informal atmosphere. While informal, these celebrations also involve ceremony and a degree of sanctity.

From an Indigenous perspective, communal feasts are a great social leveler in which all are equal and welcome. For teachers and principals, attending a Biwaase'aa Feast is an opportunity to just *be*, to sit alongside parents/caregivers as equals, not a time to conduct the business of school. Consider this parent/caregiver experience.

**Parent/Caregiver:** ...I was sitting there [at the feast]...two other grandkids...came with me and...they don't go to [that school], but [their big sister goes] there. So, this [principal] comes towards us, really authoritative looking [person], coming towards us. [The principal] says to the kids do you have someone going to school here? And [the big sister] says yes, and I'm looking at her and [the principal] didn't even recognize her. But I don't understand how the principal doesn't even recognize his own pupils. That's where I was stunned.

**Researcher 2:** Is that your story?

**Parent/Caregiver:** Yes, that's my story.

**Researcher 2:** That's a good story.

**Parent/Caregiver:** It is. You know this [principal], coming at you with authority, you know? To me it's...

**Researcher 2:** Your heart starts pounding?

**Parent/Caregiver:** Yeah, because when somebody comes, we are so scared of authority our people. When somebody is friendly you just feel relaxed and want to you know, be there. I feel uncomfortable all the way.

.....

**Parent/Caregiver:** [T]his [teacher] comes to see me. She's some kind of a [teacher] and...there is the ceremony going...and I'm trying to concentrate on what they are saying and this [teacher] comes along and says, "Hey you know [your child] did pretty well...but I think they're ready to kick [your child] out though. The principal is in the process of kicking [your child] out."

**Researcher 1:** Right there? Right then?

**Parent/Caregiver:** Yeah at the feast! I couldn't believe it. And this is why...my kids don't want to come to school, you know?

Granted, both parent/caregiver examples are undoubtedly exceptions to the experience of numerous Indigenous parents/caregivers attending their child's school feast in 2016-17. However, that testimony does demonstrate the disconnect that continues between Indigenous peoples and education.

To a degree it is understandable that principals or teachers would see the presence of Indigenous parents/caregivers at a school feast as, perhaps, a rare opportunity to communicate about a child's attendance, or grades. From an Indigenous perspective, the school experience of many has resulted in an expectation of being offended. They are hyper-sensitive and expect some sort of offense and are not surprised when they are.

If nothing else, this testimony is a cautionary tale to not assume that teachers and principals attending Biwaase'aa feasts are well educated about protocol. In particular, to recognize that when attending a feast, it is more constructive in the long run to put aside the business of school in favour of taking time to build relationships that transform Indigenous expectations that are rooted in the past. These experiences speak to the need to include this type of cultural protocol in the education of teachers and principals.

## Cultural Presentations & Traditional Knowledge

Relatively new to the Biwaase'aa *traditional knowledge* initiatives, Cultural Presentations are outreach opportunities, primarily for students and secondarily their teachers, provided to partnering and non-partnering elementary schools in Thunder Bay. YOWs develop their own fifteen-minute presentation on various topics; seasonal lifestyles, the Clan system, traditional games, traditional foods, sacred Medicines and the Sweat Lodge Ceremony. Often the presentations include multi-media, models, interactive activities, food samples, singing/drumming

and opportunities to ask questions. YOWs move from each classroom in rotation and cover an entire school in an afternoon or morning. During the 2016-17 school year Biwaase'aa YOWs completed nine Cultural Presentations in elementary schools.

**YOW:** I personally really like [the] in-school presentations...because it gives me a chance to see the kids [they] are so different at each of those schools. Some of them are more receptive to certain teachings or some schools are more into being physically active or some of them are more willing to learn about like wild food because that's what I focus on this year was wild foods. I focused on this wild traditional food and I did wild rice. So, some kids were more interested in actually trying wild rice and some of them were like "I don't want to try it at all." You know what I mean? But it was interesting to see how some of the schools ...handle the program especially for something like [the] school presentations.

YOWs do not limit their involvement as *traditional knowledge* educators to Cultural Presentations in schools alone, but acknowledgement of that expertise and inclusion in schools is not uniform in the least. Some YOWs are welcomed into classrooms by teachers and seen as colleagues, while other teachers struggle to see the relevance of *traditional knowledge* in Indigenous students' school success. There is an ongoing tension between both knowledge traditions that is often reminiscent of a YOWs early educational experience.

**YOW:** When I was in school we were...forced to do French class and I always told my teachers that I was brought up traditionally and French wasn't my second language...[S]o, I told my teachers that I didn't want to learn it. So, I think, I said it every year I wasn't going to do it, I wasn't [going to]do it. You know I got in trouble for it. So, I...finally got my mom to go in and then that's when, for grade 5 around there, when I met the Biwaase'aa program. That's when they told me I could go down there instead of taking French class. But I didn't get rewarded for the things that I was doing in the program which made me feel that, they made it seem that it was more of a hobby than a learning experience, which I didn't like. But they did, they did put in a Native language class but we didn't get marked for it. It was just the [French] lady's program that we got marked for so she gave us the reward not the school program. Which was a little disappointing.

YOWs have the benefit of not being employed by the Lakehead DSB and can resist this type of pressure to align their efforts to a purely academic focus. Often the tension between a teacher who is reluctant to release an Indigenous child to a Biwaase'aa event, can be resolved through an appeal to the principal. On most occasions the intervention is a teachable moment that includes the importance of *traditional knowledge* within the confines of school and the *Framework*.

This senior high school student's analysis sheds some light on the origins of this tension.

**Researcher 2:** Do your teachers know about the [Biwaase'aa] program?

**High School Participant:** I think...some teachers do...I think...almost all the teachers know about it but I don't think a lot of the teachers paid attention to it. Because I guess lots of other things...[I]f you look at the grades like grade 7, 8 and 9 you notice that there are a lot more kids in...that program than there are kids in grade 11.

**Researcher 1:** Why do you think that is?

**High School Participant:** It could different priorities. I mean, I don't think it's like time management. Some kids...prefer to prioritize our teaching of what we need to know in zhaaganaash [white] society...[T]hat's what they [teachers] try to emphasize when they teach a kid. This is what you need to know, this is what you need to know now, this is what you're going to learn today versus what you learn in the Biwaase'aa program where it's an open book basically. You can learn what you want.

This student's insight brings up two very different and potentially conflicting notions of what teaching and learning is about that underlies much of the tension between some teachers, Indigenous students and Biwaase'aa YOWs. Whereas the dominant society's teaching approach is largely teacher-directed, Indigenous approaches - or indigagogic tradition - involves the learner helping determine what is important in curriculum, emphasis, and evaluation. This conflict between learning needs and teaching preferences is a contributing factor to the high rates of Indigenous early leavers (see Battiste, 2013). Indigenous students, who from birth have been self-determining in their education and encouraged to explore their own interests become increasingly told what is important, what is not, what to study, how to study, when to study, and how their learning will be evaluated.

The challenge for education in Ontario is how to become bi-pedagogic in order to respect both knowledge traditions.

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This indigagogic focus is reflected in the thoughts of one YOW.

**YOW:** I've always believed that we were left with something as ignition of a people. One of those, not one but a lot of those different things, that we were left with from our ancestors that have been passed on [from] generations to generations is our sacred tools. Our sacred Medicines. Our sacred way of life. That's why I've always pushed through my program that aspect, about the Pipe, about the Drum. About the dance. About the Medicines. About our ceremonies. I have always believed that we were given those gifts for these reasons to use in a good way. It's like our Elders are always saying... We were told to use these things in a very sacred way, in a good way. That's why when I started living that way I believed that I was being taught something that a lot of us are overlooking as a people of their own

way of life. We weren't [supposed] to be Christians. That's what you call assimilation. We were given something very special and when we use it, and when we show it, quote "Western society" sees the beauty of our way of life. The beautiful colours that we use, the beautiful prayers. And I believe that's what's going to get us into these classrooms. I believe that if we all, whatever you wanted call us, Youth Outreach Workers. I remember at some point we were going to change our names to giminchige [teacher]. That's what we were supposed to be and we have not made that change yet you know. I have no idea why we haven't changed our name from Youth Outreach Workers to that.

This YOW brings up an interesting point. If the province of Ontario has made a commitment to all Indigenous peoples that they will have both *traditional* and *contemporary knowledge* in their education one might argue that both traditions require accredited educators to fulfill that commitment.



## Exploring Culture

The Cultural Activities of Biwaase'aa have evolved significantly over the last four-years. Strategically, Cultural Activities are more sophisticated, richer in content and have expanded their influence with Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, their parent/caregivers, teachers and principals at partnering and non-partnering schools in Thunder Bay. It is difficult to provide an accurate analysis of the impact of those Cultural Activities however, it is reasonable to suggest that the scope of those activities directly combats the roots of racism that are often born of ignorance in the next generation of Thunder Bay citizens.

The research team often witnessed what can be best described as cautious, multi-faceted cultural explorations by many elementary, senior elementary and high school students that were free to take up that exploration as they saw fit. As one might expect these explorations resulted in a myriad of responses by Indigenous these students. For some, exploration was foreign, awkward and, uncomfortable, possibly even an act of disloyalty to family or spiritually risky. For others, exploration increased well-being by providing a sense of purpose, pride, or an area for educational focus or service to their communities. This type of spiritual exploration by Indigenous children and youth can pose a concern to some parents/caregivers anxious to protect their young people. That well understood concern can result in a reluctance to allow those

children to participate in Biwaase'aa programming.

How Indigenous students deal with this resulting internal conflict between these factors and exploring their traditional spirituality is a serious question that has to be addressed by all stakeholders.

It is not unreasonable to suggest that the multiple stories told by YOWs of a significant increase in YOW/teacher consultations related to the needs of Indigenous students, or acting as a *traditional knowledge* resource in classrooms is a direct outcome of the increased presence of Biwaase'aa in schools that is connected to the multiple Cultural Activities.



Finally, readers of this report should not confuse Indigenous spirituality with religion in schools. The Biwaase'aa's pedagogic model (see Figure 1.1) aligns with the Medicine Wheel Teaching that contends that a human being has a Spiritual, Emotional, Mental and Physical reality that must be in balance if that individual is to be in balance.

As such, Biwaase'aa and YOWs carefully support the whole Indigenous student in a way that both respects that student's spiritual beliefs, and encourages self-exploration, while not diluting the *traditional knowledge* focus of the program.

One YOW succinctly defined their responsibility and the importance of *traditional knowledge* in schools:

**YOW:** It's our piece of education to [help Indigenous students] to know who we are, where we come from, what we do. That gives [them] self-identity as a person and we share that with the schools.



## Objective 2: Emotional Well-Being

*To qualitatively assess the impact of the Biwaase'aa Structured Activities - including Field Trips, Life Skills Courses, Role Models/Mentors, and Little Eagles - on the emotional well-being of participating students.*

The research revealed subtle yet profound evidence connecting involvement in Biwaase'aa with increased emotional well-being for Indigenous students.

Educators often observe that some Indigenous students rarely speak in classrooms. Within the dominant pedagogy this can be interpreted as problematic or presented as a pathology in a particular student. In part, the origins of this lack of question-asking in the classroom is a reflection of an Indigenous learning style, though it may reflect shyness among others. For example:

**Senior Elementary Participant:** Yeah, like when I'm in my class I don't really speak. I just do my own thing. I like the Biwaase'aa program because I can do my work and speak at the same time and [ask] questions to people in the room but I'm comfortable doing that. But if I'm in the classroom I'm not really comfortable doing that.

This particular student demonstrates a strong sense of self-direction, or getting on with the work in class. This is not to say that this student does not have questions, Biwaase'aa provides that comfortable safe-space.

**Researcher 1:** Would you say that it had a profound impact on you?

**High School Participant:** Yes, I would say it [Biwaase'aa] had a profound impact on me because it taught me different teachings... And also, it helped me take a different view point...I think I became more-wise, not just as an Anishinabe person, but just as myself you know? Just helping me understand why things are [a] certain way or what to do in certain times you know...I found it helped broaden my horizon...[W]hen it came to offering advice. Like through this program they offered me lots of wisdom, teachings that when someone would come to me asking advice I have something to say or something kind, or could offer help, give guidance to them.

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**Researcher 1:** Okay. So how did you do in school? You've talked a little bit about a profound shift in your own consciousness, right?

**High School Participant:** Yes.

**Researcher 1:** Did your schooling get better? Can you make a correlation between being in Biwaase'aa program...and a shift in your own consciousness? Did school improve? Did you get better grades? Did you attend more often? Anything like that?

**High School Participant:** Not necessarily. I'd say my grades were very good throughout my entire high school experience and I did attend school regularly. I don't really think the Biwaase'aa program really affected my attendance or my grades in terms of that.

**Researcher 1:** Do you think it affected anything else?

**High School Participant:** I guess just more deep focus. More of a determination to get those grades. More of a determination to learn all I can and absorb all I can. I just want to get to the big final test you know, I could try my hardest and pass with flying colors. And that way whether I got a good mark I got to say hey, I tried my best. I work my hardest. And whatever the result is I will still, I can still say I worked my hardest.

**Researcher 2:** So what kind of grades did you get throughout high school? Are we talking in the 80s, in the 70s?

**High School Participant:** I'd say high 70s and low 80s mostly throughout high school.

In these instances, student participants described themselves as academically high functioning before entering Biwaase'aa programming. And yet, note how participation in Biwaase'aa provided an expanded sense of identity and from that a new “determination” and “deep focus.” The mentorship provided by a YOW, “was able to teach me all of these things. And it opened up a whole new view of my culture for me and held me up to new experiences, new feelings and new, you know broaden my horizons.”

YOWs consistently act as mentors, or replacement aunties and uncles, in the lives of children and youth with little in the way of extended families.

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Biwaase'aa Field Trips were well attended and usually over-subscribed. For children and youth from homes that economically struggle, opportunities for winter tubing, bowling, ice skating, paint ball, movies, may be beyond their financial means.

Field trips are important opportunities for Biwaase'aa students to socialize with other Biwaase'aa students outside of their school. Consider this student's practical suggestion that is informed by their own experience of Biwaase'aa field trips.

**High School Participant:** There should be more events because if there is going to be almost 50% [Indigenous] students [in Thunder Bay schools], not all of those students are going to know each other and if you want people, Aboriginal students to go to school they have to be comfortable and they should have more events where students can become friends.

**Researcher 2:** You went on a lot of those?

**High School Participant:** Yeah.

**Researcher 2:** Where they fun?

**High School Participant:** Yeah...I made a lot of friends during field trips.

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**Senior Elementary Participant:** [K]nowing that there's a place [to] go to...there's the [YOW] in the Biwaase'aa program. [I] go to school to visit them too. And that's what gets me to get to school too.

**Researcher 1:** So, when you go to visit the [YOW] do they sort [encourage you] to go to class. You've got class to go to. Good to see you. Here's something to eat but get to class. [Do] they chase you to class?

**Senior Elementary Participant:** [T]hey have this way to tell us how it's going to be when we do go to class.

**Senior Elementary Participant:** [T]hey don't push it that much because if we are eight different students we might as well just go home [or] skip. [T]hey won't push it too much [or] we're just going to take off.

**Researcher 1:** [A] gentle push, not a big-time push? Right?

**Senior High School Participant:** [YOWs] are walking with you [at] the same time and they also push us to visit the Biwaase'aa program.

**Senior Elementary Participant:** For elementary [school] it was a good thing. [W]e had homework help and we played...on my computer and all of this stuff. It was more like social kind of thing. [I] guess to help develop [me] more. It was fun.

These students speak of the importance of YOW mentorship to their lives. In some instances, visiting a YOW was a deciding factor to attend school and YOWs would gently encourage attendance in classes versus allowing them to hide out in the Biwaase'aa room. With a YOW at your side you have an understanding, non-judgmental adult that walks with you. You are not alone in your daily struggles and being with others like them, in a place that they are comfortable, is a contributing factor to emotional health.

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**Parent/Caregiver Participant:** [My grandchild] dances. She danced while she was at [elementary school name]. Because I used to make dresses and I'm into that, used to be into that. Making dresses for my grandkids. [My grandchild], she made her own dress. She is used to sewing, her own dress so she can dance. But you know, I will tell you what's going on. When you have a limited amount of money you can't afford expensive material. You know? Can't afford expensive material just like you see over in the states there all of these regalia, all of these beautiful, beautiful materials and ribbons. You can't afford that stuff. You can't compete. It's almost like it's a competition. If you look at the beading, you know, that's another competition you have to go through. How to dress. That's my opinion. And then when [kids] start getting older [they] start to know that this dress cost more than that dress but then [they] start to think like that. [My grandchild], she doesn't dance anymore.

Participating in Pow Wows as a dancer can contribute to a child's well-being. Many children become increasingly self-conscious as they mature and this is especially true of tweens or teenagers who may become hypersensitive to their peer's commentary about that regalia and often stop participating because regalia does not meet some unspecified criteria.

Pow Wow regalia has evolved to become much more elaborate, until today a regalia may represent many hours of work and hundreds of dollars in materials. For many Indigenous families this kind of investment is well beyond their reach.

In an effort to overcome this, the Little Eagles Program at Churchill CVI and some elementary schools, focused on the creation of regalia including design, materials, sewing, beading and moccasin leather work. These hard skills are relevant throughout the lives of those young Indigenous students, but that learning was also about *traditional knowledge* that spans the gambit from Anishinabe language, dance styles and the spiritual tradition that frames the entire Pow Wow tradition.

On at least one occasion, an elementary student that showed an interest in Pow Wow dancing was gifted regalia by a YOW and another student interested in drumming was included as an emergent singer at their school Pow Wow.

Many of the photos included in this report include pictures of young Indigenous women who took part in the Little Eagles Program during 2016-17, wearing their new regalia. Their faces convey

their sense of pride, focus, and joy being involved in activities designed to promote emotional well-being.



## Objective 3: Mental Well-Being

*To quantitatively assess the impact of the Biwaase'aa Academic Activities - including Literacy Enhancement, Numeracy Enhancement, and Homework Support - on the mental well-being of participating students.*

The quantitative portion of this study examines student academic indicators as determined by a comprehensive review of Ontario Student Records (OSRs), specifically math, literacy, attendance, lateness and behavioural referrals, to determine whether participation in Biwaase'aa had any effect on the academic indicators. OSRs were obtained anonymously from participating school principals and presented as an aggregate.

The academic indicators were collected for Indigenous students enrolled in Biwaase'aa for a minimum of one year, as well as two, three, four and five consecutive years and one year prior to enrollment in the program as a control year for comparative purposes. In total forty Indigenous elementary, senior elementary and high school students met that selection criteria.

Numeracy and literacy scores are expressed as percentages, while attendance and instances of lateness are expressed in terms of the total of whole days. Behavioural referral data was also collected during the review of OSRs, but ultimately the data was limited and therefore, not statistically meaningful.

Descriptive statistics were run for all data collected (literacy, math, absences, instances of lateness and behavioural referrals). Paired sample *t*-tests were also run for all academic indicators collected.

## Descriptive Results

### Math

Table 4.1 includes descriptive statistics for all academic indicators collected. The research team found that in the control year (N=39) the participant's average math score was 67.77 (SD=12.91), in year one (N=40) the student average was 68.60 (SD=10.67), year two (N=23) the student average was 69.91 (SD=16.29), in the student's third year (N=11) the average was 65.64 (SD=22.18), in year four (N=3) the student average was 74.00 (SD=5.29), and in the students' fifth year (N=2) their average was 71.50 (SD=9.91).

## Literacy

With respect to participant students' literacy data, the research team found that in the control year (N=39) participant's average was 70.56 (SD=13.35), in students' first year being involved in Biwaase'aa (N=40) the student average was 69.05 (SD=12.91), year two (N=23) the student average was 70.30 (SD=16.33), the students' third year (N=11) the average was 65.27 (SD=22.13), in year four (N=3) the student average was 73.67 (SD=5.13), and in the students' fifth year (N=2) their average was 71.00 (SD=5.66).

## Absences

In respect to participant students' absences from school, the average in the control year (N= 37) participant's average absence was 28.39 (SD=24.48), in year one (N=39) the average absence was 25.01 (SD=19.68), year two (N=22) averaged 24.59 (SD=19.45), the students third year (N=11) the average was 30.86 (SD=24.08), in year four (N=3) the student average was 3.67 (SD=5.51), and in the students fifth year (N=2) their average absence form school was 5.50 (SD=4.95).

## Lateness

Moving to instances of lateness in the control year the average days late (N=37) was 28.27 (SD=30.63), in the first year of participation in the program (N=39) the average was 26.69 (SD=27.78), in the second year (N=22) the average days late were 25.73 (SD=27.50), in the third year (N=11) the average was 27.45 (SD=21.37), the fourth year (N=3) year saw an average of 7.33 (SD=3.79), and in the fifth year (N=2) the average instances of lateness was 11.00 (SD=2.83).

## Inferential Results

The data was submitted to a paired sample t-test and found no statistically significant differences between grade averages from year to year in math, literacy, absences, or instances of lateness were noted.

**Table 4.1. Descriptive Statistics for all Academic Indicators**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>SD</b>
Control Year – Math	67.77	39	12.91
Year 1 Math	68.60	40	10.67
Year 2 Math	69.91	23	16.29
Year 3 Math	65.64	11	22.18
Year 4 Math	74.00	3	5.29
Year 5 Math	71.50	2	9.19
Control Year - Literacy	70.56	39	13.35
Year 1 Literacy	69.05	40	12.19
Year 2 Literacy	70.30	23	16.33
Year 3 Literacy	65.27	11	22.13
Year 4 Literacy	73.67	3	5.13
Year 5 Literacy	71.00	2	5.66
Control Year – Absence	28.39	37	24.48
Year 1 Absence	25.01	39	19.68
Year 2 Absence	24.59	22	19.45
Year 3 Absence	30.86	11	24.08
Year 4 Absence	3.67	3	5.51
Year 5 Absence	5.50	2	4.95
Control Year - Late	28.27	37	30.63
Year 1 Late	27.69	39	27.78
Year 2 Late	25.73	22	27.50
Year 3 Late	27.45	11	21.37
Year 4 Late	7.33	3	3.97
Year 5 Late	11.00	2	2.83

## Discussion

The 2014 Biwaase'aa report (see Kitchen, Hodson & Hodson, 2014) found, a nascent rise in math and literacy scores from the control year to the third year of the study while attendance and lateness trends were negative. That nascent relationship of year-on-year increases in math and literacy scores and participation in Biwaase'aa has now become absolute in the 2017 analysis of academic indicators.

This study demonstrates a continued improvement in all academic indicators from the year previous to intake in the program, to first year and into the second year in program. However, there was a significant drop for all indicators in year three. This prompted a detailed review of the third-year data, which exposed the specific realities of many Indigenous students in the Biwaase'aa and an ethical issue for us as researchers.

One student received an incomplete in math and literacy in the year previous to intake in the program, in the second year (N=23) in the program and the third year (N=11) in the program was scored as a 0 which decreased the overall average for the third year indicators in general and more specifically in math, the score of 0 decreased the overall average by 6.56 points and for literacy by 6.53 points. With the overall decrease in year three sample size the impact of a score of 0 results in a significant drop from second year averages into the third-year averages.

There is no question that removing this outlier student's data from the data set would maintain the year-on-year increases of all academic indicators. However, when the research team met to discuss that possibility it was decided that expunging that data effectively purged that student's voice and by extension their narrative which was deemed unacceptable.

The researchers involved in Biwaase'aa program visits were familiar with this particular student's familial situation that can be generously described as an ongoing state of chaos and trauma, and yet this student has continuously attended Biwaase'aa for years.

Many Indigenous students in Thunder Bay schools must contend with serious issues in their young lives - suicide or murder of family members, violence, hunger, unstable home lives - are common and for many Biwaase'aa is the only positive constant within that chaos. This is why Biwaase'aa are so fundamentally important to both academic achievement and to the lives of Indigenous students.

## Objective 4: Physical Well-Being

*To qualitatively assess the impact of the Biwaase'aa Food Security Activities - including: Healthy Supplements, Traditional Teachings, Kids Can Cook, and Sports Activities - on the physical well-being of participating students.*

The availability of food to students enrolled in Biwaase'aa is fundamental to both their physical well-being and sense of traditional culture. According to YOWs, many Indigenous students at all levels arrive at school hungry and have little in the way of lunch or snacks throughout the day. To offset this reality, all partnering schools provide some form of food programming during the day, with Biwaase'aa making a substantive contribution through the After-School Program.

The demise of healthy *country/wild food* - wild meats, fish and berries - has had a detrimental impact on Indigenous health. Economic and cultural marginalization has exacerbated this and has led to diets high in carbohydrates and fatty foods. This has contributed to increases in childhood obesity and unprecedented levels of diabetes in the Indigenous population (see Earle, 2011).

The Biwaase'aa program directly offsets this reality with children and their parents/caregivers through multiple initiatives. This includes recognizing healthy food as an important part of traditional culture and observing protocols when preparing, serving and consuming. These protocols, or ceremonies, are especially important in the feasts, held during the year and open to Biwaase'aa families. The experience of consuming healthy foods may provide healthy alternatives to those families.

Biwaase'aa students all play a role in preparing, serving of food and clean up. High school students cook for their feasts and cultural lunches are regular events in the school. Senior elementary students in Little Eagles took cooking lessons and created cook books of favorite recipes. Younger elementary students serve their peers and are responsible for clean up after the food break. All food provided meets the nutritional requirements of the Canada Food Guide.

**Researcher 2:** Clearly you like to be involved in stuff and you are really outgoing. Right? So, do you guys see a connection between being in Biwaase'aa and success in school?

**Senior Elementary Participant:** Big connection.

**Researcher 2:** Yeah? What is the connection?

**Senior Elementary Participant:** Probably helping out...just for the little things. Like what I've mentioned about food, a comfortable place to stay and just study and things or like just to hang out and being in the school for Aboriginal students like it's kind of hard because we don't want to be in the cafe and sit around because we don't feel comfortable.

For many Indigenous students, the Biwaase'aa room is a place of cultural safety, where students can find a familiar, supportive, non-judgmental environment during a busy school day.

The weekly Biwaase'aa elementary After-School schedule includes regular opportunities for children to play, run, jump, in the school's gym and weather permitting, in the school yard. For the most part the play is non-scripted, children could make their own choices to play hockey, baseball, build a structure with the gym mats or invent a new game. These child-to-child interactions generate creativity, expands imaginations, encourage co-operation and physical well-being.



## CHAPTER 5: The Voices of Biwaase'aa Youth Outreach Workers

Highlighting the voices of Biwaase'aa Youth Outreach Workers was not part of the original research plan of 2012-13. What became glaringly apparent then, and is equally apparent during the 2016-17 study, is the unique perspective of those YOWs who literally work in the space between the two knowledges of education - *traditional and contemporary* - in elementary, senior elementary and one high school in Thunder Bay. The very existence of YOWs in provincial elementary schools is unique. YOWs are still in the vanguard of *traditional knowledge* education professionals and a model that has relevance to schools across this province.

### Issues of Relationship

The multiplicity of relationships dominates much of the YOW narratives and those relationships begin with teachers.

#### School Teachers

**YOW:** ...I still think there's a lot of racism out there...against our people just because of...the colour of our skin. [It] makes a difference when we teach these things to certain students, to certain teachers and what not. I always believe that when I say something because of the colour of my skin that sometimes it's not received as positive or as factual information from anybody [else].

According to many YOWs, instances of racism underlie a number of their relationships with teachers. One way to explain this conflict is to recognize the ongoing epistemic struggle that occurs in classrooms across this country. This notion of epistemic conflict in schools is certainly not relegated to Ontario schools alone but can be found at all levels of education in Canada and it is simple to understand (see Battiste, 2013; Bishop, O'Sullivan & Berryman, 2010; Cajete, 1994; Castellano, Davis, & Lahache, 2000; Chandler, 2005; & Hampton, 1995).

Education is charged with recreating the values and beliefs of the dominant society in every new generation of citizens. Teachers, who themselves have been successful at every level of their education, have integrated those same values and beliefs in their lives and by extension their teaching practice. When many of those same teachers are faced with an Indigenous epistemology in schools through their interaction with Biwaase'aa, the result can be a level of cognitive dissonance that is profound, extreme, and they may feel their values and beliefs or their professionalism is in question but there are many teachers that have made the epistemic leap.

**YOW:** [T]he relationship with [a particular teacher] and about two other teachers in the school are really strong because they used me quite a bit for our expertise in Aboriginal culture, Aboriginal traditional teachings. One of the teachers actually said that Biwaase'aa is a gold mine. [I]t's not being used by all of the teachers in that school the way it should be. They are really missing out. And we've talked about many different [times] this past semester with the Native [studies course] there. It really opened the student's eyes but it also made that connection

Teachers that struggle to see the connection between *traditional knowledge* and Indigenous school success are not responding from a position of maleficence but rather, from a lack of education. Some Ontario Faculties of Education have begun to include mandatory courses in Indigenous education, others have taken the position that Indigenous education is infused across the entire program.

However, in-service education still largely maintains a focus on “cultures, histories and perspectives” which translates into endless presentations on such atrocities as the Residential School Era, the Sixties Scoop, and now the Truth and Reconciliation. It is not that these atrocities are not crucial to eliminating the knowledge deficit of teachers that is a direct result of their education, it is. But this endless focus does nothing to support teachers as they struggle to teach the Indigenous epistemology that sits in their classrooms.

YOW's narratives recorded in the Wildfire Session in June of 2017 are predictably replete with stories of conflicts with teachers that cannot be reproduced here in the interests of maintaining YOW confidentiality.

Consider this simple observation.

**YOW:** So, there's a lot of things that I run into on a daily basis. I think the teachers are not yet welcoming of our program because they don't know what they expect.

## School Leadership

Principals are the backbone of schools, they set the pace, the agenda and align their schools with policies and procedures from the local and provincial level. Principals are the consummate diplomats, constantly negotiating a host of issues and personalities on a daily basis. YOWs narratives from the 2016-17 school year present numerous positive relationship stories with principals.

**YOW 1:** [M]y principal has been very accommodating and very welcoming to the program. [The principal] is constantly checking in with me all year to see if I feel welcome. Like if my presence, if I feel okay, if I established my presence in the school and how things are going. So [the principal] is constantly asking me how I'm feeling with the program and everything. So [the principal] has been really good about it. Even though there's been

some pushback from certain teachers which is always the eternal struggle right? Trying to bring your culture into the classroom. Because it's all about academics.

**Researcher 3:** Can I ask a follow-up about your principal?

**YOW 1:** Yes.

**Researcher 3:** Do you have a sense of how long [the principal] has been there? Is [the principal] a newer principal?

**YOW 1:** I think this is [the principal's] second or third year at [school name]. [The principal] was at...another public school as well.

**Researcher 3:** So [the principal] has been in the game for a while?

**YOW 1:** Yeah, [the principal] has been there for a while.

.....

Relationships between YOWs and principals are by no means consistent. YOWs describe a spectrum of appreciation for the relationship between Indigenous school success and *traditional knowledge*. This spectrum has an obvious impact on how Biwaase'aa is integrated in schools and on the relationships between YOWs and teachers.

**YOW 2:** I've probably ran into maybe three principals that really didn't care. Just didn't care about our program. And there's those other ones that really pushed our program and really recognize our program, really backed our program like my co-worker says, adamant about getting us into these classrooms. And that was that relationship, those relationships that were strong with our principal...I was able to get into these classrooms and teach about culture and traditional programming.

.....

**YOW 3:** [W]e had one really good principal, always wanting to incorporate more and now we have this new principal. [This principal] is using our program as punishment. So, like if they don't come for attendance and stuff oh you're not allowed to attend the Biwaase'aa program and stuff like that. Even though it's the most beneficial thing in their life. And having those things taken away. And I've been trying to find ways that they can still do it like even outside of school life at home and stuff. Giving them skills that they are able to incorporate, using outside of the classroom so it's not just inside the school and they can take things home so that they can do better things in life and learn more. And if they have any questions they can come back and ask me... So [if] the principal says you're not allowed to attend the program, doesn't mean that we just stopped caring. I still provide them things that they are able to do.

.....

**YOW 4:** [W]ell I was just going to say, almost every year I had a different principal or vice principal, but I think it just depends on who you have. I've had one that was adamant about getting me into the classrooms and she just told her teachers like you have to put her in, make time. This is the schedule. Make sure she's there. And teachers had to accommodate that. And a lot of times I would show up and they'd be like "oh I didn't know you were coming today". And I was like "well I was scheduled in so..." she was really good in that sense. And then you get some principles where, especially if they are new. And it's their first time dealing with our program, they don't know what's going on. They don't know what you're supposed to be doing or anything. And it was kind of like this year my principal had no clue.

.....

These four YOWs offer diverse insights into how principal leadership in Biwaase'aa schools can make room for *traditional knowledge* in schools. What seems to be common among each narrative is that familiarity with Biwaase'aa is dependent on the principal's past interaction with the program rather than some form of training before they take their position in a school.

## Indigenous Students & Parents/Caregivers

Indigenous peoples face numerous and well-documented inequity in the city of Thunder Bay. YOWs are on the front-line of the issues, providing culturally responsive relational *traditional knowledge* education to Indigenous children who are the next generation to inherit intergenerational effects/trauma of colonization and live in the poorest economic areas of this city. YOWs face both the defeats and the triumphs experienced by their young charges and have an unrecognized influence on their parents/caregivers as well. They do not work alone, or in isolation, their peers, the Biwaase'aa program manager, and the associated principals also provide support as circumstances dictate.

**YOW 1:** I'll say this year was pretty eye-opening for me in terms of parents. While overall the parents do support the program. They do feel...it's a benefit. They do want their kids there. However, in terms of being eye-opening you know how any kind of issue that gets brought up about Native [peoples] always [ends with] talk about the intergenerational effects, of residential schools and how we are still suffering. Well I really feel like this year I really saw the effects of it [on our]...lives and these families. Like there's just so many different school issues that affect them. Like you know, addictions, kids in care, there is trauma, suicide. Like family issues. Things like that. It was just crazy. It was a really tough year in terms of helping these kids deal with this stuff. So much so that our program was affected. We couldn't even really do much of our program, we have spent a lot of time on emotional

and social development. Like just teaching them how to take care of themselves. If you're feeling upset...you need to take care of that. You can't just wreak havoc on everybody and think that we can deal with it so, in terms of that it was really eye-opening...the first time [I] ever saw that. And probably because I work in the [school] area where there is low income families. It was pretty intense. But overall [parents] see the benefits they know the kid should be there but at the same time they lack the parenting skills to get their kids to come to program. Or they will be like "they don't want to go but I don't how to get them to come. [So] I will all just let them roam the neighbourhood because that's what they want to do." It was a crazy year that's all I can say. Will leave it at that.

.....

**YOW 2:** And I think that's what they're always looking for those students, is that connection for themselves and seeing us as workers being there. Being...family. Being like uncles, like aunties. And we go back to that again [like] we said before, it makes them feel comfortable even if they're just spending time in our room. It's the most comfortable place for the Aboriginal students to come because we are there. Where there is mission of a people. That's what I find that I think we need more of that kind of constant relationship and with the teachers to be invited, to feel wanted. I think that's what makes us more comfortable in those schools.

.....

**YOW 3:** Oh, I was just going to say one of my students. She was like really shy and this year she's like, I really want to write a thing to be valedictorian. She's like, I don't think I'm going to get it, the other girl is more popular and I feel like everybody is going to pick her. I'm like, no you need to try I know that you've written it and it's really good and I think you should try. And she won the valedictorian to do for her graduation.

.....

**YOW 4:** [I also] like...seeing my students...being super shy and all I'm nervous and then getting out of their comfort zone and dancing at the Pow Wows...Feeling like people are going to judge them and I'm like, no just dance like nobody's watching it's okay. You don't need to feel like you're going to be judged and they danced and they showed their bravery.

.....

**YOW 5:** I have asked for a couple of support letters. One that we are working with in partnership with the principal. A letter from him...was pretty cool, basically saying that one of the students that we have been working with throughout the year...that's always drumming,

the boy that's always in my room asking questions, asking stuff, asking about teachings, asking about all these things. And I kind of think...because [the student] is graduating this year...the principal has said that we played...a role [in that]. I've played such a role...that [the student] is going to go...to...university.

Biwaase'aa YOWs are unrecognized education professionals who face the tragedies and triumphs of Indigenous children and their families every school day throughout the school year. YOWs presence in schools directly influence the next generation of Indigenous citizens of Thunder Bay more than any other agency, service provider or community organization. YOWs work in a precarious space between educators and Indigenous children, as teachers of children, parents and educators, they are diplomats, counsellors, case workers, dieticians, artists, leaders, managers and referees. Many have been employed as a YOW for years and others began their association with Biwaase'aa when they were a child and now work in the program. They are not sufficiently remunerated for that work, they do it because they believe in what they do.

YOWs can be the only positive representation of Indigeneity in the lives of Biwaase'aa students. Each of the YOWs stories presented above are both heart-wrenching and heart-felt and speak to the unique work and talents of the women and men of Biwaase'aa. We will provide no discussion of their narratives, instead we will let the reader provide their own.



## CHAPTER 6:

### The Maamaawisiwin Professional Teacher Development Program

First Nation, Métis and Inuit (Indigenous) students are at risk in Canada's educational system. As a result, teachers and schools need to adapt their practices to attend to these students' needs. As Indigenous students are at a high risk of dropping out at the age of 17, according to Statistics Canada (2015), it is crucial that high school teachers in particular develop the pedagogical skills required to reach them before they drop out of school.

The Maamaawisiwin Professional Teacher Development Program (MPTDP) is designed to encourage provincial high school teachers to support Indigenous students during these critical dropout years (Grades 9-12). MPTDP is an innovative approach to serving Indigenous students because it attends to individual teachers as they develop a *culturally responsive pedagogy of relations* in their classes. Participating teachers commit to voluntary, confidential, and respectful involvement in the Maamaawisiwin Development Cycle of Learning, Observation, Feedback and Co-construction of culturally responsive teaching (see Figure 6.1) in order to increase student engagement and reduce their risk of dropping out.

This approach is adapted from the highly regarded Maori *Te Kotahitanga* professional teacher development program in Aotearoa/New Zealand, which is led by Maori in-service staff and supports educators working with Maori high school students. In 2010, as a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council post-doctoral fellow, co-author Dr. John Hodson, lived in Aotearoa and studied the *Te Kotahitanga* approach.

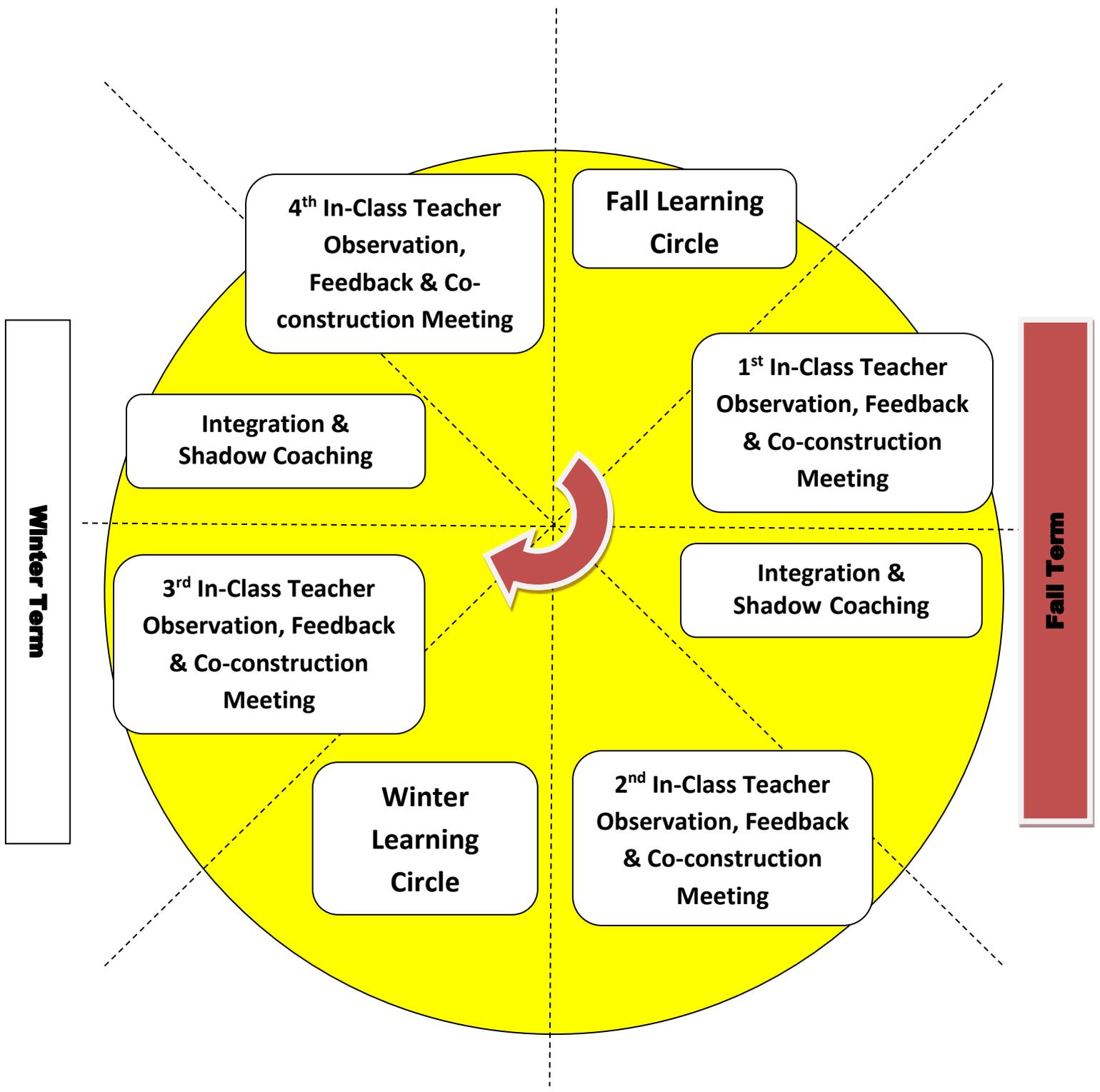
This experience, along with doctoral research on Indigenous education, led him to adapt this approach to the needs of educators serving Indigenous students in Canadian schools. The result is the Maamaawisiwin Professional Teacher Development Program which was being piloted in a Thunder Bay high school with a significant number of Indigenous students.

The Maamaawisiwin Development Cycle includes a Learning Circle, four individual teacher In-class Observations, teacher Feedback Meetings that include specific goal setting related to five Indigenous Marker Students (three chosen by the participating teacher and two by the MPTDP facilitator), as well as teacher Shadow Coaching as necessary.

The Development Cycle calls for the four Observations to take place over a school year. In this instance, the four Observations took place over one semester leaving little time for participating teachers to reflect on and integrate their new understanding into their practice before the next Observation was scheduled to take place.

The pilot program at Sir Winston Churchill Collegiate and Vocational Institute in Thunder Bay (Lakehead Public Schools), began in 2016-17. In the fall of 2016, the authors recruited the first cohort of twelve teachers at Churchill, a school with a significant Indigenous population (N=27 percent). This group of teachers constituted a quarter of faculty, and across levels - academic, applied, open - and represented five of the six departments at Churchill.

Figure 6.1. Maamaawisiíwin Professional Teacher Development Cycle



## The Learning Circle

At the beginning of the winter 2017 term, participating teachers came together in a day-long Learning Circle with MPTDP facilitators and an Indigenous Elder. The Learning Circle was dedicated to supporting the needs of local teachers. Through a range of interactive activities, teachers engaged the narratives of Indigenous students and learned how to apply the Effective Teaching Profile (ETP) in their classes. At the conclusion of the opening Learning Circle, teachers were receptive to expanding their practice to include a culturally responsive pedagogy of relations by engaging the narratives of Indigenous students and the Effective Teaching Profile (ETP) through various interactive activities.

The ETP was developed through an analysis of the narratives of Anishinabe, Haudenosaunee, Inuit, Métis, and Mushkeygo (Cree) students attending provincially funded schools across Ontario. This analysis revealed seven critical teaching foci that together create a culturally responsive pedagogy of relations that teachers can bring into their practice.

Effective teachers of Indigenous students, on a daily basis, demonstrate that,

1. they can create and maintain culturally responsive context for learning.
2. they can create and maintain culturally appropriate contexts for learning.
3. they have high expectations for student's behavior.
4. they care for students as culturally located individuals.
5. they have high learning expectations for students.
6. they can create and maintain a secure, well-managed learning environment.
7. they genuinely care for their students.

During the Learning Circle participating teachers receive and began working with four interrelated modulized workbooks:

- the Vision of Maamaawisiiwin,
- the Relationship of Maamaawisiiwin,
- the Knowledge of Maamaawisiiwin,
- the Action of Maamaawisiiwin.

Each module, along with associated resources, sets the stage for the subsequent phase of the Maamaawisiiwin Development Cycle.

## In-class Teacher Observation, Feedback, Co-construction & Shadow Coaching

At the beginning of each term, participating teachers were observed by two Maamaawisiwin facilitators during a class of their choice. The related Observation Tool is designed to reflect the ETP and how often teachers are observed using those seven points in their teaching as well as thirteen markers that indicate teaching dominance (see Table 8.1). At the conclusion of the observation the participating teacher met privately with the Maamaawisiwin facilitators, at which time the results of the in-class observation were reviewed, discussed, and agreed on. During the meeting, the participating teacher and the facilitators co-construct one or two *specific, achievable and measurable* (SAM) goals that were related to the integration of the ETP.

Over the next several weeks, the teacher integrated those goals into their practice. During that period, a Maamaawisiwin facilitators provided Shadow Coaching and met with the participating teacher to catch up on an informal basis.

### The World of an Indigenous Student

In the 2016-17 school year Indigenous students entered classrooms across the city of Thunder Bay with a sense of foreboding that only increased throughout the school year.

In January, an Anishinabe woman, Barbara Kentner was hit in the abdomen by a trailer hitch, allegedly thrown from a passing car by a young man who exclaimed, "Oh, I hit one," when Kentner was struck. Kentner subsequently died in July.

In May, two high profile drownings of First Nation teens in the river that is literally across the road from Churchill CVI, only added to the sense of tragedy and sadness.

Seventeen-year-old Tammy Keeash of North Caribou Lake First Nation was found dead in the McIntyre River on May 7. Tammy was living in a Thunder Bay group home at the time.

Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwig First Nation Josiah Begg, fourteen, was last seen on May 6 when he was visiting the city for medical attention. Thunder Bay police discouraged local Indigenous volunteers from searching the rivers insisting there was, "no evidence" Josiah was in the river.

An OPP recovery team was eventually brought in to assist and for days the thwap-thwap-thwap of the OPP helicopter could be heard over Churchill as it flew up and down the riverways looking for any evidence of Josiah.

Tammy was the sixth Indigenous teen to drown in a Thunder Bay waterway since 2000. Josiah, became the seventh when his body was found on May 18 in the McIntyre River.

Then there were a number of murders of First Nation people and several attempted street abductions of young First Nation women and men across the city.

In June, Statistics Canada announced that, "one-third of reported hate crimes in Canada in 2015 where Indigenous people were the victims, occurred in Thunder Bay."

Some Indigenous parents living in remote communities pulled their children out of Thunder Bay schools. Teens volunteered to search the river banks instead of attending school. If they missed the school bus and had to walk to school they would text their friends and tell them to call the police if you didn't get to school at a specified time. Kids would walk to and from school in groups and stayed off the streets at night. And there were a number of supportive walks and gatherings in response.

This is the city that Indigenous children, teens and youth live in. Ask yourself if this environment would have an impact on Indigenous education in Thunder Bay?

## CHAPTER 7:

# The Maamaawisiiwin Research Study's Purpose, Objectives & Methodology

## The Purpose & Objectives of the Study

The Maamaawisiiwin Professional Teacher Development Program (MPTDP) is an innovative approach to the challenge of serving Indigenous students in Canadian schools. The pilot project at Churchill CVI is to both demonstrate its effectiveness and refine it to better serve Canadian teachers and Indigenous learners and communities.

The research component of the project is designed to demonstrate the impact of MDTDP, both qualitatively and quantitatively, on participating teacher's practice as well as their Indigenous students (i.e., the Indigenous marker students).

The two broad research objectives are:

1. To **quantitatively** assess the impact of the MPTDP on participating teachers practice through various indices noted in the Maamaawisiiwin In-Class Observation Tool.
2. To **qualitatively** assess the impact of the MPTDP on participating teachers.

## The Research Study's Methodology

The study is a multiphase, convergent, mixed-method design that includes both qualitative and quantitative elements that, in the case of participating high school teachers, collected at specific points throughout the 2016-17 school year, through:

- Opening Learning Circle,
- In-Class Observations of teachers,
- Following the engagement or non-engagement of the five Indigenous marker students in each teacher's classroom.
- Recording Indigenous marker student final grade, and
- A concluding Wildfire Circle at the end of the 2016-17 school year.

## 1. Qualitative Assessment of the Maamaawisiíwin Community The Wildfire Research Method

The Wildfire Circle is the primary component of the Wildfire Research Method (Kompf & Hodson, 2000). The Circle creates a communal and often sacred research environment that is respectful of the traditions and cultural beliefs of Indigenous peoples. This culturally responsive and relational research method includes:

- Developing relationships between researchers and the circle of participants that make up the community in which the research is situated.
- Complete transparency, ongoing consultation and meaningful engagement between researchers and the circle of participants that make up that community.
- A dedicated, confidential and private circle for the participants in that circle.
- Inclusion of traditional ceremonial concepts, led by an Elder, within the dedicated circle such as prayer, ceremonial tobacco offerings etc.

Wildfire Sessions (a form of Talking Circles) are semi-structured discussions that invite each circle of participants to share their experiences and observations about the focus of the research study. In this study dedicated Wildfire Sessions were organized for participating teachers orchestrated by an experienced facilitator on the research team and included an Elder. The session was digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed; each teacher participant received their personal contribution as part of validation through a member check process. Researchers then followed-up with telephone communication with individual teacher participants to assure accuracy of the transcription.

The questions that guided the discussion in the Wildfire Sessions were developed to compliment the outcomes associated to MPTDP model.

In this instance a dedicated teacher participant Wildfire Circle was held at the end of the 2016-17 school year that included seven of the twelve participating teachers. The testimony was digitally recorded, and when transcribed, resulted in some 15,000 words, recorded over 1.5 hours.

### Transcription Analysis

That transcription underwent a rigorous analysis shaped by Patton's (1990) three-stage approach that includes:

1. Content analysis to make the obvious, obvious;
2. Interpretive analysis to make the hidden obvious; and
3. Critical analysis to make the obvious and hidden dubious.

The testimony of those participating teachers described rich and complex relationships between peers, teacher's experience of MPTDP and the Indigenous students in their classrooms. Analysis of the narratives identified five themes that become the basis for the recommended strategy outlined in chapter nine.

## 2. Quantitative Analysis of Indigenous Marker Students

Prior to the first In-Class teacher observation Maamaawisiwin facilitators meet with the participating teacher to, in part, complete a selection of Indigenous marker students. Participating teachers have an opportunity to choose three students and the facilitators randomly select two others. These five marker students are constants throughout the four Observations and their mid-term and final grades are collected and undergo analysis as an aggregate.



## CHAPTER 8:

### Findings of the Maamaawisiwin Study

Bringing Indigenous education theory into teacher's practice is a challenge. Teachers have practical needs that cannot be cluttered with theoretical constructs or endless lists of best practices that are not easily inserted into the classroom. Teachers also require ongoing support and opportunities to speak about their experiences as they shift their practice in safe, respectful and anonymous environments that are non-judgmental or dismissive.

The Maamaawisiwin Professional Teacher Development Program (MPTDP) is an intersection between Indigenous student needs and the needs of teachers. It is a complex and involved process of in-service teacher development that requires not only time and expertise, but researchers that are themselves educators working from within bi-epistemic, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, realities. The following provides a detailed synopsis of that complexity through a collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data.

#### In-class Teacher Observations

Between February and June of 2017, four In-class Observations were completed with seven of the twelve participating teachers while five teachers completed three observations. Each cycle of Observation, Feedback, Co-construction and Shadow Coaching represented almost ten hours that participating teachers had to integrate into already busy schedules.

The private Feedback/Co-construction meeting are essentially *professional learning conversations* between participating teacher and MPTDP facilitators where the collected evidence gathered from the In-class Observation is considered and *specific, achievable, measurable* (SAM) goals are Co-constructed in an effort to bring the ETP into their practice and engage the five Indigenous marker students.

#### The In-class Observation Tool

The Maamaawisiwin In-class Observation Tool is based on the Te Kotahitanga Observation Tool. In-class Observation begins with a facilitator/teacher preparatory meeting held prior to the scheduled observation. During that meeting the Teacher identifies three Indigenous students they wish to be observed interacting with and provides an overview of the lesson plan. With the assistance of the teacher the facilitator chooses an additional two Indigenous students.

During the Observation, the MPTDP facilitator observes each student for ten seconds and evaluates if they are "engaged" or "non-engaged" for five seconds. That evaluation is followed by observing the Teacher for ten seconds, evaluating what is occurring and choosing one of the

thirteen codes (see Table 8.1) within five seconds. This method is repeated until one-hundred marker student and teacher Observations are complete. These Observations undergo a frequency count and become the basis for the Feedback meeting and facilitator and teacher Co-construct *specific, achievable, measurable* (SAM) goals that result in a shift in teacher practice that aligns with the ETP.

**Table 8.1. In-Class Teacher Observation Code Abbreviations & Definitions**

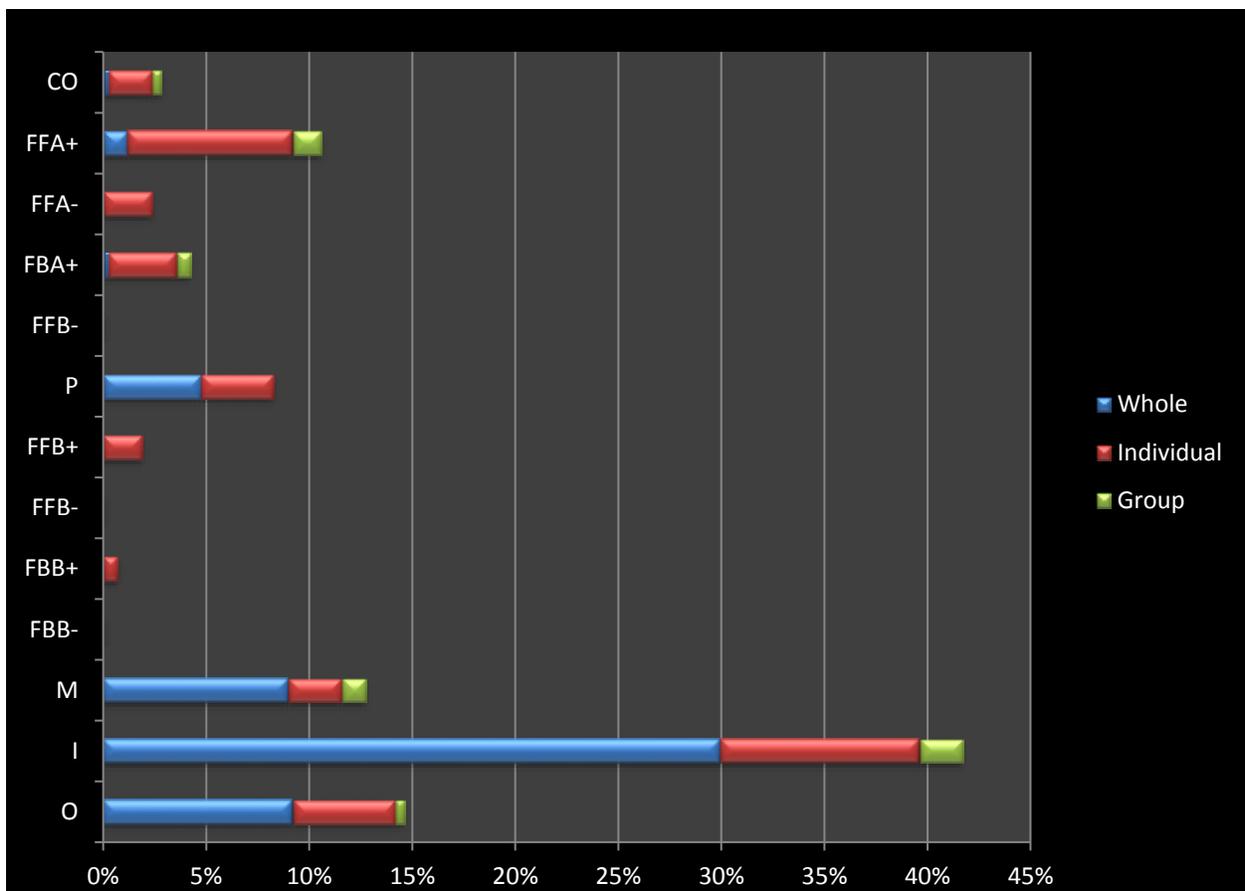
CO = The teacher & student <i>Co-Constructed</i> a goal, approach, deadline.
FFA+ = The teacher provided positive <i>Feed Forward on student's Academics</i> .
FFA- = The teacher provided negative <i>Feed Forward on student's Academics</i> .
FBA+ = The teacher provided positive <i>Feed Back on student's Academics</i> .
FBA- = The teacher provided negative <i>Feed Back on student's Academics</i> .
FFB+ = The teacher provided positive <i>Feed Forward on student's Behavior</i> .
FFB- = The teacher provided negative <i>Feed Forward on student's Behavior</i> .
FBB+ = The teacher provided positive <i>Feed Back on student's Behavior</i> .
FBB- = The teacher provided negative <i>Feed Back on student's Behavior</i> .
P = The teacher engaged the student's <i>Prior Knowledge and/or Experience</i> .
I = The teacher focused on <i>Instruction</i> related to the lesson.
M = The teacher <i>Monitored</i> the student.
O = <i>Other</i> instruction.



## First In-Class Teacher Observation Analysis

Each In-Class Observation was recorded on the In-Class Observation Tool, compiled and expressed below as an aggregate. The resulting compilation of the first In-class Observation data (see Figure 8.1) establishes a baseline of participating teacher practice. The vertical axis records the teaching dominance of the classrooms from Socratic transmission to a discursive practice (see Table 8.1) while the horizontal axis records the percentage of time the twelve teachers invested in forms of teaching and is further defined as, the whole class (blue), an individual (red), or a group of students (green).

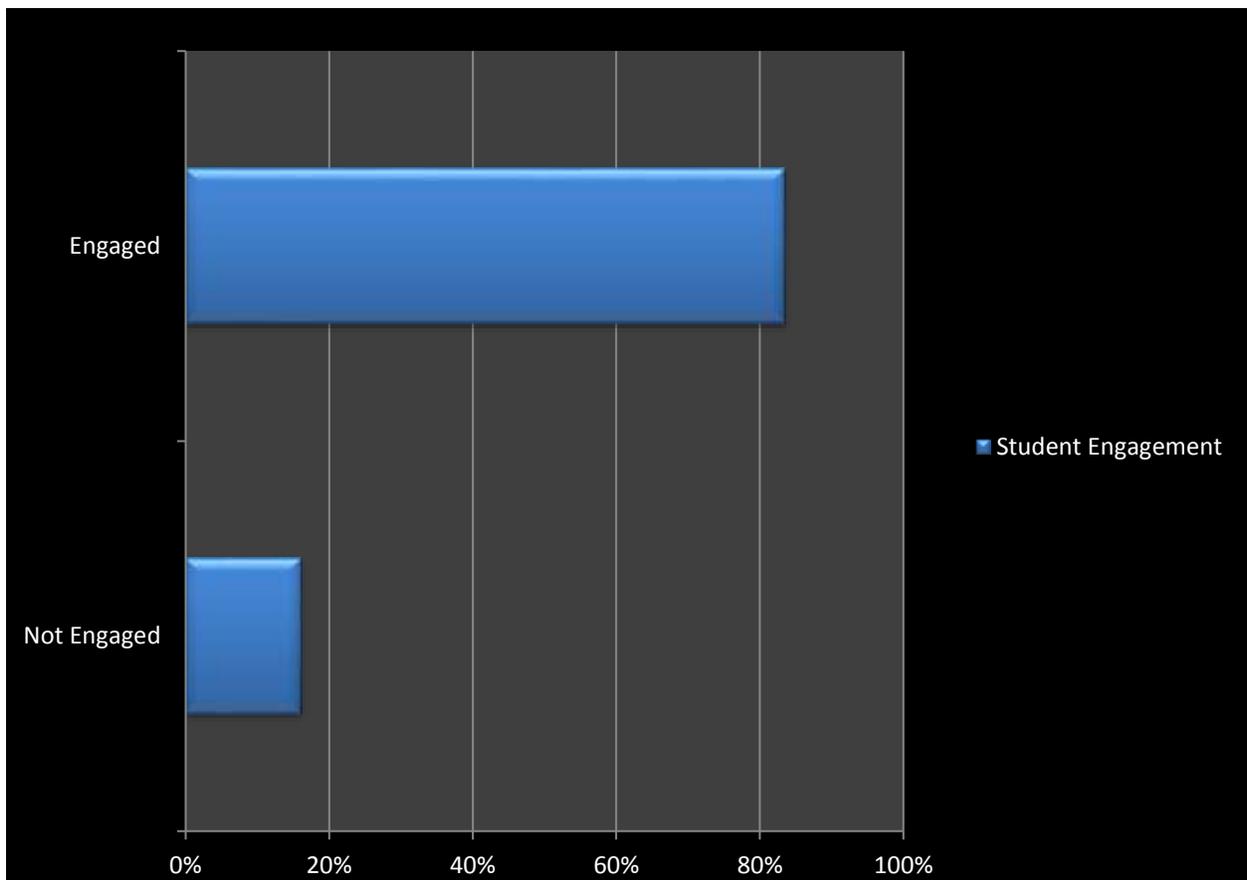
**Figure 8.1. First In-Class Teacher Observation**



In this first Observation, over sixty-eight percent of the teacher practice focused on Socratic modes of instruction including monitoring, direct instruction and others, while approximately thirty-two percent of teachers' time was dedicated to the discursive sphere of teaching, Co-construction - Feed Forward Academic, Feed Back Academic or engaging the Prior Knowledge of students.

What is especially interesting is that, when teachers did engage more discursive practices, the percentage of individual student interactions increased significantly as a percentage of the total. During the first Observation eighty-four percent of the five marker students were determined to be engaged in the classroom activity (see Figure 8.2). At first glance, these data would appear to indicate a high level of student engagement but when considered with the predominance of teacher instruction category which was overwhelmingly observed to be Socratic in nature (see Figure 8.1). Marker students were engaged but, that engagement mirrored the focus of their teacher's practice and tended to be of non-discursive in nature and the level of individual teacher/student interaction was extremely low in favour of the whole class interaction.

**Figure 8.2. First In-Class Observation - Student Engagement**



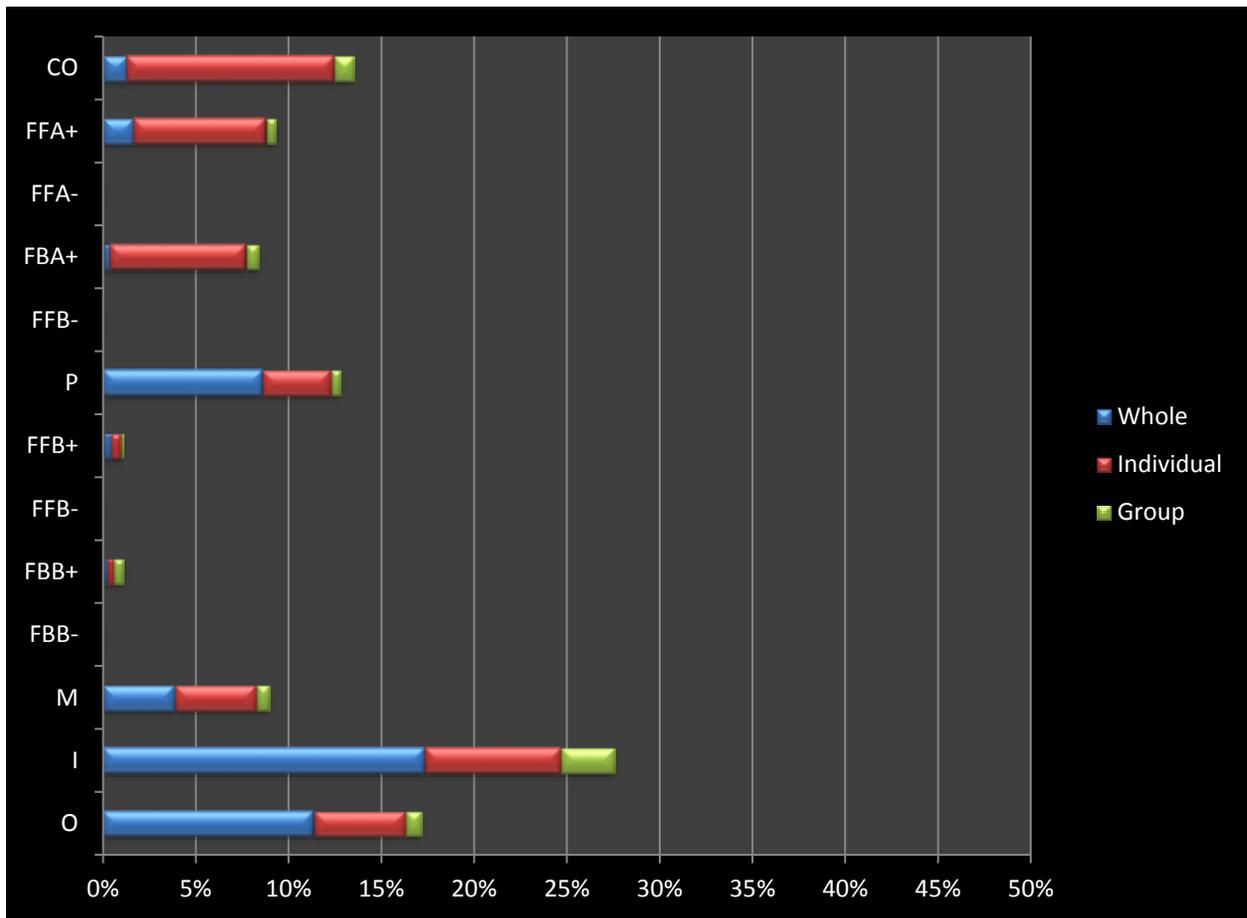
## Second In-Class Teacher Observation Analysis

Observation two (see Figure 8.3) was completed after the participating teachers had met with the Maamaawisiwin facilitators to review the first Observation data and to co-create individual teacher goals.

Observation two demonstrated a significant decrease in Socratic modes of teaching (approximately fourteen percent) over Observation one, while discursive teaching practices have increased to approximately forty-three percent.

Again, as participating teachers began to shift their teaching in favour of discursive practices the students received more individual attention expressed as a percentage of the whole.

**Figure 8.3. Second In-Class Teacher Observation**



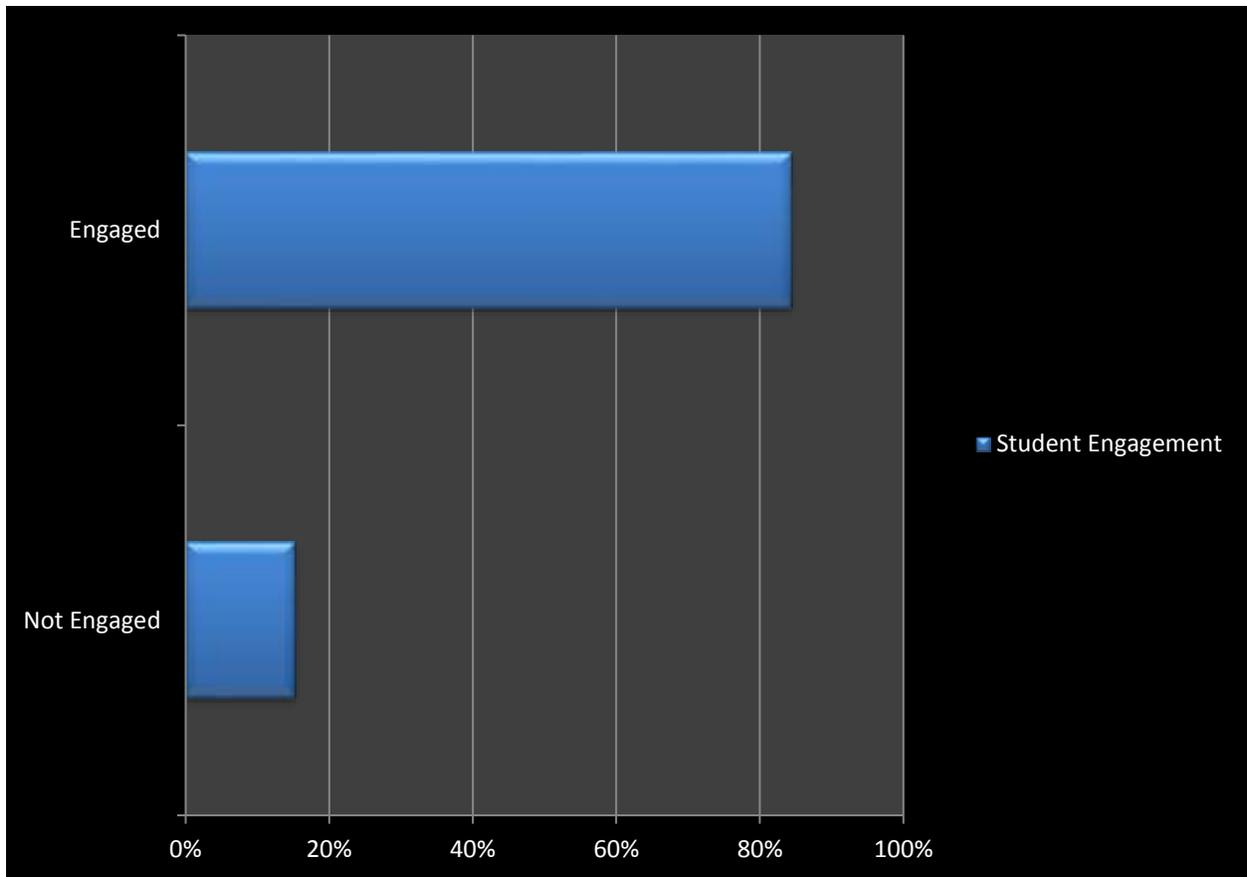
Student engagement (see Figure 8.4) has increased to eighty-five percent, a one percent increase over the first Observation.

Although this increase in student engagement between the Observation one and two may appear insignificant, that increase must be considered along with the results in Teacher Observation (see Figure, 8.3). For example, Observation two demonstrates a significant decrease in Whole (blue) and Group (green) interactions between teachers and students, while Individual interactions (red) increase markedly.

Observation two demonstrates an increase in discursive practices – Co-construction, Feed Forward Academic +, Feed Back Academic +, or exploring Prior Knowledge - by nature, include a higher level of student participation that take on various forms of discussion between teacher and student.

Within a discursive classroom, students are actively engaged, they are not passive empty vessels relying on teachers to fill them with knowledge, but recognized as individuals with experience and ideas that are relevant to learning. As a result, classrooms evolve to become learning communities where power is shared between teacher and student, and all are responsible for the health of that community.

**Figure 8.4. Second In-Class Observation - Student Engagement**

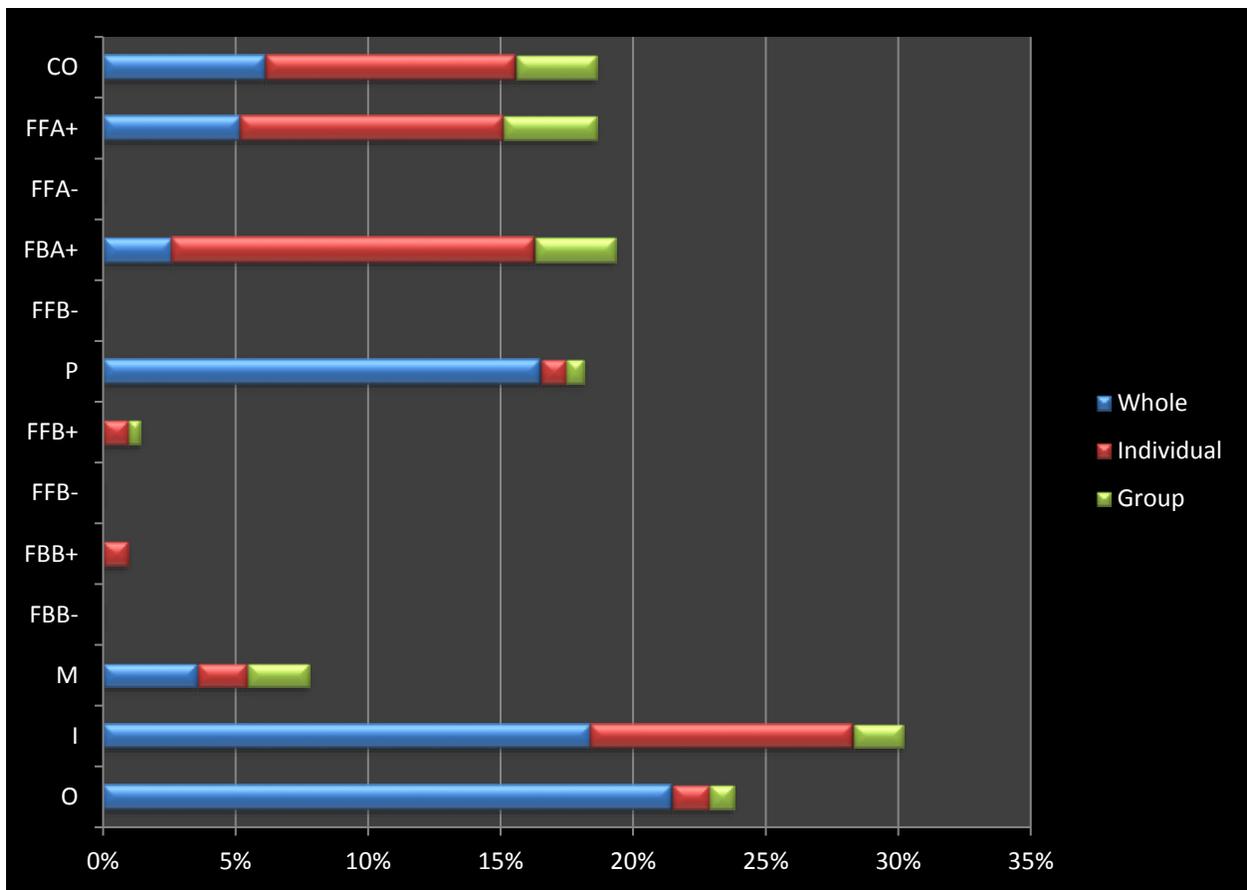


## Third In-Class Teacher Observation Analysis

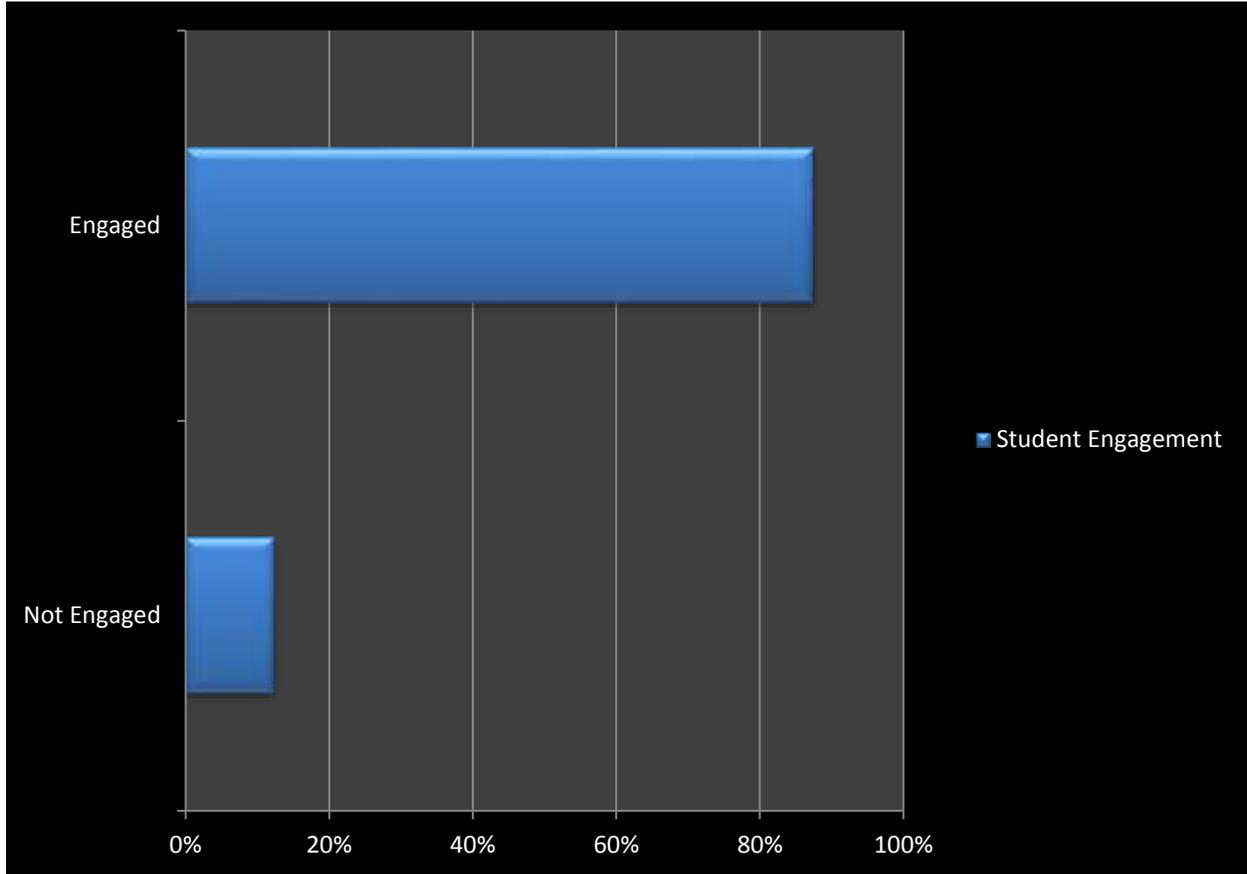
Increases in discursive teaching (see Figure 8.5) practices continued to be evident in data gathered during the third Observation. This is especially noticeable in the percentage of time teachers were observed providing positive academic Feed Back and Feed Forward to individual Indigenous marker students. Instances where student Prior Knowledge was referenced by teachers also increased and reflect the kind of ongoing discourse that the whole class would participate in.

Instances of individual teacher, student interaction increases while Whole and Group interactions decrease.

**Figure 8.5. Third In-Class Teacher Observation**



**Figure 8.6. Third In-Class Observation - Student Engagement**



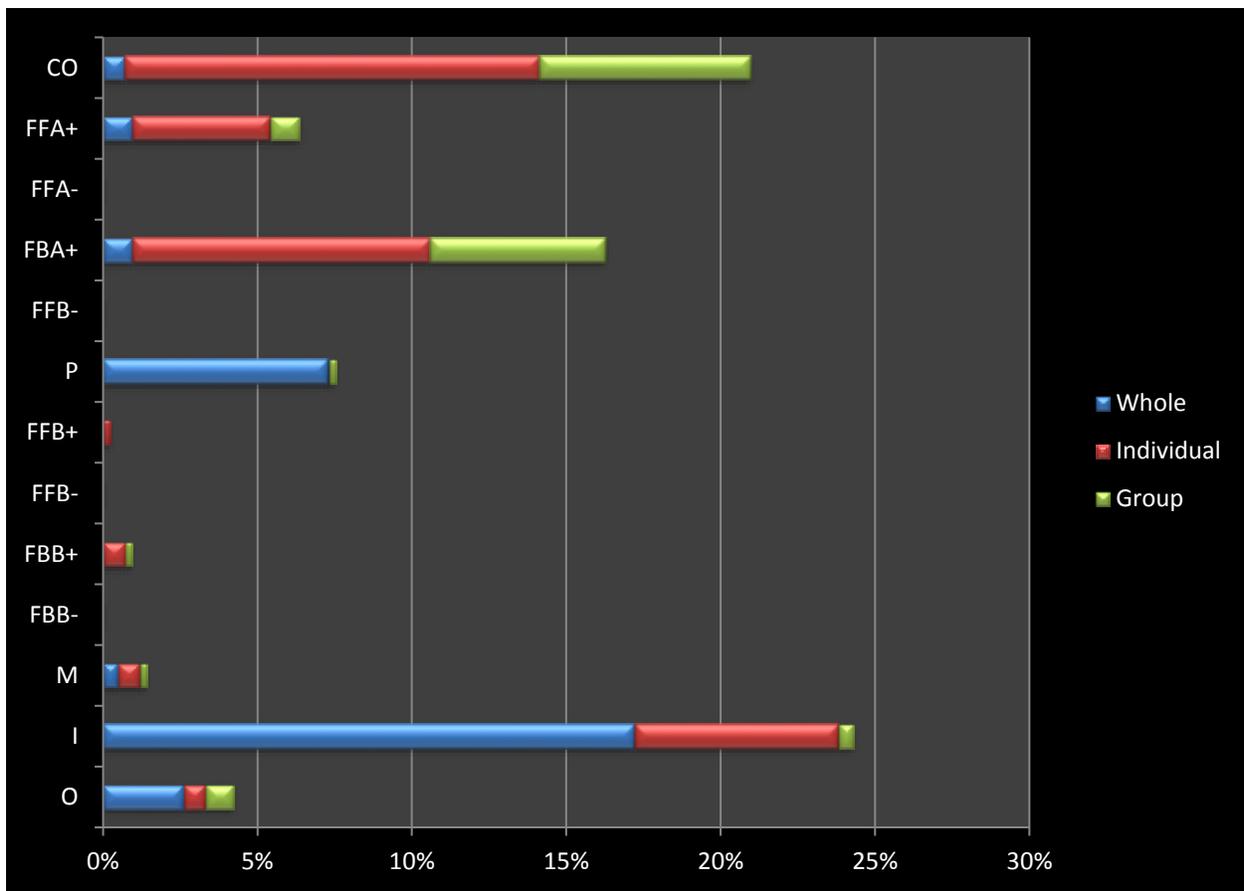
Student engagement (see Figure 8.6) has increased by approximately four percent to eighty-eight percent over Observation one. Although the increase of student engagement recorded in Observation one, two and three (+four percent) is not impressive in itself, again it must be considered along with the increase in discursive practices that speaks of a higher level of teacher, student engagement.

## Fourth In-Class Teacher Observation Analysis

Observation four occurred late in the 2016-17 school year. Data collected during Observation four demonstrates a potential anomaly when compared with the dramatic increases in discursive practice seen in Observations one, two and three (see Table 8.10).

The greatest contributing factor in this anomaly is that only seven of the twelve (fifty-eight percent) teachers participated in Observation four. This was the result of a scheduling issue, or the natural outcome of attempting to complete four Observations, designed to occur over a full school year, in just half of a school year.

**Figure 8.7. Fourth In-Class Teacher Observation**



However, if we adjust the total frequency count of discursive practice by extending the average over the twelve teachers we can observe a continued shift in discursive practice (see Table 8.10) and those increases and decreases are extremely dramatic. For example,

- Adjusted frequency of Co-construction *increased* between Observation three (N=79) and Observation four (N=153).

- Adjusted frequency of Feed Forward on Student Academics + *decreased* between Observation three (N=79) versus Observation four (N=46).
- Adjusted frequency of Feed Back on Student Academics + *increased* between Observation three (N=82) versus Observation four (N=118).
- Adjusted frequency of Prior Knowledge *decreased* between Observation three (N=77) and Observation four (N=55).

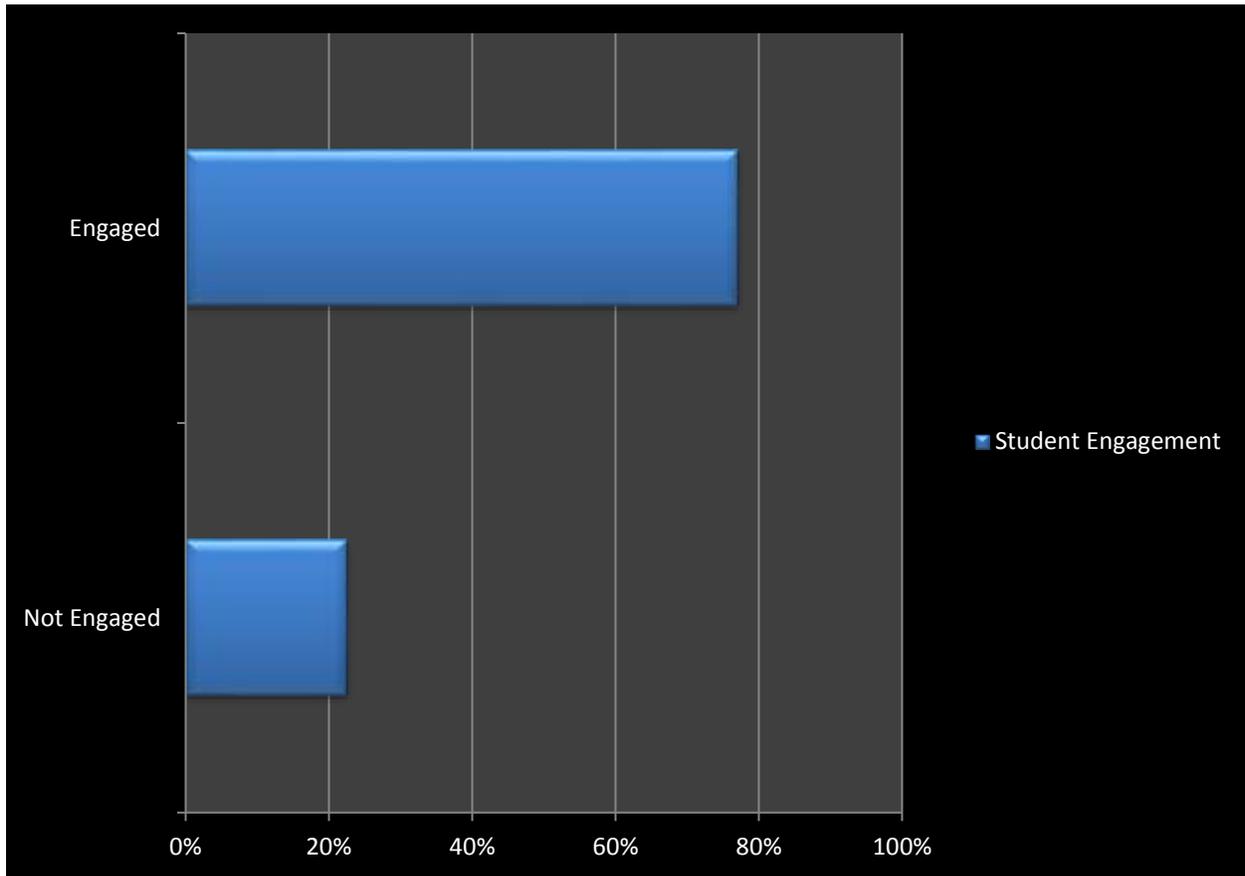
Providing an explanation for these increases and decreases in specific discursive practices can be, in part, attributed to the nature of class work underway at the end of the school year. The final student grade in each of the seven teachers observed included the submission of a culminating project, series of smaller scaffolded projects, or preparation for an exam.

The nature of this work is such that teachers are continually co-constructing with their students. Culminating projects are about compiling evidence of what *has* been learned, and therefore instances of Feed Forward on Student Academics, which focuses on what *will* be learned, are not as relevant to that task as providing Feed Back on the evidence of past learning.

Decreases in Prior Learning between Observation three (N=77) and adjusted totals in Observation four (N=55) would appear, at face, an outlier. One would think that completing a culminating project, a series of smaller projects or preparing for an exam would, by nature, result in increases in teachers directly engaging a student's Prior Knowledge, but this was not the case. Again, we believe that the nature of culminating projects, smaller assignments or reviews for final exams is my nature about students compiling or reviewing evidence of what *has* been learned, and therefore teachers accessing the Prior Learning of students is not as frequent as providing students with immediate Feed Back on that learning evidence.



**Figure 8.8. Fourth In-Class Observation - Student Engagement**



Student Engagement during Observation four would appear to have decreased markedly (N=77 percent) when compared with Observation three (N=88 percent) and unadjusted would indicate a full ten percent decrease. There are several factors at play here that explain this decrease in student engagement including:

- Only forty percent of the maker students were in attendance during Observation four.
- Only fifty-eight percent (N=7) of the teachers participated in Observation four.

**Table 8.10. Aggregate of Discursive Practice Frequency by Observation**

Discursive Practices	Observation 1 Actual Count	Observation 2 Actual Count	Observation 3 Actual Count	Observation 4 Actual Count	Observation 4 Adjusted Count*
CO = The teacher & student <i>Co-Constructed</i> a goal, approach, deadline.	12	74	79	89	153
FFA+ = The teacher provided positive <i>Feed Forward on student's Academics</i> .	45	51	79	27	46
FFA- = The teacher provided negative <i>Feed Forward on student's Academics</i> .	10	0	0	0	N/A
FBA+ = The teacher provided positive <i>Feed Back on student's Academics</i> .	18	46	82	69	118
FBA- = The teacher provided negative <i>Feed Back on student's Academics</i> .	0	0	0	0	N/A
P = The teacher engaged the student's <i>Prior Knowledge and/or Experience</i> .	35	70	77	32	55

\* CO = 89 ÷ 7 teachers observed = 12.71 x 12 teachers = 153

\* FFA+ = 27 ÷ 7 teachers observed = 3.86 x 12 teachers = 46

\* FBA+ = 69 ÷ 7 teachers observed = 9.86 x 12 teachers = 118

\* P = 32 ÷ 7 teachers observed = 4.57 x 12 = 55

## Indigenous Marker Student Final Grades

A total of fifty-nine Indigenous marker students were chosen by each of the twelve participating teachers (N=3) and the Maamaawisiwin facilitators (N=2) and these same marker students were a constant throughout the four Observations. Marker students are critical to shifting teacher practice because they are the focus of that shift from two perspectives.

First, during each observation the facilitator observes each student for ten seconds to determine if they are “engaged” or “non-engaged” and records that observation on the evaluation tool. Marker student engagement is part of the focus for the *professional learning conversations* that are part of the Feed Back meeting where teachers and facilitators Co-construct *specific, achievable, measurable* (SAM) ETP strategies designed to respond to individual student need. The teacher then employs those strategies for several weeks, records their associated observations and reports back during the next Feed Back/Co-construction meeting.

Secondly, marker student grades are recorded at mid-term and at the conclusion of the 2016-17 school year and are presented as an aggregate below.

- Of the 59 marker students 40 passed (68 percent) their course.
- A total of 17 marker students (29 percent) increased their final course grade from their mid-term grade.
- A total of 5 marker students went “off-roll,” or received an incomplete grade (8 percent).

Of special note are the five marker students engaged in EQAO coaching.

- A total of 2 (40 percent) passed with a 75 percent final grade.
- A total of 2 (40 percent) were deferred.
- A total of 1 took wrote the exam and failed by 1 question (20 percent).

It is difficult to draw any conclusions from the marker student mid-term or final grades from one semester. The ultimate goal of MPTDP is to shift the teaching and learning practice of an entire school and this is not accomplished over one semester. Te Kotahitanga research (see Bishop, O’Sullivan & Berryman, 2010) suggests that a minimum of three years of concerted teacher and leadership effort is necessary before a pedagogic tipping point is reached in a school.

With this timeframe in mind, we hypothesize that if we had begun to work with teachers in September or October of the 2016-17 school year, all teachers would have begun to enhance their practice sooner which would have resulted in a corresponding increase in student grades.

## Discussion

The MPTDP was created as a response to the needs of teachers as expressed by teachers. The goal of MPTDP is to support teachers as they shift their practice to include Effective Teachers Profile, that is described through the voices of Indigenous students.

### Teacher's Voice

Teacher's voices are an invaluable part of this study, certainly from the perspective of a busy educator, but also from the perspective of an agent of change. Both perspectives offer important insights that inform and enrich the interpretation of the associated data.

In just a short five intense months, participating teachers expanded their use of discursive practices by integrating elements of the ETP and this shift was evident between Observation one and four. As teacher reliance on discursive practices increased, so too did the instances of individual teacher/student interaction also increase markedly (see Table 8.10).

In effect, teachers became facilitators of student learning, capable of orchestrating learning experiences that engaged students in individual, group or whole class discussions that tapped into the prior knowledge and built an understanding for the curriculum in a deeper level. As one participant teacher reported:

[The]...one thing about being involved in this project is that it has forced me not just to empty my bag of tricks but to turn it inside out, rip the lining out and shake it really hard to find other things and some of it has worked but I would not say it has worked in terms of the curriculum. The one thing I have had to let go of is the curriculum. If my job is to get these kids to come to school then it is to also to make them be nice to each other and to make them talk appropriately when they come to my classroom and to be able to ask questions in a respectful way. That's been my job.

Participating in MPTDP is not an easy experience for teachers. To one degree or another, teachers took up a deep, reflective and personal analysis of their practice and what was considered to be common practice was often modified or even thrown out in light of that reflection.

For example, in a discursive classroom, the all-encompassing need to cover the curriculum recedes into the background of the learning experience. Curriculum becomes a means to an end, the means to a deeper understanding - of life, of new skills, critical thinking, new understandings, of possibilities - not an end in itself. In a discursive classroom, there is a palpable sense of excitement within this new environment and student behavioral issues gradually diminish into the background of the experience.

The move towards more culturally responsive practice within a discursive classroom represented a considerable effort by each teacher. For example, the time spent with MPTDP staff was considerable. Lessons had to be refined and, often, significantly revised, to become more culturally responsive. Routine classroom practices had to be revisited as they explicitly worked to develop stronger relationships with students. As one participant reflected:

[O]ne of the things that has happened as part of this project is that you forced me to view my own teaching strategies and make some really hard choices about what to do and what not to do in my classroom. So, I have taught way differently this year than in the past and it has been exhausting because I don't learn new things easily, but it is not a bad thing though. I don't think it is bad at all. The things that have worked I won't just use with my FNMI kids. I will use on all of my kids.

Other teachers provided these reflections about the MPTDP experience:

- It is rare that I get professional feedback. I found it refreshing and encouraging.
- Enjoyable experience-well worth the effort.
- The experience has opened my mind and my heart to all of my [Indigenous] students.
- The process has been very interesting to be a part of. I look forward to seeing how things develop and progress that can be made.
- Very positive to see some of the results.

Participating teachers generally found the MPTDP experience to be worthwhile from several perspectives. First, meaningful professional feedback by peers or by principals is a rare experience for many of the participating teachers. A senior leader may visit a classroom once in a semester but the depth of the related feedback does not equal MPTDP. The Observation Tool results in an extremely detailed snap-shot of a teacher in action and how a segment of their Indigenous students is responding.

Teachers on the whole, found the MPTDP Feedback to be mind, (or heart) opening. By participating teachers moved beyond what was considered to be normal into a realm of teaching that was experimental in nature, but informed by the ETP, and they were supported throughout the process.

Each of the participating teachers took a calculated, thoughtful pedagogic risk and those risks came with a price, exhaustion.

I've never been this exhausted. And I'm only teaching one course, formally. But I [have] a stack full of people that I am trying to chase. And that is just tiring me out.

Another admitted,

[C]an I just say how glad I am that you people are [as] exhausted as I am? Because that is empowering to think just how hard we all work and like it's just, I cannot believe how tired I am.

Teachers' efforts to realign their pedagogic beliefs begins with a process of personal reflection of the in-depth evidence gathered during each Observation. The ensuing *professional learning conversations* between teacher and MPTDP facilitators is the catalyst for that reflection. The resulting realignment from Socratic to discursive practice was entirely up to the participating teacher, as was the depth of the evolution of their classroom practices to better serve Indigenous students.

As might be expected teacher narratives shared in the concluding Talking Circle held in June struggled to focus on their successes.

### Failures vs. Successes vs. Relevance

Teachers in Ontario are dedicated professionals who genuinely care about their students and their success. In our in-service teaching and research experiences, we have witnessed many excellent teachers who have gone to great lengths to enhance student lives and learning. While teachers are sometimes worn down by policy directives, they are motivated when respected for their adaptive expertise and offered the tools needed to address the learning needs of the students in front of them. This is especially true of teachers in schools such as Churchill CVI who are challenged by Indigenous students who are not well served by school and society.

I know we aren't supposed to focus on our failures and we should focus on the successes, yet at the end of the day...I know that there is pressure that we feel. It comes from the heart, that you want these kids to do well, and so you think, okay, I have tried to engage you in conversation and I wanted to get to know you [Indigenous student] and still ....at the end of the day I didn't succeed. I wonder where did I go wrong? [Participant sighs in frustration.]

The narratives of teachers in the Talking Circle, which were deeply reflective, exemplified dedication and commitment to improving professional practice and connecting with Indigenous students in order to promote school success.

Another teacher added,

It's just like a firefighter if you ask them how many [they saved] he says twenty-three and you say, Oh, wow you saved twenty-three! And he says, No, those are the ones I've lost. It's well and good and it's very politically correct to focus on successes and I get that is where...our society is going. But that doesn't solve the problem.

If I measure school over 2000 years of schooling you are always going to have those red zone kids and that's the ones we are faced with because I think quite frankly we are put in a position where everyone should be able to...have a level 1...I get the idea of planting the seed and all that but I am teaching through the lens in this particular case of the [course] curriculum.

Did they cover the [course] stuff? Not because I like them, not because we have a good relationship not because they are showing up. Can they cohesively describe or say to me, if they can't I cannot pass them nor should I. That's not in the best interest of who they are.

It's like saying to the heart surgeon yeah you saw the movie you can probably do it. Here's the scalpel. Go for it. And that's the line we walk ethically without being allowed to bring that out into the light... That underlines teaching where we are supposed to hold some sort of standard of what we would call success and stand behind it and we fight about it in our lunch rooms, we fight about it outside of work. Because we are looking at how well this kid worked damn hard to get that 80, good job and it is a good job. That kid didn't work very hard to get that 55. So that's the angst we are feeling as we are trained in our specific fields. There is no way you would pass someone that couldn't weld a girder to the bridge.

Teachers struggled to exclusively focus on their successes with students. Student failure is always writ large in their minds and in their hearts, but they must also work from a very pragmatic perspective. They are often torn between building meaningful, trusting relationships with Indigenous students, holding those same students accountable for achieving the objectives of the courses they teach and awarding a passing grade.

Many teachers work with Indigenous students that carry the legacy of Residential School and years of previous school experience, provincially and federally funded that have struggled to meet their needs. In this environment, it is not unreasonable to propose that participating MPTDP teachers are placed in a position where they are attempting to retro-fit student success from within a legacy of historic educational failure that can span generations.

For example, in 2004, Dr. Mary-Beth Minthorn-Biggs completed a study in the elementary schools in the Sioux Lookout District First Nations. Minthorn-Biggs found that, “[a]n alarming 93 percent of Native children in Ontario’s far north lag at least two grades behind in school and with little hope of going past high school without help with basic skills” (in Brown, 2004). Although Minthorn-Biggs’ study focusses on Indigenous basic skills of students in the far north of Ontario there is also strong evidence of similar realities in Thunder Bay schools as well that will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter 9.

Suffice it to say that, anecdotal evidence from many MPTDP teachers compliments Minthorn-Biggs’ findings that are obvious barriers to school success and rarely the focus of solutions.

It is within this environment that MPTDP teachers must attempt to champion the importance of education to Indigenous students who may see extremely limited opportunities in their future and as a result seriously question the relevance of education to that future or have not acquired the basic skills necessary for school success. For those Indigenous students from remote First Nation communities attending schools in the south, this is can be especially true.

We have a chunk of students here that are very weak here below the regular (inaudible) our essential [One] student and he's weak and I've been trying to encourage him for a couple...years for sure. You know just learn your skills, develop your skills, your math skills, your English skills. Develop them and it'll help you in life and all of this stuff and then finally...[I say to him] it looks like you're not going to pass, you're not doing all the stuff here [on] your list...I was trying to get him to do a little bit more for that final push and he's like...I don't need this. On my reserve you need, I think he said, grade 2. You don't need an education to get a job he says only certain people get jobs or you just stay at home. [T]here's only so many jobs on the reserve so, you can stand in line but if there's only 10 jobs and only 10 people are getting jobs and everybody else on the reserve is not getting jobs. [S]o then you get a government cheque? Yep. And so why should I work so hard and do it? [W]hat do I say to that? How do I fight that question?

The truth is, as long as the successful completion of a high school education is unilaterally connected to future employment, Indigenous youth - with few employment opportunities in their future, struggle to see the relevance of education, have learned to be distrustful of schools, teachers and principals - the response to any initiative designed to increase attendance will be poor.

What will have a positive impact over time are teachers, administrators, schools and boards of education that work from within a *culturally responsive pedagogy of relations*.

Plante-Dupuis, (2016) work that focuses on improving school attendance in northern Ontario writes,

Relationship building is fundamental to any strategy for improving student attendance. Students are more likely to go to school if they know someone cares whether they show up. Trusting relationships whether with teachers, mentors, coaches or other caring adults are critical to encouraging families and students to seek out help to overcome barriers to attendance (p. 10).

Embedding the type of sweeping change necessary in Indigenous education in provincial schools will be a long and costly effort.

## You Have to Do More than Just Show Up

The eight district school boards in the Thunder Bay region have reported the highest absenteeism in the province. One 2016 study (see Alex, 2017; Plante-Dupuis, 2016) suggests persistent absenteeism of an “average of two days per month in elementary school stand a sixty percent chance of dropping out in grade nine.” In response the eight Northwestern school boards, including the Lakehead DSB, launched the *I'M HERE* campaign in the spring of 2017 in an effort to increase school attendance (Alex, 2017).

The associated Plante-Dupuis (2017) toolkit, designed to provide direction to school administrators to reduce student absences, does not specifically mention Indigenous school attendance in the northwest however, in a related article published by the authors (Hodson & Kitchen, 2015), “estimated that between 6,824 [self-identified Indigenous population] and 9,139 [estimated Indigenous population] students were enrolled in provincially funded schools” in those same eight school boards in Northwestern Ontario or approximately, “forty percent” of the entire population (p. 10).

Applying the perspectives offered by Plante-Dupuis (2016) and Hodson and Kitchen (2015) to the attendance data from the four observations strongly suggests that Indigenous absenteeism continues to be a significant and an obvious contributing factor to Indigenous school success. For example, only forty percent of the Indigenous marker students were in attendance during Observation Four.

The question has to be asked, why do Indigenous students not attend school? The answer is complex and heavily nuanced but there are a number of contributing factors that can shape a more robust strategy.

In 2001, the most common reason (twenty-four percent) given by Indigenous youth aged 15 to 24 for leaving elementary and secondary school was simply that they were “bored” (Statistics Canada, 2003A, p. 18). Boredom is the result of a lack of personal relevance and a resulting detachment from school. It is essentially an admission of weariness from an unsuccessful search for school relevance in the lives of Indigenous students.

One participating teacher shared their thoughts on the issue of Indigenous attendance:

I[‘ve] had this conversation...many times this week, this year, the concept that if you're here that's a good start. What I'm seeing is, [Indigenous students] are here but then it becomes a holding pattern. There is no forward movement. So, summer comes along and real life happens we see them back in September we do the whole cycle again. We are moving them forward. So as a metric, as a teacher if I was to measure whether I was successful [over] many years I would not be successful just because they show up. Does that make sense?

Another teacher admitted:

My attendance hasn't gotten a whole lot better but it hasn't gotten a whole lot worse. But I have lost kids and they were kids at the beginning that I thought they were going to be my target kids. I am going to be so amazing that I'm going to make them want to come to class. And they never did. So, and you kind of have to resolve yourself to that I can't, what's the starfish thing? That I can't save them all but I can save a couple. Yeah, I can save this one.

Both teachers provide an informed insight into the *holding pattern cycle* that has many Indigenous students literally just marking time in schools. Teachers are literally working against a myriad of factors – economics, intergenerational effects, past educational failure, irrelevance – in an effort to get Indigenous students to just show up, let alone meet the requirements of the course.

It is unlikely that focusing on increasing Indigenous school attendance alone will increase school success, or grades, or graduation rates. Attendance then, is not the issue, it is just a symptom of a much greater and more complex dis-ease that is the result of a complex set of factors that demand an equally complex strategy to cure the dis-ease. To that end, chapter 9 presents an emergent strategy for consideration.

## The Cultures, Histories & Perspectives in Professional Development Debate

In this study, the twelve participating teachers that volunteered their time were desperately looking for variety of new tools to address important issues affecting Indigenous student's school experience. When asked about their hopes and expectations for the study during the Learning Circle held in February 2017, participating teachers wrote:

- Not to be the bad guy.
- To find what works, the things in the student that turns them onto education.
- To find the things that clicks for them.
- To listen and attend to PD leaders
- Connections to all students and engage all students.
- Understand where students come from.
- What can I do to bring pedagogy into their life?
- To listen, to observe and share stories. To do right by my students.
- How can I help my kids?
- How can I engage them and graduate them?
- Help my kids.
- Engage all of my students.
- Help First Nations students help themselves.

- Help First Nation students retain who they are.
- Help First Nations students be successful in the world.

Much of this teacher testimony, gathered at the first MPTDP Learning Circle, provides a glimpse of teacher's fears and hopes for their involvement in the MPTDP process, but little of this testimony can be linked to the predominant focus of in-service professional teacher development in Ontario, Indigenous "cultures, histories and perspectives". Moreover, much of the associated Indigenous research literature does not support this in-service professional development focus for teachers.

Access to *traditional knowledge* throughout the school day is considered crucial to positive self-image, well-being and connected to Indigenous school success (see Battiste, 2013; Bishop, O'Sullivan & Berryman, 2010; Cajete, 1994; Castellano, Davis, & Lahache, 2000; Chandler, 2005; & Hampton, 1995). However, *traditional knowledge* cannot be rendered down to the mere overview of "cultures, histories and perspectives" and then imparted by predominantly non-Indigenous teachers. The transfer of *traditional knowledge* is more complex than can be comprehended in an afternoon professional development session, dedicated to "cultures, histories and perspectives". A more effective strategy is to support teachers to become facilitators of an Indigenous student's exploration of their *traditional knowledge* by making room for that exploration in their assignments and in classrooms.

For example, one participating teacher developed an in-class assignment associated to an Indigenous themed novel that included an analysis of the plot through the Anishinabe Seven Grandfather Teachings, considered by many to be the epitome of *traditional knowledge*. In this instance, the teacher, with support from the YOW, was not an expert in that *traditional knowledge* but that did not inhibit them from encouraging an exploration by students, Indigenous and non-Indigenous. This pedagogic approach is markedly different from the expectations many teachers fear associated to working within a culturally responsive pedagogy of relations.

Another teacher admitted:

What I find from other teachers telling me...that they are just scared to teach a Native studies class or scared to incorporate parts of Aboriginal culture because...they don't know...they [fear] they are going to do something incorrectly...they are going to insult someone. They don't want to insult an Elder. [T]hey don't know how to do it.

We have witnessed the bewildered expressions on teachers' faces when they realize they are expected to become the font of *traditional knowledge* in their schools after being presented with a library of resources. Teacher's predictable response is informed by an innate understanding that these expectations are inappropriate at best and can be understood to be a form of cultural appropriation at worse.

**Little Brown Baby**

There was a racist comment that an Indigenous student faced at the local mall this spring. The female Parenting Class student took her little baby doll everywhere she went as was necessary for the assignment to simulate what it is like to have an infant.

She and her friends went to the mall one day and an older woman looked at the doll and said to her, "Your baby is brown."

The student responded, "I'm brown, of course I have a brown baby."

"That's too bad. She's going to die. The baby will die soon." The lady replied matter-of-factly.

The surprised student, with the support of friends, told the women she couldn't talk to her like that.

The next day at school the student shared her story with teachers and classmates, Indigenous and non-Indigenous. This generated discussions about what the older woman might have been thinking and why she made such a racist statement. It was said that perhaps she had been listening to the news, hearing about Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls or the recent local deaths in the river, that maybe she was confused or concerned.

In the end teachers stated that they were impressed that the young student had politely stood up for herself, confronted the racist remark, and that those involved openly discussed the incident. The ordeal became an opportunity for everyone to learn from, even the woman at the mall might now choose her words more carefully.

There are exceptions to this notion however, and a participating teacher provided an example of struggle that had connections to working within *traditional knowledge*:

[W]hen you're looking at someone else's culture...I feel it's rude to call someone on [a behavioural issue associated to their culture]. I had one [student] who was just very disrespectful. [I reminded the student that] one of the Grandfather Teachings is to respect your elders and [the student responded], "I don't follow those teachings." [But] it did help. Even though [the student] ...could look at you with a look that would kill [the student] was actually a little more respectful the next day.

Again, this is an example of cultural co-constructing that occurs between teachers and MPTDP facilitators during *professional learning conversations* after In-class Observations. These conversations open opportunities for teachers to co-construct strategies around specific Indigenous student issues. In this instance, the student's behavior, an outcome of a life altering loss, were understandable but not an excuse for disrespect. Coincidentally, the teacher had suffered the same loss at the same age and had shared that with the student. He allowed himself to be vulnerable and took a risk by sharing his experience to build a relationship. The facilitators also suggested calling the student on the behavior and referring to the related Grandfather Teaching and the strategy worked, to a degree.

Both of these examples of how teachers can work from within a position of *traditional knowledge* by responding to culture without being an expert, results in students building a multitude of relationships with their culture, themselves and with the teacher.

These examples of teachers working within a *culturally responsive pedagogy of relations* are dependent on facilitators who are cultural experts and educators who provide support to participating teachers, prompt pedagogic reflection and assist with building strategies that address the needs of Indigenous students. If teachers in Thunder Bay are to continue to successfully engage the Indigenous students in their classrooms, they require programs like the MPTDP that offer in-depth pedagogic support that transcends the prevailing professional development focus of, “cultures, histories and perspectives.”



# CHAPTER 9:

## Conclusion and Recommendations

### Conclusion

The preceding chapters detail the results of a research study that follows an educational innovation to reveal the multiple impacts of the Biwaase'aa Program and Maamaawisiwin Professional Teacher Development Program [MPTDP], that work in concert to enhance access to *traditional* and *contemporary* knowledge in the school experience of Indigenous students (MOE, 2007).

Biwaase'aa research conclusively demonstrates statistically, a continued improvement in all academic indicators from the year previous to intake in the program, to first, second and third year of enrollment.

Maamaawisiwin research has statistically demonstrated a significant increase in discursive practice by participating teachers that is linked to increases in marker Indigenous student engagement and to their final grades.

Likewise, the narratives of Indigenous students, their parent/caregivers, Biwaase'aa Youth Outreach Workers and teachers participating in MPTDP provide a holistic insight of a related increase in the well-being in all participant groups.

If the province of Ontario is to meet the commitment to significantly improve Indigenous school success, education must move past the current strategies of including *traditional Indigenous knowledge* and *contemporary mainstream knowledge* in schools, by committing resources to innovation that values both knowledge traditions, respects the capacity of Indigenous communities (e.g., Biwaase'aa) and by supporting teachers as they expand their pedagogic practice (e.g., Maamaawisiwin).

What is clear as we move ahead, and well delineated in the related international Indigenous literature, to choose to maintain the status-quo approaches to Indigenous education will only perpetuate the financial, social, economic failures of the past in our collective futures. A better choice, practically, financially and ethically, is to continue to invest in *Biwaase'aa/Maamaawisiwin Education & Research Innovation* in Thunder Bay and consider how the innovation can be strategically scaled-up and spread to other jurisdictions with significant Indigenous school populations.

The evidence gathered during the five months of the second half of the 2016-17 school year, demonstrate an emergent shift in teacher practice and a corresponding shift in Indigenous student

school success indicators. Generally, participating MPTDP teachers valued the support they received and took calculated pedagogic risks and as a result, Indigenous students responded positively. This is a positive beginning that needs to be continued.

To that end, what follows is a holistic strategy that builds on this report's successes.

## Recommendation 1: Extending the Innovation Funding

There is now conclusive statistical evidence that connects Maamaawisiwin Professional Teacher Development Program (MPTDP) with improvements in teacher *contemporary knowledge* practice and involvement with the Biwaase'aa *traditional knowledge* program to Indigenous student success.

The *Biwaase'aa/Maamaawisiwin Education & Research Innovation* has been developed to support the vision statement of the *Framework* (2007) specifically,

- To follow the impact of the Biwaase'aa's *traditional knowledge* program on Indigenous students while,
- Providing Maamaawisiwin Professional Development to teachers to encourage a shift in their *contemporary knowledge* practice on behalf of the learning needs of Indigenous students.

To determine the efficacy of this strategy, the associated research design includes a six-year longitudinal study that follows approximately one-hundred Indigenous students (grade 6 to 12) and fifty high school teachers in Thunder Bay.

Until recently, the associated funding strategy relied on a successful application to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) beginning in year two of the project, that would have theoretically have begun in the 2017-18 school year.

Brock University's Office of Research Services completed an analysis of the project's alignment with current SSHRC success criteria and determined that an application would not be successful at this time. We had hoped that SSHRC's funding criteria would have evolved under the new federal government but, that has not been the case.

## The Proposal

We believe that the *Biwaase'aa/Maamaawisiwin Education & Research Innovation* 2016-17 pilot has definitively generated positive evidence that supports scaling-up as well as an expansion through the Mino Bimaadiziwin strategy that links and validates both *traditional* and *contemporary knowledge* in the hearts of Indigenous students.

As we will not be able to secure SSHRC or other research funding, we are requesting that the Ministry of Education continue to fund this work, ideally an additional two years beginning December of 2017<sup>4</sup>.

## The 2017-18 Commitment

The Brock University and Maamaawisiwin Education Research Centre commitment for the 2017-18 school year for the MPTDP is as follows:

- Continue to work with 1<sup>st</sup> cohort (N=12) and bring them into Level 2 of MPTDP at Churchill.
- Recruit a 2<sup>nd</sup> cohort (N=9) at Churchill beginning at MPTDP Level 1.
- Recruit a 3<sup>rd</sup> cohort (N=9) at Westgate beginning at MPTDP Level 1.

The recent announcement to close Churchill at the end of the 2017-18 school year and amalgamate the school population at Westgate CVI<sup>5</sup> would result in an estimated total Indigenous student population at approximately twenty-five percent. At that point, if this plan is implemented, approximately thirty percent of the total amalgamated teacher population (N=30) at Westgate will have been part of MPTDP. This would ensure a critical mass of discursive practice and measurable increase in Indigenous student success.

## The 2018-19 Commitment

The Brock University and Maamaawisiwin Education Research Centre 2018-19 commitment, at the beginning of the school year, we would continue to recruit new teachers into MPTDP at Westgate. This would include as follows:

- Recruiting a 4<sup>th</sup> cohort (N=9) at Westgate beginning at MPTDP Level 1.
- Working with the 1<sup>st</sup> cohort (N=12) now at Westgate would move to MPTDP Level 3.

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<sup>4</sup> A more detailed proposal of the MPTDP investment will be forwarded to the Ministry of Education in the near future.

<sup>5</sup> During 2016-17 the Westgate student population totaled 775. The number of self-identified Indigenous population totaled 109 or 14 percent of the total student population. At the beginning of 2017-18 the Westgate student population has increased to 836 students. The number of self-identified Indigenous population totaled 142 or 18 percent of the total student population.

- Working with the combined 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> cohorts (N=18) now at Westgate would move to MPTDP Level 2.

By the end of the two-year financial commitment, approximately half of the entire compliment of teachers (N=39) of Westgate CVI would have received MPTDP training and the study would have followed the related academic progress of approximately one-hundred and ninety-five Indigenous marker students of those teachers for as many as three school years. This would provide us with substantial teacher and student data that could inform Indigenous teaching and learning at the school and board. The initial rounds of observation suggest that the model could be mobilized across the province to improve the learning experience of Indigenous students.

### The 2017-19 Biwaase'aa Commitment

In addition, we would continue working/following the academic progress of the Biwaase'aa group of one-hundred Indigenous students, we have now identified approximately half of that goal, for a total of three years or from grade 6 until 12. This would include ongoing site-visits to the five Biwaase'aa elementary schools, presentations to registered children, attendance at Feasts to connect with parents/caregivers, culminating Talking Circles, collection/analysis of the Academic indicators of success and a summative report at the end of each of the two school years.



## Recommendation 2: Mino Bimaadiziwin - An Emergent Strategy

### Looking to the Future - Reading, Writing, Rhythmic & Healing

Indigenous education research (see Battiste, 2013; Bishop, O'Sullivan & Berryman, 2010; Cajete, 1994; Castellano, Davis, & Lahache, 2000; Chandler, 2005; & Hampton, 1995) overwhelmingly demonstrates a nexus of multiple causal elements that can positively or negatively impact the school success of young Indigenous people and often results in predictable outcomes. Consider just one negative outcome that connects school success with the school-to-prison pipeline phenomena:

- In 2011 - 1.8% of Aboriginal adults in Ontario are aged 18+ (Statistics Canada, 2012).
- In 2011 - 29% of Aboriginal people 20-34 had not completed high school in Ontario (Statistics Canada, 2011).
- In 2011 - 11.4% of Aboriginal adults aged 18+ were in Ontario custody. (Kitchen, Hodson & Hodson, p. 65).

Keeping the flood of Indigenous youth out of provincial incarceration begins with all concerned courageously facing these outcomes, carefully considering the related evidence, introducing specific strategic innovation designed to disrupt the cycle, gathering the resulting evidence related to that new outcome, and amending the initiative accordingly.

There are often competing agendas that resist change, even if that resistance means ignoring evidence to the contrary. Often there is the perception that the change required will be too disruptive to the status quo, too costly and somehow power and/or control and/or quality will be eroded, but there is often little evidence to support these positions. An alternative view of this process is such that when power is shared with those who are most affected or at risk are also those that best understand the nuances of the cycle.

From the 2012-13 Biwaase'aa research, all stakeholders have consistently demonstrated a willingness to step outside of the status quo and invest in an innovative initiative that generates reliable evidence of success and gradually expanding the innovation based on that evidence.

The final recommendation is not an exhaustive analysis of the current reality, but rather a snapshot of some of the critical causal elements and a recommended holistic strategy that has the potential to interrupt the predictable results. It is with this in mind that the authors offer the following strategic recommendation.

## Problem Analysis: An Overview

We believe, based on our observations and the research literature, that many of the socio-cultural, socio-economic, socio-cultural, socio-judicial (see Moore & Trevethan, 2002), socio-medical issues including youth suicide (see McBride, & Siegel, 1997) are directly connected to the low levels of school success, including early leaving before the completion of grade 12.

Anecdotal evidence from MPTDP teachers, related to this report, have consistently commented on the low levels of multiple literacies - reading, writing, mathematics - considered to be fundamental to school success (see Minthorn-Biggs in Brown, 2004).

### EQAO

Although by no means a definitive analysis of Indigenous student reading, writing and mathematics capabilities, EQAO assessment does provide a window to student achievement against the learning expectations in the Ontario Curriculum that may have serious implications in future school success.

During the 2016-17 school year approximately one-third (N=32.5 percent) of the student population in the five elementary focus schools were Indigenous (see Table 1.1). The report of the percentage of all students at or above the provincial or board standard of reading, writing and mathematics, in the junior division (grades 4-6) in the same schools during the same year includes:

- Two schools did not meet the board or provincial standard.
- One school exceeded the board and provincial standard in reading and the board standard in writing.
- One school exceeded the board standard in writing only.
- Due to student confidentiality issues - too few students had participated - one school did not report any data.

In just a few short years the Indigenous students in these elementary schools will be attending Westgate CVI.

### Attendance

Whether at elementary, senior elementary or high school, Indigenous attendance continues to be a challenge. The following provides a snap-shot of the issue from the perspective of this study.

- During the Fourth MPTDP Observation of seven participating teachers that occurred between mid-May and mid-June of 2017, only forty percent of the Indigenous marker students were in attendance.

- The twenty-three registered Biwaase'aa elementary students associated to this study were absent from school a total of five-hundred and eighty-nine days during the 2016-17 school year.

## Facing the Issue

The cycle of Indigenous school failure is the result of a number of causal elements, too numerous to cover in this report. All conspire to send a message to young Indigenous people that there is no place for them in education and little future in their lives. They are stuck in a quagmire of victimization.

To provide an alternative perspective, consider the words of Indigenous students that participated in this study.

**Researcher 1:** Didn't you say you were going to go into nursing?

**Participant:** Yeah and I want to go into the northern communities because sometimes they don't have that much hands-on nursing or they don't have...Aboriginal nurses and I think they would feel more comfortable if they see an Aboriginal nurse helping them. Especially...a young-women coming to the nurse for birth control or any feminine things. I think that would be a big help.

.....

**Researcher 1:** Would you say that [Biwaase'aa] had a profound impact on you?

**Participant:** Yes, I would. I would say it had a profound impact on me because it taught me different teachings... And also, it helped me take a different view point on things...I think become more-wise, not just as a Anishinabe person but just as myself you know? Just helping me understand why things are certain way or what to do in certain times or you know, I found [Biwaase'aa] helped broaden my horizon[s].

.....

**Researcher 1:** What made [you make the] decision to study in university? Was being in the [Biwaase'aa] program, did it have anything to do with that?

**Participant:** A little bit yeah. I think...for the longest time I always wanted to work with Aboriginal people or even work on my reserve. It didn't matter what kind of job I got just work somewhere close to where my ties are. But also, [the] Biwaase'aa program, it helped a lot in terms of you know putting me in the direction that I wanted to go. Yeah, I can say that it was an influence for me.

.....

**Participant:** I think kids, people should be involved with the Biwaase'aa program that come from up north because it's a big step to come all the way to a big city with different people. Like they're used to being around you know, on the reserve [with]...mostly family

and they are around that all of the time and then coming to a place where they don't know people. They should include Biwaase'aa because that's a place where you feel comfortable. Like I feel comfortable being around Native people and like I feel like they should [be] involved, because they need a place to be comfortable and they can't be comfortable in a classroom they just don't even know these people.

.....

Consider the clarity of these young people's analysis, the depth of their personal change and their level of commitment to facilitate change in the lives of their own peoples. It is nothing less than young Indigenous people moving away from the victimization of the past, building a deeper consciousness and seeing a future in which they can participate in a meaningful way. None of these students come from a privileged background, nor are their families particularly well off economically. What they have in common is a strong sense of identity, a recognition that they do not have to replicate their family's history in their lives, they see alternatives and that understanding comes out of their association with Biwaase'aa. Imagine if that energy, that clarity of thought, that selflessness could be generated in the hearts and minds of all Indigenous students attending schools in Thunder Bay?

These students may well be in the minority of the Indigenous experience of education in Ontario, but they are not an unexplainable educational anomaly. These students are the specific result of strategic initiative that began in 2007 with the *Framework* that opened the doors to Indigenous *traditional knowledge* educators, like Biwaase'aa YOWs, that have disrupted that causal cycle that has resulted in staggering levels of Indigenous early leaving.

Now contrast those four students and their perception of their futures with the student's story, as told by a MPTDP teacher.

**Participant:** We have a chunk of students here that are very weak here below the regular, academic or essential [levels]. [One] student, and he's weak, and I've been trying to encourage him for a couple... years for sure. You know just learn your skills, develop your skills, your math skills, your English skills. Develop them and it'll help you in life and all of this stuff and then finally... [I say to him] it looks like you're not going to pass, you're not doing all the stuff here [on] your list... I was trying to get him to do a little bit more for that final push and he's like... I don't need this. On my reserve you need, I think he said, grade 2. You don't need an education to get a job he says only certain people get jobs or you just stay at home. [T]here's only so many jobs on the reserve so, you can stand in line but if there's only 10 jobs and only 10 people are getting jobs and everybody else on the reserve is not getting jobs. [S]o then you get a government cheque? Yep. And so why should I work so hard and do it? [W]hat do I say to that? How do I fight that question?

.....

We know in part, that early leaving results in a minimum of a decade of Indigenous social alienation before returning to school that can often be punctuated by unprecedented levels of - violence, substance abuse, suicide, incarceration, health issues, unemployment and/or economic inequity - just to name a few, and it makes sense. What options does a young Indigenous person have without a grade 12 diploma? Higher education opportunities are non-existent, employment opportunities are limited, there is a sense of shame, hopelessness, purposelessness that is often only relieved through some form of self-medicating through drugs, or alcohol, or violence, or risky sex, etc.

How do we stop the exit of Indigenous youth from schools and into the streets? How do we provide the type of life changing experience so evident in the narratives of the four Biwaase'aa students? How do we inspire this generation and enlist the energy, the selflessness, the hopefulness of this generation of Indigenous youth to heal the realities of their communities?

The findings associated to this study reveal a clear link between improvements in Indigenous school success and the *Biwaase'aa/Maamaawisiwin Education & Research Innovation*, that supports the continued need to do things differently. The partners in the Innovation, Biwaase'aa/Shkoday, Lakehead DSB, Brock University, Maamaawisiwin Education Research Centre, are involved in a number of other initiatives designed to support Indigenous school success that are complimentary to the goals of the Innovation that can be more closely integrated to maximize the results under one banner. For example, just as Biwaase'aa saw an increase of teacher contacts through the ongoing MPTDP referrals, the success of the *I'M HERE* campaign launched in the spring of 2017 by Lakehead DSB can be leveraged through the joint effort of the partners.

To that end, the following umbrella strategy is an expanded evolution that brings into a closer, intra-supportive relationship in support of Indigenous school success.

## The Strategy

The recent decision to close Churchill CVI at the end of the 2017-18 school year and amalgamate the population of students and teachers at Westgate CVI<sup>7</sup> will result in an estimated total Indigenous student population at approximately twenty-five percent and creates an opportunity to implement a dynamic vision – Mino Bimaadiziwin.

Mino Bimaadiziwin, literal translation, *the good way of Anishinabe life*, is a holistic program that integrates both *traditional and contemporary knowledge* traditions in the Indigenous high school experience. The purpose of Mino Bimaadiziwin is to inspire and recruit this generation of Indigenous students to take up the ongoing goal of Healing Our Communities. To achieve that goal requires a multitude of highly educated Indigenous young women and men, grounded in both

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<sup>7</sup> During 2016-17 the Westgate student population totaled 775. The number of self-identified FNMI population totaled 109 or 14 percent of the total student population.

*traditional* and *contemporary knowledge* traditions. Mino Bimaadiziwin is a joint venture of the Biwaase'aa/Shkoday, Lakehead DSB, Brock University, Maamaawisiwin Education Research Centre and the Ministry of Education located at Westgate CVI, open to all Indigenous students and includes, but is not limited to the following elements:

## Biwaase'aa/Shkoday and Lakehead DSB

- Mino Bimaadiziwin is positioned as an elite program of study designed to support Indigenous students interested in dedicating their lives to the healing of their nations.
- Mino Bimaadiziwin includes college level courses - for the most part Indigenous high school graduates will choose to attend college rather than university.
- Credit for successful completion of the Little Eagles Program in art.
- Identification of Indigenous students struggling with basic skills - specific supports for reading, writing, math.
- Revitalization of Biwaase'aa to include - assertive recruitment, inspiring speakers, ongoing Elder-in-Residence program.
- Training for all principals at partnering schools.

Although Biwaase'aa is part of the school experience in Thunder Bay, it is still an island isolated from the dominant school culture. Integration of Biwaase'aa and by extension *traditional knowledge* with schools and *contemporary knowledge* will only come through stakeholder collaboration. This collaboration results in a critical mass of consciousness that is shared in the minds and hearts of all stakeholders.

To achieve this recommendation before the fall of 2017-18 school year, Biwaase'aa/Shkoday, Lakehead DSB, Brock University, Maamaawisiwin Education Research Centre and the Ministry of Education should be meeting immediately to develop this strategy more fully.

## Recommendation 3: The Ministry of Education

### Extending Biwaase'aa Funding

A decade of evidence has consistently demonstrated that Biwaase'aa/Shkoday is both financially accountable and the research evidence has demonstrated a direct relationship between Biwaase'aa enrollment and improvements in Indigenous academic indicators.

The historic last-minute funding model that proved to be detrimental to the operation of Biwaase'aa was ended by the Ministry after the 2012-13 research study and the resulting three-year funding commitment has maintained the employment of a cadre of highly skilled YOWs, built new program initiatives across all partnering schools, and improved the school experience of Indigenous students.

That three-year funding commitment made by the Ministry of Education ends in August of 2018 and coincides with the launching of the Mino Bimaadiziwin initiative that should coincide with the MPTDP research.

Given all of this, we recommend that the Ministry of Education work with Biwaase'aa/Shkoday to identify an increased investment in Mino Bimaadiziwin and commit to a five-year funding strategy.



## Recommendation 4: Youth Outreach Workers

It is time to formally recognize Biwaase'aa YOWs as the *traditional knowledge* educators that they are by acknowledging their status as Anishinabe educators – Cha-Nishnabe-Ki-no-mah-ta-ga-ing and to promote that title change across the territory (see Recommendation 5).

It is also time to further develop the teaching capacities and improve the professional certification of Biwaase'aa teachers. While there are no educational programs geared to Indigenous YOWs, some existing programs might be helpful, and could perhaps be offered in off-campus locations. Two options include:

- A recognized teacher education certification program such as the Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (ATEP) at the Primary/Junior level through the University of Ottawa, or
- The Aboriginal Adult Education Certificate Program offered through Brock University's Tecumseh Centre, and focuses on Indigenous knowledge, leadership and curriculum development and could be adapted to local needs.

Taking up an Aboriginal teacher education program could result in a Biwaase'aa teacher who meets the regulatory requirements of the province and enhances the professional partnerships with *contemporary knowledge* teachers and principals in partnering schools.



## Recommendation 5: Promoting the FNMI Framework

At this time *Biwaase'aa/Maamaawisiwin Education & Research Innovation* is the only program of its kind in Ontario that both supports the vision of the *Framework* and has revealing startling evidence of success. In a city where negative press associated to young Indigenous people is a daily occurrence, this innovation is a rare good news story that should be widely disseminated through local, national media and presented at international forums.

An increase in awareness in the general public's consciousness means a wider acceptance, increased enrollments and can increase private sector funding as well. Everybody wants to be part of a winner and that begins with the following:

- Compile a series of Talking Points drawn from this study to focus all promotional materials, media interviews and print advertising.
- As part of the promotional strategy, develop a series of press releases, and formal presentations to present details of the study that focus on the Talking Points for:
  - District School Board Trustees.
  - LDSB teachers.
  - Chief & Council, Fort William First Nation.
  - Nishnawbe Aski Nation, Union of Ontario Indians-Anishinabek, Chiefs of Ontario, Treaty 3 & 5.
  - Ontario Aboriginal Head Start Association.
  - Private Sector Funders.
  - Local media - print, radio & television.
  - National media – APTN, CBC.

The *Biwaase'aa/Maamaawisiwin Education & Research Innovation* and the proposed Mino Bimaadiziwin strategy are unique to the education landscape of this province and deserves to be shared with a wider global Indigenous education community.

There are four regular scheduled education conferences that include Indigenous educators/researchers – The Aboriginal Policy Research Conference (APRC), The American Education and Research Association's Indigenous Special Interest Groups (AERA); the World Indigenous People's Conference on Education (WIPCE); and the Canadian Society for Studies in Education Aboriginal Special Interest Group (CSSE).

We recommend that all future research budgets include funding for a contingent that includes representation from Biwaase'aa/Shkoday, Lakehead DSB, Brock University and Maamaawisiwin Education Research Centre Management.



## Finally

Revealing the multiple evidence of *Biwaase'aa/Maamaawisiwin Education & Research Innovation* and the emergent *Mino Bimaadiziwin* strategy success will not be achieved in one school year, but will take a concerted and sustained effort that follows and supports Indigenous students, their parent/caregivers, YOWs and teachers through elementary, senior elementary and the high school years.

Only together, acting in partnership can all stakeholders make the vision of the *First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (2007) a reality in Thunder Bay and, ultimately, for Indigenous people across Ontario.



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