OSHKI-WENJACK

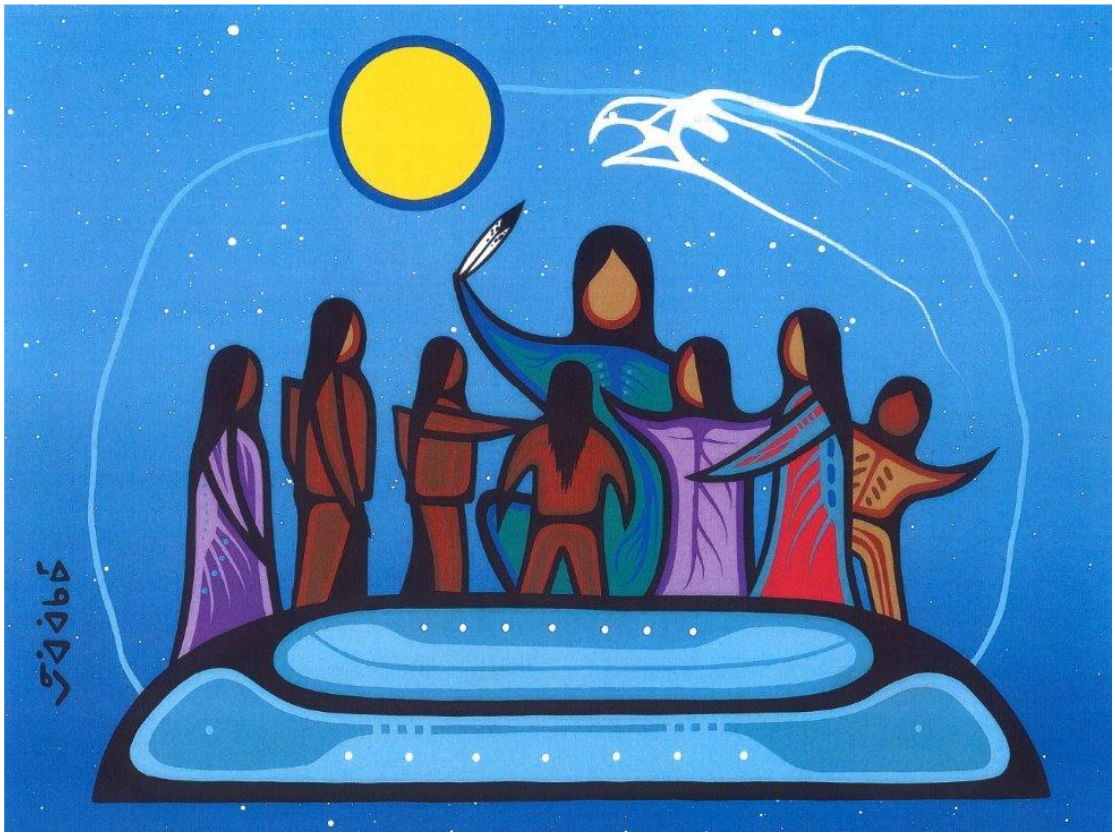
OSHKI-PIMACHE-O-WIN
THE WENJACK EDUCATION INSTITUTE

2019

Anishininiiwi Awaashishiiw Kihkinohamaakewi Niikaanihtamaakew

Indigenous Early Childhood Education Professional Development Program

~A Summative Research Report~



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SHKDAY
IGNITING THE SPIRIT WITHIN

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This report was made possible in part through the support of the Government of Canada. We greatly appreciate their generous support but emphasize the following: the views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of Oshki-Pimache-O-Win: The Wenjack Education Institute, and their respective Directors, supporters, donors, partners, the Government of Canada, or the Government of Ontario. Quotation with appropriate credit is permissible. The information presented in this report is current at the time of printing."

Cover Painting: "Next Generation" by Kevin Belmore, Ojibway Artist, Thunder Bay, Ontario.

We gratefully acknowledge the support and thank Indigenous Services of Canada.

Indigenous Services Canada | Services aux Autochtones Canada

This professional development program and the associated research study would not be possible without the vision and ongoing support of Ms Rosie Mosquito, Executive Director of Oshki-Pinace-O-Win: The Wenjack Education Institute.

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This executive summary presents an overview of the research associated with a two-year educational innovation designed to increase the leadership capacities of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Early Childhood Educators (IECE) working in a First Nation and Indigenous urban context in Northwestern Ontario, Anishinabek territory.

The Education Reality in Northwestern Ontario

The total reported population in the 0 to 19 age group is 16,471 in the approximately seventy-seven communities located in Northwestern Ontario. This demographic group represents almost forty-one percent of the total population in the territory (*N*=40,307).

Projecting the thirty-five percent graduation rate (Statistics Canada, 2018A; Statistics Canada, 2018B) across the total 0 to 19 age group in those communities would mean that some 5,765 will not complete high school.

These communities are culturally, linguistically, as well as historically diverse with equally diverse aspirations for the future. Unaddressed, the potential of thirty-five percent of the current generation of the population not completing high school and the potential trauma that reality represents compounds the intergenerational trauma (Bombay, 2015), as well as erodes the future human resource so desperately needed to continue the momentum of self-determination. What should be equally clear is that maintaining the status quo is not only untenable, but is tantamount to a cultural genocide.

Overcoming the status quo will require enacting sweeping innovation at all levels of education which will in turn, necessitate in-service educators acquiring new skill-sets.

Envisioning an Educational Innovation

For almost a decade Oshki-Pimache-O-Win: The Wenjack Education Institute, has offered an Early Childhood Education Program that has accredited numerous Indigenous Early Childhood Educators (IECE), many currently employed in First Nation early learning centres across Northwestern Ontario (see Table 4.1).

The development of Oshki-Wenjack's In-Service Indigenous Early Childhood Education Professional Development Program (Program) was a strategic innovation that began in 2017. Concerned with their ongoing professional development (PD) needs, the 2017 graduating IECE class and alumni came together in a Needs Assessment Talking Circle, sponsored by Oshki-Wenjack.

That Needs Assessment was foundational to the development and implementation of the Program that was designed to enhance the capacities of IECEs in those communities by expanding the Indigenous Early Childhood Educator's innovation skill-set at a local level. The

results of the Needs Assessment were subsequently organized using the Vision Medicine Wheel Teaching (see Figure 1.1). This particular Teaching contends that for every vision to become a realty require certain relationships and specific knowledge will dictate a related series of actions.

Based on the result of that Needs Assessment, Oshki-Wenjack developed a PD strategy that included a three-month online preparatory course work, two one-week long institutes and a related summative research study.

PD Strategy

Elements of the PD strategy included (see Appendix 1 and 2),

- Online Preparatory Course Work (ran November 2017 to January 15, 2018) was a survey course that delved into the related international literature and encouraged a discursive learning environment.
- Institute One (ran February 11 to 17, 2018) brought together twenty-eight IECEs from seventeen communities to establish a knowledge baseline in a wide array of specific subject areas related to community education innovation, funded through INAC's New Paths for Education.
- Institute Two (ran August 27 to 31, 2018) brought together sixteen senior IECEs managers from the same communities and was designed to increase the teaching skills necessary to address the cultural, linguistic, and land-based education needs of the 0 to 12-year-old demographic and to enhance the innovation skillset and the early childhood education services of those communities. In addition, this Institute included Shkoday's Aboriginal Head Start Biwaase'aa culture programs for those participant's families including, infants (*N*=2), preschoolers (*N*=3) and school aged (*N*=5) children. In part this was created to encourage IECEs to attend but it was also intended to provide examples of highly successful programs designed to enhance cultural identity among childcare and school aged populations.

Research Strategy

The body of research literature that focuses on IECE in Canada is extrmely limited, this is further compounded by a lack of literature associated to the in-service professional development of IECEs working in a First Nation context. And yet the lack of school success of First Nation children is almost a universal Canadian reality (see Battiste, 2013) in a population where one-third of First Nation people are 14 years-of-age or younger (see Statistic Canada, 2017).

To overcome this research shortfall Oshki-Wenjack combined the PD strategy mentioned above with a two-part research strategy. The first-part of the strategy revealed the impact of the two Institutes from the perspective of the IECE participants and is complete.

The second part of the research, and the subject of this project, looks to study the PD strategy from the perspective of the impacts on the related First Nation communities.

The Research Study's Purpose, Objectives & Method

The results of the Program's summative research study relied on four Wildfire Sessions in four First Nation communities and included local Elders, Registered ECEs, childcare workers, support staff and parents as the participants in those sessions.

The Purpose & Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the summative inquiry strategy was to reveal the impact of Institute One and Institute Two on IECE practice to achieve the two main research objectives, as well as a number of related sub-topics.

Objective 1. To qualitatively assess the impact of the Professional Development Program to enhance the local ECE curriculum inclusions in the 0 to 6 and 7 to 12 year-old-age groups, including:

a) Land-based education, cultural teachings, outdoor play,

b) Integrating language (local dialect).

c) Brain Development, creating resources, including iconography, creating a holistic learning environment.

d) Nutrition education, gathering and harvesting traditional foods.

Objective 2. To qualitatively assess the impact of the Program to enact the expanded education innovation skill-set in a local First Nation context, including:

a) Proposal development, proposal strategies, budgeting, writing.

b) IECE innovation-visioning, relations, knowledge, and action planning

c) Facilitating community-based IECE innovation

The Research Study's Method

Four First Nation communities were purposely selected from IECE's communities attending Institute One and Two. In part, the selected communities were chosen to represent the four Provincial Territorial Organizations and included two remote fly-in, as well as two First Nations accessible by road. Those communities selected also represented the four cardinal directions – one from the east, one from the south, one from the west and one from the north.

The selected communities also included a sample of each category of childcare centre including, two Aboriginal Head Start Programs, which are also regulated Licensed Childcare

Centres, one stand-alone Licensed Childcare Centre, and one stand-alone Aboriginal Head Start Program.

An aggregate demographic profile of the selected First Nation communities would include:

- Average Total Population: 850
- Average Total Population 0 to 19 Years: 345
- Median Age: 25 Years

What is especially interesting to note from the aggregate profile of the selected First Nation communities is the population 0 to 19 years of age. This demographic group, considered to be the typical school years, represents almost half of the entire aggregate population (*N*=41%).

At the same time, the median age of 25 years suggests that the population of the participating communities is young, well within the typical childbearing years.

Demographically these data suggest that the Indigenous population wave of school aged children is just beginning to build and will bring even more children into First Nation and urban education in Northwestern Ontario.

Qualitative Analysis of the Narratives

During the winter of 2019 representatives of the Knowledge Collective traveled to each of the four selected First Nation communities for an average of two days. Those community visits, defined as Wildfire Sessions (see Kompf & Hodson, 2000), allowed the Knowledge Collective and the potential participants the opportunity to further solidify relationships with each other, develop a fuller understanding of the early childhood centre, demystify the research, and answer questions about the study in general.

At the end of each Wildfire Session, a Wildfire Circle was convened that was open to a wide cross-section of participants including IECEs that participated in Institute One and / or Two, as well as those who did not participate in the Institutes including a local Elder, associated childcare workers, support staff, parents, etc.[1]

Each Wildfire Circle ran for approximately sixty minutes and was digitally recorded. Those recordings were subsequently transcribed and underwent analysis, including coding and categorizing into key idea units. The idea units are then collapsed into categorical clusters or themes that reflect the collective experience of those in each Circle.

[1] The purpose of including participants in the Wildfire Circles who did not directly attend the Institutes was twofold. First, by attending the Circles, non-Institute participants may have witnessed an evolution in the IECE practices and may have shared some insights relevant to that shift in practice. Second, involving a wider cross-section of First Nation IECE participants, widens the shared experience of Indigenous research which builds a deeper understanding for Indigenous research practices.

The resulting themes then underwent a rigorous comparative 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.

Hypothetically, it is reasonable to propose that the diverse nature and experience of all participant groups from the four chosen First Nations will identify both common and divergent patterns of impact.

To maintain the anonymity of the four First Nation childcare centres are represented as follows:

First Nation Child Care Centre One, [FNC1]

First Nation Childcare Centre Two, [FNC2]

First Nation Childcare Centre Three, [FNC3]

First Nation Childcare Centre Four, [FNC4]

Highlights of Success

The narratives of IECEs are replete with practical examples of change that can be directly attributed to participation in the PD innovation. Consider the following.

Seeking Out Leadership Opportunities

An increased in leadership capacities resulted in multiple instances of increased leadership involvement. IECEs shared that they have run for council positions in their communities, accepted positions on education councils representing the early years and stood for election in the Ontario College of Early Childhood Educators.

[FNC2] I sit on their [school] education board so I helped collaborate with school and the center to come together, it's a slow start and it's still slow. I want to do more together.

[FNC1] Through the sessions, [Institutes 1 and 2] we gained confidence in speaking whether it was online or in a circle that allowed us an opportunity to speak up and gave us the tools with confidence and how to prepare, so that was very valuable.

Three of the participants are part of the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO) Truth and Reconciliation for Childcare Committee.

Increased Funding Opportunities

Including the practical skill of proposal writing resulted in a number of successful proposals that brought new financial resources into childcare centres.

[FNC3] We got $194,000 in funding under the Journey Together proposal

[FNC3] We got a brand-new van last week

[FNC3] I hear proposals I jump on it right away

[FNC2] I'm actually working on one, the proposal I'm working on is Jordan's Principal Funding.

Language, Culture & the Land-Based Opportunities

A heightened awareness of the importance of identity resulted in a myriad of expressions of language, culture and land-based learning.

[FNC4] We received some extra funding and we were able to purchase more Oji-Cree resources and books. We now have more books with Native people and culture.

[FNC4] We also write syllabics ourselves and share those charts in our classrooms.

[FNC4] We hosted a hunting camp for all women and girls between the ages 3 to 57 years old, went and they shot and cleaned a moose together. We spent three days in the camp.

Seeking Other Professional Development Opportunities

Professional Development that was grounded in a culturally responsive and relational indigagogy spawned a hunger for more learning.

[FNC1] But now we're looking at the Indigenous Early Childhood framework…. I think it's through the federal government, we will use that framework, it's very new [November 2018].

[FNC1] We would have our own policies and procedures, that would be different for First Nation communities, because there is a big difference between Traditional practices and Municipal practices.

[FNC3] We have advocated to use some of the new funding we received to hire a consultant to create some manuals. One will be how to create a language nest program and the other one is land-based learning program.

[FNC3] I'm going to see if I can send my two new workers to get the puppetry training with the [Kwayaciiwin Education Resource Centre] language teacher to receive the same training I did at Oshki [Institute One]

A total of twelve of the twenty-one teacher candidates enrolled in Oshki-Wenjack's Aboriginal Bachelor of Education (Primary / Junior) Degree Program in the fall of 2019 were participants in the PD.

Finally, consider the following IECE observation that speaks to a balance between increases in confidence and practical skill that is positioned at the centre of this PD innovation.

> [W]e gained confidence in speaking whether it was online or in a Circle. That [confidence] allowed us an opportunity to speak up. [The PD] gave us the tools…[the] confidence…to prepare…that was very valuable.

Calls to Act

The lack of Indigenous education success in this province has been shown to be linked to negative future health, judicial, education, employment, social, cultural, linguistic outcomes (see Brown, 2004; Hodson & Kitchen, 2015). Combined with the significant wave of Indigenous school aged children that are now beginning their education it is difficult not to conclude a human catastrophe is both imminent and entirely avoidable.

What should be clear is that the prevailing Indigenous educational strategies, enacted for over a decade (see Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007), in both First Nation and urban contexts, have done little to increase the school success of Indigenous children and youth (see Statistics Canada, 2018A; Statistics Canada, 2018B). Furthermore, a lack of school success can result in additional trauma in an already at-risk population burdened by significant levels of inherited trauma (see Bombay, 2015).

Instead of the next generation of Indigenous children moving into adulthood, raising families and propelling the ongoing movement to self-determination at all levels of Indigenous communities, we see the exact opposite (see Chandler & Lalonde, 2008).

There are multiple opportunities for all levels of education, employment training, boards of education, governance, service agencies, etc. - to take steps that will enhance the quality of life of Indigenous peoples in Northwestern Ontario. It is with this in mind that we offer the following Calls to Act.

Oshki-Pimache-O-Win: The Wenjack Education Institute

1. Educational Leadership

With the long history of Early Childhood Education Programming, the recent addition of the Indigenous Classroom Assistant Diploma Program and the Aboriginal Bachelor of Education (Primary / Junior) Degree Program, Oshki-Wenjack should take up the leadership role and be the voice of Indigenous teacher education in Northwestern Ontario.

In part, taking up the leadership mantel requires supporting a culturally responsive and relational Indigenous education for all Indigenous children and offering evidence-based arguments that result in significant change. At this time there is little reliable research evidence that represents the highly nuanced realities of Indigenous education in Northwestern Ontario.

i. Establish and core fund an Oshki-Wenjack Centre for Indigenous Research that is led by an Indigenous researcher / scholar with an extensive and demonstrable experience in securing research funding, publication and Indigenous community research.

ii. Maintain, expand and promote the Knowledge Collective approach to Indigenous research piloted in this study. The Knowledge Collective has proven to be an effective research structure that brings a wider community expertise to the centre of Indigenous inquiry and works within the Indigenous Institute culture.

iii. Working with the Provincial Territorial Organizations develop a research plan designed to reveal the numbers of and, potential impact to children born to parents involved in opioid replacement programs in the northwest.

iv. At this time there is no dedicated screening tool that IECEs can assess children of opioid replacement program parents that would result in early interventions. Collaborating with Provincial Territorial Organizations, health, and education authorities develop and pilot the use of an Indigenous Screening Tool for children of parents involved in opioid replacement programs in the northwest.

v. In collaboration with the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario (AECEO) undertake a research study that determines the number of registered / non-registered IECEs, and their salaries in the province with the view of providing recommendations to the Chiefs of Ontario, Tribal Councils and Chiefs and Councils in two areas - Compensation and Working Conditions of IECEs working in a First Nation context.

3. PD for Indigenous & Non-Indigenous Educators

In collaboration with the College of ECE and the College of Teachers, establish and core fund an Oshki-Wenjack Centre for Professional Teacher Development to offer PD opportunities to IECEs and approved PD to elementary and high school educators working in a First Nation context. The new Centre should be led by an Indigenous educator with an extensive and demonstrable experience in securing related funding, publication and Indigenous education in the territory.

4. Working with Indigenous Governance

In collaboration with the four PTOs develop a Chiefs of Ontario Resolution that recognizes IECEs working in First Nation and urban contexts as essential educators of the next generation of Indigenous children.

5. Working with Mainstream Governance

Oshki-Wenjack's leadership role in Indigenous childhood education will inevitably include a wider provincial responsibility as well.

i. In collaboration with Indigenous Institutes Consortium lobby the Ministry of Education to develop a Policy Framework for Indigenous Early Learning Childcare in Ontario that includes guidelines for a licensed Child Care operating in a First Nation context.

ii. In collaboration with Indigenous Institutes Consortium lobby the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to approve and fund the Consortium to develop a distinct two-year Indigenous ECE Diploma Program that would be offered exclusively by Indigenous Institutes.

CONCLUSION

A conservative analysis of the impact of the Anishininiiwi Awaashishiiw Kihkinohamaakewi Niikaanihtamaakew Program reveals at least a modest impact across multiple areas critical to early childhood education. In many instances that impact was almost immediately implemented by participants when they returned to their communities.

The narratives of those Indigenous Early Childhood Educators participating the PD innovation demonstrates a deep commitment to the children and families, often in difficult and under-resourced circumstances.

What should be clear through those narratives, are the multiple threats to all levels of Indigenous education, First Nation and urban, will face over the next decade. Maintaining the status quo is, no longer an option it is a threat to the future.

Without serious and sustained upstream educational investment, that privileges Indigenous innovation, those threats will result in significant downstream costs to all levels of the society and will effectively slow the ongoing project of Indigenous self-determination.

To that end, the Calls to Act are strategically developed to extend Indigenous education innovation that began with Anishininiiwi Awaashishiiw Kihkinohamaakewi Niikaanihtamaakew, across all levels of education in the Northwestern Ontario.

CHAPTER 1:

Overview of the Report

This report presents the details of a two-year educational innovation designed to increase the leadership capacities of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Early Childhood Educators (IECE) working in a First Nation and Indigenous urban context in Northwestern Ontario, Anishinabek territory.

Background

There is a distinct lack of accurate information related to all levels of Indigenous education success in the Northwestern Ontario. What data that does exist is often dated, lacks specificity, alludes to, or is tangentially connected to the realities of Indigenous education success in this territory.

Census data from 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2018A; Statistics Canada, 2018B) records that in the 15 to 24 age group only thirty-five percent of the Indigenous population in Ontario held a high school diploma or equivalent. The difficulty with these data is obvious. How many 15-year-old children do you know that have completed high school?

None the less, consider the following:

- The 2001 Census reported that twelve percent of the Indigenous population in Ontario, aged 15 years and over, had a high school diploma (in Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007).
- The 2016 Census reported that thirty-five percent of the Indigenous population in Ontario aged 15 to 24 years, had a high school diploma (Statistics Canada, 2018A; Statistics Canada, 2018B).
- In 2017, the overall four-year high school graduation rate was seventy-nine percent (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2019).
- Given the 2001 / 2016 rate of increase it will take until 2045 for Indigenous people to reach the 2017 four-year high school overall graduation rate.

There are obvious difficulties with this equation, however, it does demonstrate the disparity between Indigenous high school graduation rates and overall graduation rates in this province that left unchecked will only further traumatize the next generation of Indigenous peoples.

The Relationship Between Indigenous Trauma & Education

The well-being of Indigenous children is undermined by both inherited historic trauma and contemporary experienced trauma that is especially evident in the lives of those children residing in Northwestern Ontario.

Understanding Historic Trauma

Arguably the most destructive outcome of colonization to contemporary Indigenous peoples has been the loss of cultural identity. Alfred (1999) suggests that this loss of identity has left people in a state of perpetual crisis, where Indigenous people, "wander a forest of frustration living inauthentic lives that make us easy prey for those who would enslave us (p. xi)."

This lack of identity is not relegated to the past but has a complex impact on Indigenous youth today. For example, the rise of "gang culture" in Thunder Bay (Jackson, 2017) is just one way an identity vacuum can be filled in the contemporary lives of Indigenous youth.

For over a generation Indigenous Elders have spoken at length about the impact of intergenerational effects colonization has had on each new generation of children. Until recently, this notion was an unproven theoretical construct that was easily dismissed by those influenced by more empirical evidence.

Scientific research of the epigenetics of Indigenous peoples, or how environmental factors and experience can alter gene expression would seem to end that theoretical debate. During several interviews Dr. Amy Bombay (CBC, 2015A) spoke of her work that demonstrates negative experience can have an impact on DNA "tags".

> [T]hose little tags can basically turn the gene on or off…so while the same gene is still there, it could be not functioning or functioning differently and therefore the functional aspects and roles of that DNA are different.

Bombay concluded that, "... those who had a parent or grandparent who went to residential school seemed to be at increased risk for psychological distress, suicidal ideation, suicide attempts and this is in both adults and youth" (CBC, 2015B). More importantly, Bombay's work demonstrates that the inherited impact of historic trauma on contemporary Indigenous genetics can be reversed through positive experiences that can produce positive outcomes across multiple generations (Bombay, 2015).

Medical, psychological, traditional Anishinabe knowledge, and genetic research converge to reveal the relationship between historic trauma and increased risk factors that influence future life outcomes.

Understanding Contemporary Trauma – School

The experience of school and the overall lack of success also contributes to numerous future socio-educational, socio-economic, socio-suicidal realities in the lives of Indigenous children.

Census data from 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2018A; Statistics Canada, 2018B) records that in the 15 to 24 age group only thirty-five percent of the Indigenous population in Ontario held a high school diploma or equivalent. Certainly, the lack of a grade 12 qualification limits access to higher education, or future employment opportunities and at least partially contributes to "eighty-one percent of reserves had a median income below the low-income measure, which Statistics Canada considers to be $22,133 for one person (Press, 2017, p. 1)."

What is most alarming is the connection between school success and the associated trauma that may increase suicide risk factors among Indigenous youth in Northwestern Ontario.

At least one report details the scope of that loss.

> According to Nishnawbe Aski Nation, a political organization that oversees 49 communities in the north, there have been 562 suicide deaths since 1986. Of those deaths, 334 were males. Many of these deaths are also young people between the age of 15-20 years old, accounting for 218 suicides (Troian, 2018, p. 2).

Chandler (2005) and Lalonde's research (2008) may shed some light on the contributing factors of this unprecedented loss of young lives. Their work in British Columbia asked the question: What distinguishes First Nation communities with no youth suicides from those in which the rate is alarmingly high? They concluded that communities with strong expressions of cultural continuity create a protective factor against First Nation youth suicide. First Nations with the lowest rates of youth suicide exhibit a high degree of cultural continuity exemplified through the reclamation and control of nine culturally aligned community factors. Four of those nine inclusions are strongly associated to school success and this research report including - education, health services, cultural facilities, and knowledge of first language.

Crawford and Hicks (2018) propose several upstream strategies that provide "promising directions for future suicide prevention" that compliment Chandler and Lalonde's work including,

> Mentoring programmes to enhance connectedness between vulnerable young people and supportive stable and nurturing adults and school-based, skill-building program to engage teachers/staff, students and parents in fostering social responsibility and social-emotional skills-building (e.g., coping, problem-solving skills, help-seeking) (p. 20).

All levels of school can be an important arena to enhance the protective factors that act as a buffer between inherited historic trauma and minimizes the impact of contemporary trauma that is part of the Indigenous school aged populations in Northwestern Ontario. The question becomes how to strategically maximize the capacities in teachers working with culturally / linguistically diverse Indigenous children to counter the impact of trauma across Northwestern Ontario.

Considering Indigenous Diversity in Northwestern Ontario

Provincial Territorial Organizations (PTOs)

There are four PTOs in the Northwest that First Nations align politically, including the forty-nine Nishnawbe Aski Nation communities, nine Union of Ontario Indians-Anishinabek communities, the five Independent First Nation Alliance communities, and the twenty-eight Grand Council Treaty 3 communities (see Table 1.1 to 1.4).

Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN)

The communities of the NAN, many accessible only by air or winter roads, include a population of approximately 9,000 young people between 0 to 19 years of age. This school-aged demographic represents forty-three percent of the entire population (see Table 1.1).

Over the last decade this group has increased significantly straining the education systems of First Nations and when combined with the socio-cultural, socio-economic, socio-health issues results in what one study concluded, "in 93 percent of (NAN) children of Ontario's far north lag at least two grades behind in school" (Minthorn-Biggs in Brown, 2004).

Union of Ontario Indians-Anishinabek (UOI)

The total 0 to 19 aged population of the nine UOI communities located in Northwestern Ontario total some 1,000 individuals or approximately one-third (*N*=33 percent) of the entire population. The median age of those communities is older than NAN communities, 33 years vs. 25 years respectfully (see Table 1.2).

Independent First Nation Alliance (IFNA)

IFNA communities are different again and include 665 individuals 0 to 19 years of age, or fifty-nine percent of the total population (*N*=5,590). The median age of those communities is 26 years of age (see Table 1.3).

Grand Council Treaty #3 (GCT3)

Thirty percent of the population (*N*=3,459) of the twenty-eight communities within GCT3 territory are 0 to 19 years of age. Again, the median age of those communities is young, 28 years of age (see Table 1.4).

Table 1.1: Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Communities[2]

First Nation	Children 0 to 19 Years	Median-Age	Registered Population
Aroland	160	24	365
Attawapiskat	630	25	1,500
Bearskin Lake	135	26	355
Beaver House	N/A		
Brunswick House	35	30	85
Cat Lake	255	22	565
Chapleau Cree	N/A		
Chapleau Ojibwe	N/A		
Constance Lake	225	30	590
Deer Lake	395	23	865
Eabametoong	495	21	1,010
Flying Post	N/A		
Fort Albany	N/A		
Fort Severn	140	25	360
Ginoogaming	85	26	210
Hornepayne	N/A		
Kasabonika Lake	370	23	850
Kashechewan	N/A		
Keewaywin	195	22	420
Kingfisher	210	25	500
Koocheching	310	30	810
Lac Seul	385	27	975
Long Lake #58	165	25	385
McDowell Lake	N/A		
Martin Falls	120	21	250
Matachewan	15	37	60
Mattagami	60	30	190
Mishkeegogamang	330	20	665
Missanabie Cree	N/A		
Moose Cree	560	27	1,560
Muskrat Dam	125	24	285

[2]Unless otherwise noted, all data in Tables 1.1 through 1.4 from Indigenous & Northern Affairs Canada, Community Profiles. Available from http://fnp-ppn.aandc-aadnc.gc.ca/fnp/Main/Search/SearchFN.aspx?lang=eng

Neskantaga	80	28	235
Nibinamik	170	21	380
North Caribou Lake	390	25	850
North Spirit Lake	130	23	290
Popular Hill	250	18	475
Sachigo Lake	240	21	515
Sandy Lake	920	22	2,015
Slate Falls	80	25	259
Taykwa Tagamou Nation (New Post)	35	26	90
Wapekeka	205	22	440
Wawakapewin	N/A		
Webequie	365	22	780
Weenusk	60	34	195
Whitewater Lake	N/A		
Wunnumin	265	23	595
TOTAL Pop. Children 0 to 19 Years	**8,590**	**25**	**19,974 TOTAL Population[3]**

Table 1.2: Union of Ontario Indians – Anishinabek (UOI) Communities

First Nation	Children 0 to 19 Years	Median-Age	Registered Population
Lake Nipigon Ojibway Animbiigoo Zaagi'igan	123	33	499
Pic River - Biigtigong Nishnaabeg	145	34	445
Rocky Bay Biinjitiwaabik Zaaging Anishinaabek	60	33	185
Sand Point Bingwi Neyaashi Anishinaabek	110	32	294
Gull Bay	90	30	245
Pic Mobert	115	31	325
Pays Plat	25	34	90
Red Rock	100	33	295
Fort William	330	35	980
TOTAL Pop. Children 0 to 19 Years	**1,098**	**33**	**3,358 TOTAL Population**

[3] There is a decided difference between the population data available from Indigenous & Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), Community Profiles and the population data available from the Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN). INAC data suggests a total NAN community population to be approximately 20,000, while NAN suggests an approximate population of 45,000 (see http://www.nan.on.ca/article/about-us-3.asp).

Table 1.3: Independent First Nation Alliance (IFNA) Communities

First Nation	Children 0 to 19 Years	Median-Age	Registered Population
Whitesand	120	30	325
Lac Seul	385	27	970
Muskrat Dam	125	24	280
Pikangikum*	N/A	N/A	2,300
Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug (Big Trout Lake)	455	24	1,030
TOTAL Pop. Children 0 to 19 Years	**1,085**	**26**	**4,905 TOTAL Population**

*****Source: http://www.ifna.ca/article/pikangikum-116.asp

Table 1.4: Grand Council Treaty #3 (GCT3) Communities

First Nation	Children 0 to 19 Years	Median-Age	Registered Population
Anishinaabeg of Naongashing	30	33	110
Buffalo Point, MB	155	43	112
Couchiching	310	30	810
Dalles	80	28	190
Grassy Narrows	240	27	640
Lac Des Mille Lacs	65	27	600
Lac La Croix	60	27	175
Lac Seul	385	27	970
Migisi Sahgaigan (Eagle Lake)	65	37	225
Mishkosiminiziibiing (Big Grassy)	95	27	235
Naicatchewenin	94	25	220
Nigigoonsiminikaaning	60	27	160
Northwest Angle 33	70	29	190
Northwest Angle 37	65	26	200
Ojibway Nation of Saugeen	40	25	90
Onigaming	145	28	709
Rainy River	105	30	880
Saugeen	325	38	1,035
Seine River	85	30	260
Shoal Lake 39	195	29	540
Shoal Lake 40	75	27	220
Stanjikoming	25	27	139
Wabauskang	25	34	70
Wabigoon Lake	40	39	165
Washagamis Bay (Obashkaandagaang)	50	31	825
Wauzhushk Onigum	160	26	415
Whitedog (Wabaseemoong Independent Nations)	335	25	825
Whitefish Bay	80	23	575
TOTAL Pop. Children 0 to 19 Years	**3,459**	**28**	**11,385 TOTAL Population**

The Demographic Reality

The total reported population in the 0 to 19 age group is 16,471 in the approximately seventy-seven communities located in Northwestern Ontario. This demographic group represents almost forty-one percent of the total population in the territory (*N*=40,307).

Projecting the thirty-five percent graduation rate (Statistics Canada, 2018A; Statistics Canada, 2018B) across the total 0 to 19 age group in those communities would mean that some 5,765 will not complete high school.

These communities are culturally, linguistically, as well as historically diverse with equally diverse aspirations for the future. Unaddressed, the potential of thirty-five percent of the current generation of the population not completing high school and the potential trauma that reality represents compounds the intergenerational trauma, as well as erodes the future human resource so desperately needed to continue the momentum of self-determination. What should be equally clear is that maintaining the status quo is not only untenable, but is tantamount to a cultural genocide.

Overcoming the status quo will require enacting sweeping innovation at all levels of education which will in turn, necessitate in-service educators acquiring new skill-sets.

Begin at the Beginning

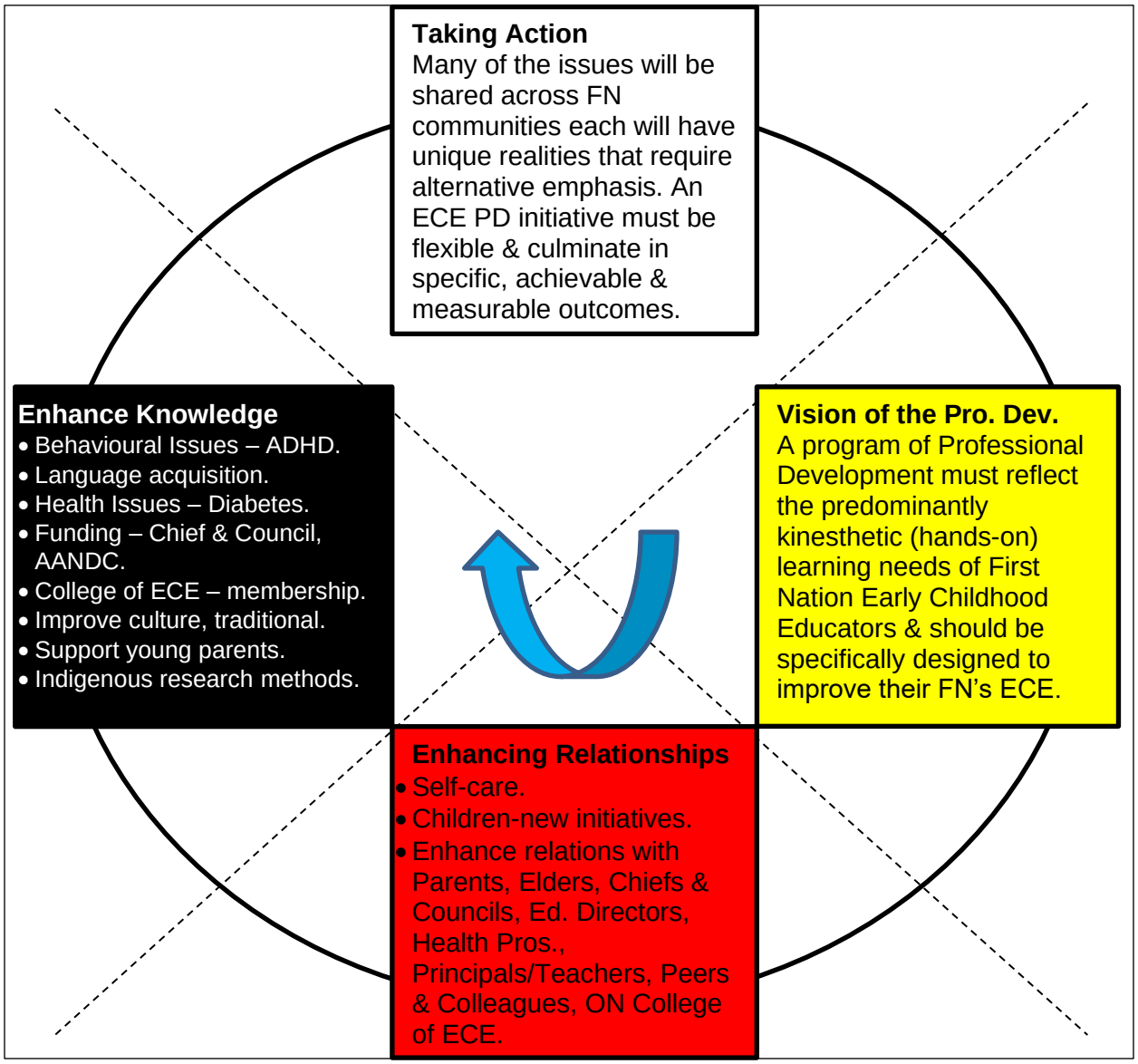
Envisioning an Educational Innovation

For almost a decade Oshki-Pimache-O-Win: The Wenjack Education Institute, has offered an Early Childhood Education Program that has accredited numerous Indigenous Early Childhood Educators (IECE), many currently employed in First Nation early learning centres across Northwestern Ontario (see Table 4.1).

The development of Oshki-Wenjack's In-Service Indigenous Early Childhood Education Professional Development Program (Program) was a strategic innovation that began in 2017. Concerned with their ongoing professional development (PD) needs, the 2017 graduating IECE class and alumni came together in a Needs Assessment Talking Circle, sponsored by Oshki-Wenjack.

That Needs Assessment was foundational to the development and implementation of the Program that was designed to enhance the capacities of IECEs in those communities by expanding the Indigenous Early Childhood Educator's innovation skill-set at a local level. The results of the Needs Assessment were subsequently organized using the Vision Medicine Wheel Teaching (see Figure 1.1). This particular Teaching contends that for every vision to become a realty require certain relationships and specific knowledge will dictate a related series of actions.

Figure 1.1: Results of the 2017 Needs Assessment



Based on the result of that Needs Assessment, Oshki-Wenjack developed a PD strategy that included a three-month online preparatory course work, two one-week long institutes and a related summative research study.

PD Strategy

Elements of the PD strategy included (see Appendix 1 and 2),

- Online Preparatory Course Work (ran November 2017 to January 15, 2018) was a survey course that delved into the related international literature and encouraged a discursive learning environment.
- Institute One (ran February 11 to 17, 2018) brought together twenty-eight IECEs from seventeen communities to establish a knowledge baseline in a wide array of specific subject areas related to community education innovation, funded through INAC's New Paths for Education.
- Institute Two (ran August 27 to 31, 2018) brought together sixteen senior IECEs managers from the same communities and was designed to increase the teaching skills necessary to address the cultural, linguistic, and land-based education needs of the 0 to 12-year-old demographic and to enhance the innovation skillset and the early childhood education services of those communities. In addition, this Institute included Shkoday's Aboriginal Head Start Biwaase'aa culture programs for those participant's families including, infants (*N*=2), preschoolers (*N*=3) and school aged (*N*=5) children. In part this was created to encourage IECEs to attend but it was also intended to provide examples of highly successful programs designed to enhance cultural identity among childcare and school aged populations.

Research Strategy

The body of research literature that focuses on IECE in Canada is extremely limited, this is further compounded by a lack of literature associated to the in-service professional development of IECEs working in a First Nation context. And yet the lack of school success of First Nation children is almost a universal Canadian reality (see Battiste, 2013) in a population where one-third of First Nation people are 14 years-of-age or younger (see Statistic Canada, 2017).

To overcome this research shortfall Oshki-Wenjack combined the PD strategy mentioned above with a two-part research strategy. The first-part of the strategy revealed the impact of the two Institutes from the perspective of the IECE participants and is complete.

The second part of the research, and the subject of this project, looks to study the PD strategy from the perspective of the impacts on the related First Nation communities.

CHAPTER 2:

Oshki-Wenjack's Response to Community Research

Background to Indigenous Institutes in Ontario

Historically the Ontario higher education environment has, for the most part, under valued and / or limited Aboriginal Institutes from a meaningful role in the higher education of Indigenous people by denying core funding or the ability to award recognized certificates, diplomas, or degrees.

Indigenous Institutes have had no other option but to "partner" with colleges and universities that has resulted in little sharing by those institutions of tuitions or the matching basic income units (BIUs) received from the provincial government. This has effectively slowed Institute development, especially in the area of research.

Postsecondary enrollments of Canadian students in mainstream institutions began to experience a slight decline as of 2016 / 2017 (Statistics Canada, 2018C). An overall aging population and decreasing birth rate will propel a continued decline in postsecondary enrollments in the future. In an effort to maintain a financially viable student body Ontario colleges and universities have aggressively recruited internationally, as well as the historically underserved Indigenous student market.

In an effort to compete with Indigenous Institutes the mainstream postsecondary community has attempted to create a culturally responsive infrastructure including recruiting Indigenous professors, Elders, building relevant programming and establishing various support services. In many instances that inclusion of Indigenous people in postsecondary institutions has resulted in epistemic clashes that have resulted in numerous allegations of systemic racism and turn-over of those Indigenous employees has been significant (see Kusch, 2019; Yang, 2018).

In spite of all this postsecondary activity the proportion of the Indigenous population with a university degree has only realized slight increases from 2 percent 1981, to 7.7 percent in 2006 (AUCC, 2011, p. 19).

Alternatively, Indigenous Institutes have flourished within a narrow financial / operational window by focusing on building capacity within Indigenous communities in specific sectors including - language restoration, health, education, child welfare, economics, environment - in an effort to increase the momentum of the ongoing momentum of Indigenous self-determination.

The Evolving Post-Secondary Environment

Decades of lobbying effort by the Ontario Indigenous Institutes Consortium resulted in the province passing the Indigenous Institutes Act in 2017 that recognized, "Indigenous Institutes as a unique and complimentary pillar of Ontario's postsecondary education system." With the 2017 provincial budget came a $56-million-dollar commitment over three years to build capacity and retain staff of the Institutes (Ontario, 2017).

At the annual general meeting of the Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association, the Indigenous Institutes Consortium (2018) presented a holistic vision for the future for the eight member institutes in the province. That vision builds on the spirit of the 2017 Legislation and takes the Indigenous Institutes to a logical conclusion within the postsecondary environment in the province, including:

- …secure sustainable funding for…institutes to provide education and training programs that honour our traditions and will enable more of our people to soar to their potential.
- …fully resourced commiserate to colleges and universities.
- …build on student successes for strong, healthier, and culturally vibrant communities.
- …lead in developing innovative, flexible and transferable credentials (e.g., certificates, diplomas, and degrees) in a uniquely Indigenous cultural and linguistic context (p. 14).

The sweeping rejection of an unpopular government by the Ontario electorate in favour of a government running on a fiscal responsibly platform in 2018 may threaten the progress made by the Indigenous Institutes Consortium over the last thirty-five years.

Indigenous Institutes & Research

Within a historically underfunded Indigenous Institute environment research has been limited in favour of focusing on increasing the capacity of the human resource to face the ongoing state of crisis that is the reality of many Indigenous communities.

Generally, Indigenous Institutes have invested heavily in the support of a diverse and historically underserved student body. Within the Oshki-Wenjack context this has resulted in the expansion of support positions including, Program Co-ordinators, Student Support and Cultural

Workers and Elders, – that are necessary to provide a depth of connectivity, support and service required to assure the school success of a generally adult student body, many from remote fly-in communities.

From a teaching perspective, this lack of provincial financial investment has resulted in a predominantly non-tenured, contracted professorate where the primary performance indicator has focused on teaching[4], as measured by student evaluations. Again, in this instance the difference between the mainstream and the Aboriginal Institutes is stark.

The dominant performance indicators for the mainstream professorate include:

- Research production, measured by successful funding & peer reviewed publications, at 40 percent.
- Teaching, measured by student evaluations, at 40 percent and,
- Service, measured by university & community engagement, at 20 percent.

The Evidence Based Environment & Research

At this time the prevalent management philosophy in post-secondary education, business, charities, and all three levels of government is dominated by an "evidence-based decision-making model" that connects all financial investment to the evidence of success.

Yet again this philosophical focus has placed Indigenous peoples in a deficit position where successful funding proposals depend on building an argument that is supported by existing research evidence and includes a fully developed research proposal that measures success.

It would seem glaringly inequitable of those funders to expect Aboriginal Institutes to compete on the same level playing field as a mainstream university or college that have had the benefit of a century of core public funding to establish and maintain a significant research infrastructure, including a highly paid professorate in who the responsibility for research is predominantly located.

Oshki-Wenjack Reconceptualizes Indigenous Research

In spite of these significant inequities Oshki-Wenjack has recognized that within this increasing evidence-based environment the needs of First Nation peoples and communities are being marginalized and require a culturally informed approach to research that reflects the complexity of their cultures, languages, histories and contemporary realities.

Within this highly complex Indigenous environment no one individual, or class of individuals has the capacity to represent the realities of Indigenous communities. Instead, within an Indigenous context, research inquiry requires a multiplicity of expertise that can only be achieved through Knowledge Collectives that include both Indigenous and non-Indigenous members.

[4] This notion of "teaching" does not begin to describe the depth of work or commitment of those contracted professors working in an Indigenous Institute context. Suffice it to say that those professors consistently respond to the academic, social, emotional and cultural needs of their students.

All individuals engaged in these Collectives, those that are the focus of the research and the collective of researchers, have an opportunity to expand their understanding of Indigenous research through the experience of research. That learning may be deep, at a systems level or, more often illuminates how the history of colonization has impacted "all" contemporarily.

Unlike the dominant conception of research there is little space between the Knowledge Collective and the Indigenous community that is engaged in the inquiry. All members of the Collective and the community are therefore intimately connected to the phenomenon that is under consideration because that phenomenon is the reality of all. When compared to the dominant approach to research the false notion of objectivity in Indigenous research is glaringly evident. Hodson (2013) believes that Indigenous research must purposefully abandon the "myth" of objectivity that dominates western forms of research and encourages Indigenous people to embrace their subjectivity in research (p. 357).

Members of the Knowledge Collective & Affiliations

It is with all of these factors in mind that Oshki-Wenjack struck a Knowledge Collective to develop and oversee the development of a Professional Development innovation developed around the needs of IECE alumni as well as a related research study to measure the impact of that initiative.

Membership of that Collective included,

- Brenda Mason, Elder-in-Residence, Oshki-Wenjack, Thunder Bay.
- Lori Huston, Co-ordinator ECE, Oshki-Wenjack, Thunder Bay.
- Kim Falcigno, Academic Director, Oshki-Wenjack, Thunder Bay.
- Kathy Evans, Special Projects Coordinator, Oshki-Wenjack, Thunder Bay.
- Marilyn Junnila, Executive Director, Shkoday Abinojiiwak Obimiwedoon, Thunder Bay.
- Nadine Hedican, Research Coordinator, Maamaawisiiwin Education Research Centre, Thunder Bay.
- Dr. John A. Hodson, Director, Maamaawisiiwin Education Research Centre, Thunder Bay.

Throughout the two-years of the Innovation the Collective met on a regular basis and worked within a consensus driven decision-making model.

The inclusion of Maamaawisiiwin, (see www.indigagogy.com) an ex-officio member, early on in the innovation, brought in specific Indigenous research and funding proposal skills to the Collective. In part, through that inclusion in the Collective, Maamaawisiiwin co-developed two successful funding proposals to Indigenous Services Canada, that financed the development of the PD as well as the associated research study.

CHAPTER 3:

The Research Study's Purpose, Objectives & Method

This chapter presents the results of the Program's summative research study that included four Wildfire Sessions in four First Nation communities and included Elders, Registered ECEs, childcare workers, support staff and parents as the participants in those sessions.

The Purpose & Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the summative inquiry strategy was to reveal the impact of Institute One and Institute Two on IECE practice to achieve the two main research objectives, as well as a number of related sub-topics.

Objective 1. To qualitatively assess the impact of the Professional Development Program to enhance the local ECE curriculum inclusions in the 0 to 6 and 7 to 12 year-old-age groups, including:

a) Land-based education, cultural teachings, outdoor play,

b) Integrating language (local dialect).

c) Brain Development, creating resources, including iconography, creating a holistic learning environment.

d) Nutrition education, gathering and harvesting traditional foods.

Objective 2. To qualitatively assess the impact of the Program to enact the expanded education innovation skill-set in a local First Nation context, including:

a) Proposal development, proposal strategies, budgeting, writing.

b) IECE innovation-visioning, relations, knowledge, and action planning

c) Facilitating community-based IECE innovation

The Research Study's Method

Four First Nation communities were purposely selected from IECE's communities attending Institute One and Two. In part, the selected communities were chosen to represent the four Provincial Territorial Organizations and included two remote fly-in, as well as two First Nations accessible by road. Those communities selected also represented the four cardinal directions – one from the east, one from the south, one from the west and one from the north.

The selected communities also included a sample of each category of childcare centre including, two Aboriginal Head Start Programs, which are also regulated Licensed Childcare Centres, one stand-alone Licensed Childcare Centre, and one stand-alone Aboriginal Head Start Program.

An aggregate demographic profile of the selected First Nation communities would include:

- Average Total Population: 850
- Average Total Population 0 to 19 Years: 345
- Median Age: 25 Years

What is especially interesting to note from the aggregate profile of the selected First Nation communities is the population 0 to 19 years of age. This demographic group, considered to be the typical school years, represents almost half of the entire aggregate population (*N*=41%).

At the same time, the median age of 25 years suggests that the population of the participating communities is young, well within the typical childbearing years.

Demographically these data suggest that the Indigenous population wave of school aged children is just beginning to build and will bring even more children into First Nation and urban education in Northwestern Ontario.

Qualitative Analysis of the Narratives

During the winter of 2019 representatives of the Knowledge Collective traveled to each of the four selected First Nation communities for an average of two days. Those community visits, defined as Wildfire Sessions (see Kompf & Hodson, 2000), allowed the Knowledge Collective and the potential participants the opportunity to further solidify relationships with each other, develop a fuller understanding of the early childhood centre, demystify the research, and answer questions about the study in general.

At the end of each Wildfire Session, a Wildfire Circle was convened that was open to a wide cross-section of participants including IECEs that participated in Institute One and / or Two, as well as those who did not participate in the Institutes including a local Elder, associated childcare workers, support staff, parents, etc.[5]

Each Wildfire Circle ran for approximately sixty minutes and was digitally recorded. Those recordings were subsequently transcribed and underwent analysis, including coding and

[5] The purpose of including participants in the Wildfire Circles who did not directly attend the Institutes was twofold. First, by attending the Circles, non-Institute participants may have witnessed an evolution in the IECE practices and may have shared some insights relevant to that shift in practice. Second, involving a wider cross-section of First Nation IECE participants, widens the shared experience of Indigenous research which builds a deeper understanding for Indigenous research practices.

categorizing into key idea units. The idea units are then collapsed into categorical clusters or themes that reflect the collective experience of those in each Circle.

The resulting themes then underwent a rigorous comparative 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.

Hypothetically, it is reasonable to propose that the diverse nature and experience of all participant groups from the four chosen First Nations will identify both common and divergent patterns of impact.

To maintain the anonymity of the four First Nation childcare centres are represented as follows:

First Nation Child Care Centre One, [FNC1]

First Nation Childcare Centre Two, [FNC2]

First Nation Childcare Centre Three, [FNC3]

First Nation Childcare Centre Four, [FNC4]

CHAPTER 4:

Findings of the Study

Objective 1.

To qualitatively assess the impact of the Program to enhance the local IECE curriculum inclusions in the 0 to 6 and 7 to 12 year-old-age groups, including, land-based education, cultural teachings, and outdoor play.

Land-Based Education

In each of the four Wildfire Circles, participants spoke at length of the barriers and challenges to incorporating land-based education in their early childhood education centre. Often that discussion included personal stories of their childhood experiences related to cultural learning from the land.

Analysis of those narratives revealed a broad thematic reference to “fences” that was common across each of the communities. In a First Nation early learning context, fences exist in both a “physical” and “symbolic” sense. These broad categories of fences can be further categorized as: The Regulatory Fence, The Physical Fence, The Invisible Fence, and The Environmental Fence.

The Regulatory Fence

Regulatory Fences do not exist in the physical, but exist within the 2014 Child Care and Early Years Act (CCEYA). This legislation establishes a set of regulations that dictate the practice and design of an early childhood centre’s outdoor playground. Violation of those regulations could lead to supervisory penalties, and / or convictions that often include fines. This body of regulation establish a fence that can restrict an Anishinabe expression of land-based learning in each of the four childcare centers.

[FNC2] We do not have a play structure now...the licensing took it away they said it didn't pass code. It’s been seven years since we had a play structure outside.

[FNC2] I have to let her [licensing inspector] know if I dig into the ground, let her know how far I'm digging into the ground because it has to be a certain number of meters...say if we place stumps it has to be a certain height and also a certain [depth] into the ground.

These two examples reveal the difficulty obtaining funding to replace playground structures that do not meet the CCEYA regulations. When the childcare centre considered bringing in smaller free-standing equipment they are then faced with having to navigate a

licensing inspector, usually over the phone, to understand the approved processes to install new equipment.

Another consideration common to the remote communities is the general lack of financial and human resources. For example, one childcare center has not been able to replace a play structure for seven years because of the lack of a licensed carpenter to complete the work.

The next layer of the regulatory fence that restricts land-based education involves children moving outside that approved area to explore outside the only literal fence in the community. Educators wanted to connect children to the land surrounding the centres, to allow the children the freedom to explore their limits and abilities through land-based and place-based learning.

Often, what underlies the narratives of the Indigenous educators is an understanding that children can best decide their learning focus for themselves, and should have the freedom to explore the landscape around them to develop multiple skills.

Traditionally, Indigenous children were expected to learn by doing instead of being instructed and were not forbidden to try new activities that in today's risk-averse environment might be considered dangerous, for example sitting with a fire. To further explain what is meant by place-based learning, consider the narrative variations that describe learning about their specific community's environment, as well as the associated history and stories.

[FNC1] I'd like to talk about land-based learning and bringing our children outdoors. We are mandated by the provincial legislation and we believe the children need to be able to take risks in the outdoors and when we look at the playgrounds that we provide for the children and we have to make sure there are safety zones and the proper heights of fencing and [it's] difficult to allow the children to take risks. It's difficult to let children take risks with all the legislation that is put upon us. When we looked at relocating our centre we really want to include our playground into the natural bush line. The playground that will be license isn't going to be in the bush however we will expand into the bush and go back to how we used to play as children run in the forest take risks to climb and jump. When they come and look at our space it's just a playground you can either go up the play structure to slide or go down there isn't a lot of risks or learning opportunities.

[FNC2] The [Childcare] Center and the school came together with the same idea and they are calling it an outdoor classroom and they are going to teach how to live off the land, setting up traps, learning about the medicines, growing tobacco, we're going to try all those things.

[FNC4] Elder: My sister runs a program in the next community over; she lives in a teepee for a week [on the Aboriginal Headstart Program property] and the kids go and visit with her there outside. There's a big teepee there she is there during the hours that the kids are in programming. She prepares ducks, fish, many Aboriginal dishes and they watch her prepare the food.

[FNC4] We [the community] want to build a healing lodge for the community members to connect to land-based teachings with their whole family.

[FNC2] We usually follow the skidoo trails on the ice [frozen lake] and we also go behind the school in the bush there lots of trails back there.

While in one of the participating communities, during outdoor play time, the Educators literally opened the fence and invited the children to play, climb, slide on the snow hill in the parking lot. This practice would rarely happen in a mainstream childcare center during scheduled outdoor play because of the potential risk of playing in a parking lot. In this instance, that risk was mitigated as the centre's van exclusively transports children to the centre which limits the use of the parking lot.

The participants also talked about the need to have parents sign consents before leaving the childcare property. One of the centres was innovative in how they obtained parental consent.

[FNC1] We have to send forms home to have parents sign in order to leave the playground. This can cause problems with parents not returning the forms, how we have got around it is having the forms ready at the door [of the childcare centre] when the parents are dropping off the children in the mornings forms are ready to sign - right at the centre, [therefore] the forms don't actually go home anymore.

The Physical Fence

In a First Nation context the early childhood education centre playground is one of the few properties in the communities with an actual physical fence. Participants related that the physical fence that surrounded the license child care playgrounds have been a place where teenagers hang out after hours, which has led to vandalism and theft.

Participants shared that the physical solid fence can feel very restrictive and for young children the fence can literally be a barrier to seeing their surrounding community.

[FNC2] The structure was vandalized with graffiti writing, inappropriate pictures and swear words on it.

[FNC1] Vandalism after hours teenagers/kids come in and go to the bathroom [inside the fence], we can't leave anything outside overnight.

[FNC2] Because there are gaps in our fence the dogs can get in…. it's not easy with the dogs[6] it scares the children when they come into their playground.

[6] Traditional First Nation economies - hunting, trapping, fishing, and gathering - relied heavily on working dogs. Today that reliance was all but disappeared, dogs are now kept as pets but because of the financial burden are often set free to fend for themselves. This can lead to packs of semi-feral dogs roaming the community posing a threat to all.

[FNCI] I hate being fenced in... I also don't like that we can't see outside of the fence it's such a high wooden fence which is beautiful but once we're down in there we can't see out so they are climbing to stand on things; there's no airflow.

[FNC1] Elder: It would be nice if the new daycare had a shaded area where the kids could go and play if it was in the bush they would have all the trees but the way it is built the playground will have the sun shining on them [children] all day.

[FNC1] Always making sure it's clean and safe but we try to get them outside of that fenced-in areas as much as possible.

Researcher 2: Can you connect any of this to the Institute 2 training with Elder Brenda Mason when we went out to the Medicine Garden?

[FNC1] Yes, all the medicines that we were able to see and learn about and [we now] want to provide those opportunities for our own children….and that's all part of it in the big scheme of things... the vision that we have [at the new centre in the fenced playground].

[FNC4] We have a garden we do with the children every year on the far side of the playground.

[FNC1] The kids are in four walls inside, you see fewer challenging behaviors outside. [where they] could be looking in the grass to find a bug and the other one could be mastering their running skills, and they bring painting outside, the one that's interested in art still has those opportunities so it's not just a playground, or learning environment, we bring things outside

In each of the participating communities, one of the researchers shared information about funding opportunities for outdoor play spaces to purchase of new natural materials, and incorporating gardening to enhance their playgrounds within the fence. This conversation was an extension to the planning and work completed during Institutes 1 and 2 on fundraising and organizing community members to help with the playground designs construction and overall improvements. Participating educators also shared their aspirations on how to improve their playgrounds to reflect more natural and reusable materials.

The Invisible Fence

Outside the fence of the licensed playground the participants shared visions, personal experiences and ideas of providing land-based education in early learning. Those visions included engaging in experiential learning, learning from Elders, and building relationships with community and place. Often that sharing related back to their own childhoods, playing outdoors and freely exploring the land-scape. Currently, none of the participating centres are accessing the bush lines with the children and families during program hours.

[FNC3] We want to clear cut the back-bush line [behind the childcare centre] to have children play there.

[FNC2] We would like to have the underbrush cleared so that the kids could go there and explore and we could still see them.

[FNC2] We keep talking about how it would be for them [the children] to explore more of that bush area.

[FNC1] We are really looking at the land-based learning and go outside [of] a typical playground.

[FNC1] It's important for the children to get out there and learn what's in their community... what's in their bush lines...

[FNC2] Just outside the fenced area is our bush line and we want to have it cleaned up.

[FNC4] Elder: I take a group out [school-aged children] at the school to teach them traditional medicines we build a fire [in the bush] and I make Labrador tea and then they have some; we always gather enough [medicines] to take back to school and share. We also get pin cherries, Labrador tea and spruce cones which are good for sore throats. Those are the main medicines in our area.

When the educators talked about their childhood experiences, they expressed a level of joy that was punctuated by lots of laughter and recalling fun, spontaneous activities that were underpinned by their autonomy to explore their communities. That freedom to explore is fundamental to Indigenous ways of parenting.

[FNC1] Go back to how we used to play as children run in the forest, take risks, climb and jump.

[FNC2] My own childhood experience…there were no rules, we were allowed to play freely, and at the centre we allow the children to play with whatever they want to outside.

[FNC3] Sliding in the snow, I used to make my mom mad because I was using her plates as a slide.

[FNC3] Making mud pies and climbing trees are things that we would do when we were younger

[FNC1] When I was younger, we would have races and tournaments with the boogie wheels [go carts]. [We'd] need to define who would go the farthest and make mud trophies.

Bush lines were only meters from all of the childcare centres front door. The participant's ideas of wanting to bring the children to explore the bush lines are natural often recalled through their childhood experiences and provided endless learning opportunities of land-based teachings which supported healthy development in all areas and across all subjects.

The Environmental Fence

In Northwestern Ontario, the winters are long and cold. That often means wind-chill advisories and school closures occur. With the changing seasons bring biting insects, animals -

bear, wolf, lynx are often attracted to the community further limiting access to outdoor learning. In these circumstances the fences protect children.

[FNC3] Sometimes the weather is too cold to play outside during the winter months.

[FNC3] We don't go outside in our playground from November to April each year because of the winter wind chill.

[FNC1] Sometimes it's hard in the Winter they have to get all bundled up but they enjoy it will take 20 minutes to take 5 minutes outside it is really worth it for them to get fresh air.

[FNC1] When the weather is warm, we stay outside all day we have some problems with shade but we extend our outdoor time in the summer.

[FNC3] Sometimes bugs are a problem. Lots of pine beetles.

[FNC3] We had a pack of wolves in the community this last winter and that kept us from playing outside.

[FNC1] Bugs, well some of the children have allergies and forces us back inside

[FNC2] We have lots of rez dogs and they are mean, we have to walk with a stick, they sometimes travel in packs too.

[FNC2] In the spring the bears are in the community looking for garbage.

[FNC1] Lots of black flies and mosquitos in the summer it affects how long we can stay outside with the toddlers.

[FNC1] The community has a lot of dogs and they can scare the children at times and get into our playground.

Cultural Teachings & Outdoor Play

Each of the participating communities held cultural events open to all ages and all community members on the land. Many of the First Nations organize week-long annual cultural camps held on specific grounds, where the entire community camps out. These events are organized specifically, to increase engagement between children, parents, Elders, to enhance community relationships and provide cultural teachings by living on the land in what could be described as the “old-way.”

Within the culture camp environment Indigenous culture moves from an abstract to a lived reality. The sharing of local knowledge, stories, languages, and histories occurs naturally by living within the culture.

[FNC4] Spring and fall we have the cultural week we prepare ducks and we go out there [to the tipi in the outdoor property attached to the program] and cook with the kids, parents are involved.

[FNC4] We hosted a hunting camp, all women and girls between the ages 3 to 57 years old went and they shot and cleaned a moose together. We spent three days in the camp.

[FNC4] The school does ice fishing and they do snowshoe and they show the children how to prepare the fish in the spring.

[FNC1] The community sometimes puts on different sessions or gatherings; there was one in the community last year where traps were set up.

[FNC1] He [trapper] was doing things [demonstrations] with the martens and skinning them.

[FNC1] Elder: We [childcare centre staff and children] go to the powwow week. Dilico [Anishinabek Family Care] brought little fish, sucker minnows and the kids snare them, the kids snare them in the bucket. The kids try to snare them.

[FNC4] Elder: In the spring we do cultural days for one week. Most of the kids from the school sign up. I did traditional games and I had a large group I had a small group the first day but the second day a whole bunch showed up.

[FNC4] The child care center does not go to cultural days. Some activities are not age appropriate and the activities are happening when the children are napping sometimes.

All the participants shared stories and experiences of the local cultural week activities with pride and a strong sense of their community's identity.

Discussion

Outdoor Learning & Cultural / Linguistic Re-remembering

During Institute One and Two IECEs shared their passion for changing their current outdoor learning environments which would include cultural teachings on the land with the children and families attending the childcare centers. Coe explains (2016), "integrating the natural world into early childhood education can be viewed as a pedagogical endeavor for teachers" and adds that "ideas and theories" can guide how the natural world supports the children's learning" (p. 5).

Coe's work aligns with many of the IECE's visions and ways of knowing. To bring practical skills to achieve those visions, IECEs worked with Olivia Chow, from Building Skills for Change Institute at Ryerson University, to design new playgrounds, modify existing ones, and question current policies in an effort to build a strategic plan that focused on building a distinct Anishinabe expression of land-based cultural / linguistic teachings. Bringing those visions into reality can be considered to be a local expression of science of the land that can be expanded as the child develops.

Elders are respected as carriers of knowledge, wisdom, and experience therefore Elders are the first teachers in learning an Indigenous science (Cajete, 2000). In an effort to model that understanding additional teachings were shared by Elder Brenda Mason and other Knowledge Keepers during Institute Two.

A review of Sutherland & Swayze's (2012) article on including Indigenous Knowledge in science-based environmental education programs supported this notion in that, "Elders share traditional cultural teachings, exposing students to a worldview that recognizes the intrinsic value and interdependence of all living beings and spiritual entities" (p. 90). Elder inclusion, "helps to close generation gaps created by legacies of residential schools while strengthening Aboriginal pride and kinship" (Sutherland & Swayze, 2012, p. 90).

Elder Brenda Mason (personal conversation, September 23, 2018), defined the primary focus of Euro-Western education in this way, "it teaches us to lead with our minds…but often leaves out the holistic approaches to learning." Mason believes that in-spite of colonization Indigenous knowing has survived, "wisdom is already in you, it's your heart which enhances our understandings confirming what we know and the work we do reflects our truth as we walk with our values." Awakening that "knowing" is conditional on a form of education that privileges Indigagogic practice that is driven by authentic spiritual values, that intersect with more formally-acquired knowledge (Hodson & Kitchen, 2015). Indigagogic practice in the early years relies on outdoor learning opportunities that envelop children in play spaces that bring natural and reusable materials into their playgrounds, including gardening.

IECEs recognize their regulatory approved playgrounds limit the learning opportunities that exist in the bush line, the community cultural events, or engaging with Elders and other community members. Styres (2011) believes that,

> Land as the first teacher, is a contemporary engagement with Indigenous philosophies derived from a land-centered culture and based on very old pedagogies. These pedagogies are an acknowledgment and an honouring of the art and science embedded in traditional teaching practices (p. 717).

Within the confines of Indigagogic land learning there are many teachers including the crawlers, the swimmers, the flyers, and the four leggeds. Taylor and Pacini-Ketchabaw's (2015) work detail this teaching perspective,

> As we see it, the children are not the only orchestrators or actors in these interspecies worlds and encounters. Rather, the learning emerges from the relations taking place between all actors - human and more-than-human alike (p. 2).

Learning that embraces Indigagogy[7] embraces the totality of a child and the teacher, spiritually, emotionally, intellectually and physically in the natural world where all are, "members of interconnected and interdependent multispecies common worlds" (Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015, p. 5).

Real Fences & Otherwise

The research findings outline many barriers and challenges to enacting outdoor learning, these findings are highlighted under four fences: *a Regulatory Fence, a Physical Fence, an Invisible Fence,* and an *Environmental Fence.* Fences keep things in and keep things out both literally and figuratively. It could be initially noted that there is only one physical fence built around the outdoor playground at the licensed childcare centre to meet the licensing regulations, but what is more important are the ideas that are being kept inside and outside of the fences that are being built.

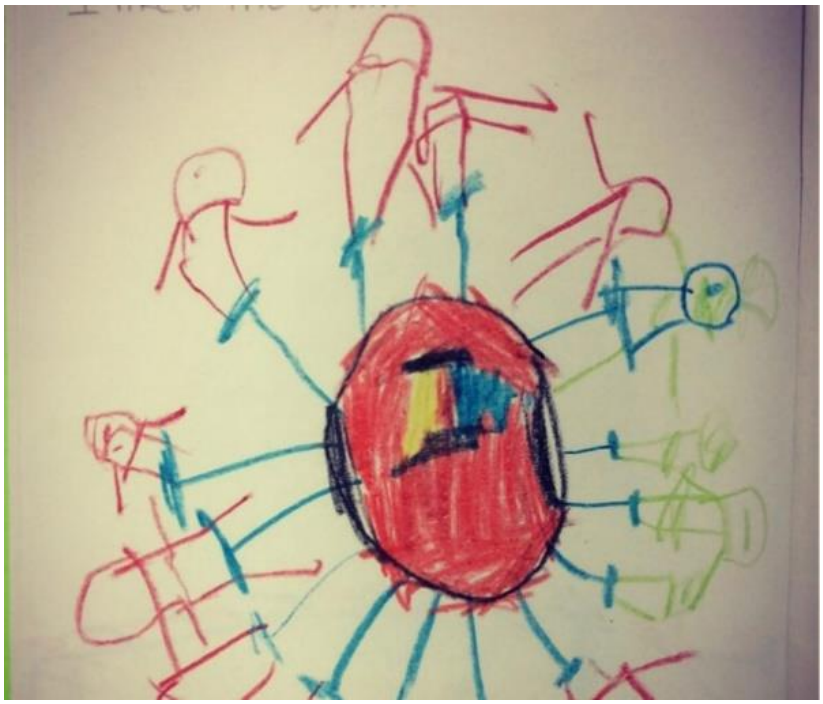
The IECEs and participants in the study are motivated and committed to improving the outdoor learning opportunities for children and families to allow for healthy play opportunities. Research of ECE practice demonstrate that children can make sense of the world through play. As children investigate, experiment with materials and interact with one another through play they establish skills in problem-solving, social competence, self-regulation, and communication (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2019). The participants will need support and resources to plan and implement play-based learning, and land-based education in early learning outdoor settings. Indigenous philosophies believe nature was the frame of reality that formed the learning experiences (Cajete, 2000, p. 95). Connecting through clan and societal symbolism, ritual, art, and visionary, tradition, members connected themselves to the plants, animals, waters, mountains, sun, moon, stars, and planets of their world. (Cajete, 2000, p. 95). The land-based education provides these connections and learning experiences.

[7] Hodson believes that the term "Pedagogy", and the lesser used term "Andragogy" privilege the values / beliefs of the dominant society and shape all aspects of formal schooling. Indigenous people come to education with an inherent set of values / beliefs that are often in conflict with the dominant experience of school and the result not only further traumatizes, but is a contributing factor to the low grade 12 completion rates in Ontario.
The term, "Indigagogy" (see Hodson & Kitchen, 2015) is a strategic response that promotes an alternative vision and encourages all Indigenous educators, scholars and researchers to look to epistemically aligned alternatives in all areas of education that privilege the values / beliefs of Indigenous peoples.
indig-a-gogy /' indige , gäjë noun
the method and practice of Indigenous teaching, learning and research, especially as in relationship to the theory of healing and wellness of Indigenous children, youth, adults and [E]lders.
"the successful pursuit of Indigenous healing and wellness is dependent on Indigagogy."

Within the framework of nature, the reality of providing learning experiences in the language expresses a way of life and a connection to the land. Language concerning the environment is explained by Styres (2011), "Language is storied through the interconnected relationships of land as the first teacher and primary caregiver through pedagogy" (p. 721).

> As illustrated by one Elder in the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996): Does it confuse you when I refer to animals as people? In my language it is not confusing...we consider both animals and people to be living beings...when my people see a creature in the distance they say: Awiiyak (someone is there). It is not that my people fail to distinguish animals from people. Rather, they address them with equal respect. Once they are near and [identifiable] ... then they use their particular name. (Vol. 4, p. 123)

Truth and Reconciliation calls to action: Call #12 speaks to early childhood education: "We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). Shared stories from Indigenous educators highlight awareness of the cultural teaching that support Indigenous children's learning and overall wellbeing by way of fostering identity and Canadian history. Callaghan, Hale, Taylor-Leonhardi, Lavallee (2018) state that, "we must start learning to listen respectfully and without judgments" and "not only with our ears but our hearts" and "act in ways to contribute to reconciliation" (p. 18).



"Around the Drum"
Artist: Jett Parkinson, age 4
Photo: Lori Huston

Objective 2.

To qualitatively assess the impact of the Program to enact the expanded education innovation skill-set in a local First Nation context, including, proposal development - proposal strategies, budgeting, writing, IECE innovation-visioning, relations, knowledge, and action planning, and facilitating community-based IECE innovations.

Innovation & Practical Skill

To be effective all innovation must be buttressed with practical skill. The ability to locate applicable knowledge, research capacity, collaborate with community / colleagues to develop a shared vision, budgeting, or the ability to write a successful funding proposal are all part of being a leader.

[FNC1] The community did a proposal and received the Journey Together [funding in our community]. We still haven't met this new year [with the health department] but we will be meeting and will be looking at how that will look [regarding new programs].

[FNC1] [Journey together funding] It was more towards an Early ON center [program]...is what the proposal was geared towards. Family Support drop-in program for parents like what you would see off- reserve in an Early ON Center.

[FNC1] We will have space for the new Journey Together program a huge space, not during the summer months but all year. [large room where a family support program will run from September to June and July/Aug school-age children will be in that space].

[FNC4] We don't write any many proposals here. We have not done any here.

[FNC4] We have had some free time to explore Jordan's principal funding. I think last year I had to write a proposal for a language program. It took some work to try and get all the information I needed in the proposal it was for a language program. I was really second-guessing myself how I was wording it but I never heard anything back.

Researcher 1: Would that stop you from doing another proposal not hearing back?

[FNC4] I would do another one [proposal] I heard I could use Jordan's principal funding to get outdoor play space funding.

[FNC3] If I hear of any [call for] proposals I always jump on it right away.

[FNC3] We need to fix up our roof. We always have a problem with our roof... funding is not usually for structural stuff so that can be an issue our windows are busted and we need to fix that because it doesn't look nice.

[FNC3] We got a brand-new van last week.

[FNC3] If we ever have a proposal for transportation again. I'm going to get a minibus next time.

[FNC3] Sometimes they [band office] faxes funding opportunities over and sometimes on Facebook somebody will say [post/share] opportunities for funding.

Research 2: **The IECEs from the Program have a Facebook group to post any funding calls or professional development opportunities.**

[FNC3] During the leadership [the Program], there were lots of links shared for new funding. I looked into them but didn't have time to finish.

[FNC2] I'm actually working on one now. The proposal I'm working on is Jordan's Principle Funding.

IECE Innovation - Visioning, Relations, Knowledge & Action

Researcher 1: Did you use the Medicine Wheel model vision, relations, knowledge and action when you were developing your proposal?

[FNC1] Yes definitely, but I definitely need more opportunities... well I don't want to say opportunity because the opportunity is there. Maybe confidence, may be just the encouragement and being able to look at other people's examples.

[FNC1] It's still very new to me using the medicine wheel [the model given in the Institutes One and Two].

[FNC1] through the sessions, [Institutes One and Two] we gained confidence in speaking whether it was online or in a circle. That allowed us an opportunity to speak up and gave us the tools with confidence and how to prepare, so that was very valuable.

[FNC4] I know the early years is moving to a more of pedagogical learning and that's a thing the staff has not been able to keep up on and how to get started on the new curriculum frameworks.

[FNC4] The change has been more of an emergent curriculum for some time now but the centers want to be more up-to-date which we need support with.

[FNC4] It's part of our licensing manual [Child Care Early Years Act] and I had to write a program statement and goals on how we are going to teach the curriculum.

[FNC4] It's a lot of work to try and teach the staff what the province curriculum is asking and I'm not really knowledgeable about how learning happens. Documenting it can be a struggle.

[FNC4] The struggle is the way it is written, the terms and the language used are not familiar, it is very much a mainstream document and it takes time to learn, [to] interpret it.

[FNC4] It's not relevant to the way we teach, in some ways.

[FNC4] We get stuck on the terminology and I think this is because of [fluent speaker of Oji-Cree] language.

Researcher 2: Recently an Indigenous Early Learning Framework was developed have you seen it?

[FNC4] I have only heard of the Ontario [How does learning happen] framework.

[FNC4] I have never heard of the Indigenous framework either. I always have to get a hold of the licensing program advisor if I find out there's a [new] resource out there [available] she doesn't always offer them up.

[FNC4] We're going to create some manuals which will be on how to incorporate our language and the other one will be online based activities.

[FNC4] I'm going to see if I can send my two new workers to get the puppetry training with the [Kwayaciiwin Education Resource Centre] language teacher to receive the same training I did at Oshki [Institute Two].

Researcher 1: So, you've seen the women involved in the leadership training have you seen the difference in these ladies?

[FNC1] Elder: I could see their ideas and trying to find different things to relate to their schooling and that oh yeah you could see it like they want to bring what they learn from there here and they've done that.

[FNC1] Elder: They definitely got their ideas and want to work on it like ...one [of the Registered Early Childhood Educator] would say "like when I went to this childcare" and she would bring her feedback not to copy what they're doing but different ideas.

Researcher 1: You can see that training impacts the Quality Care?

[FNC1] Elder: Oh yeah, I can see that coming back from their training happy with their certificates and their pass...but yes when they were going, they were stressed out they needed to get assignments done while working but they did it and I'm really proud of them.

[FNC1] Elder: Always supporting…I'm the cook but they come and ask me and talk to me you know.

[FNC1] Sometimes we don't get treated as professionals from the community and from the people that come into this building, we're just here taking care of kids.

[FNC1] "You can go to the center and do that" [assuming they have the room at the center] they have the room they come in and use our facilities and they don't realize that what we have to go through…[lots of work to move everything back] all of this to get it back to where it is for our kids keeping everything clean and sanitize on a daily basis and ….even when we had our van and they would use it for community events and it was up to our driver to clean the van and that there was nothing left in the van….

[FNC1] Sometimes we don't get treated the way we should be….one time it was really hot in here [the childcare center] and they [band administrators] said just put all the kids downstairs and they don't understand we can't mix all the children together…. to them [band administrators] it was just like no big deal they don't know what our policies and procedures are for childcare licensing.

[FNC1] I think sometimes what happens is even though it's important and we all know that children need to be safe and healthy... all the other political stuff takes priority and we continue operating successfully with quality and I don't want to say we get forgotten about but we almost do.

[FNC1] The band members need to see more value in our role and also make more of a presence in our Center. We always invite them.

Researcher 2: Would you say you are paid fairly?

[FNC2] No, we are not paid what others are paid in town [off-reserve].

[FNC2] Very low wages and everybody's the same there's no difference between qualified or not qualified.

[FNC2] We were told we would get an increase [in wages] but we never did if we completed our ECE Diploma program.

[FNC2] She [a Registered Early Childhood Educator] has been here for 20 years and has not received a raise.

[FNC2] I always ask the centres supervisor, is there a way that we can manage our own finances and then we can decide how we would like to spend the funding.

[FNC2] I have nothing to do with the Finance I just call the band office and say what I need and I get approval. The band looks after all funding.

[FNC2] I'm mad sometimes…we get less pay.

Facilitating Community-Based ECE Innovation

[FNC2] We can't close the childcare center to attend the band meeting so we can't attend the meetings they have them during the day they always have their meetings during the day when everybody's working.

[FNC2] We have a hard time getting volunteers and the parents to support our programs they think of us as just babysitters.

[FNC2] The parents come to the events but they don't participate they still rely on the Child Care staff to feed their children and do not support us.

[FNC1] We just keep going day-to-day and support each other and I'm hoping that as you can see there are steps to come up [to the main door] we do have a ramp but you will see in the new center it will be easier access for people.

[FNC1] We have community members that come here on a regular basis, the center is open to everyone... you know what if this was a municipal center that would not happen even with our mandate and our licensing we're not really allowed to but we never say no to community members. The children really enjoy their visits as well. They always say hello to the children when they come in.

[FNC1] They [the children] love seeing people [the community members] come [into the childcare center].

[FNC1] It's an exciting part of their day [community members] we want them to feel part of the program and we would never say something like we need a criminal reference check and we would never leave them alone with the children.

[FNC1] But now we're looking at the Indigenous Early Childhood framework…I think it's through the federal government. We will use that framework, it's very new [as of November 2018].

[FNC1] We would have our own policies and procedures that would be different for First Nation communities because there is a big difference between Traditional practices and Municipal practices.

[FNC2] I sit on their [school] education board so I helped collaborate with school and the center to come together, it's a slow start and it's still slow. I want to do more together.

[FNC4] Elder: Education is really important I'm grateful for the invite today.

[FNC4] Elder: When I saw my students misbehaving not being able to handle school life that's when I went and got personal training. I wanted to know exactly who I am and what I could give to my students and how I could help them. Recently, in the past 12 years maybe past 11 years. I've done a lot of personal growth.

[FNC4] Elder: I'm really glad to be a part of the Suboxone program I did personal growth workshops with the clients and I still do that at my place of work when we have workshops so if you need personal workshop here [at the childcare center] I can do that, it's usually three days.

[FNC4] Elder: The workshop on self-care it frees you, personal freedom you become aware of who you are and what you were created to be. Why you were created and what your gifts are…

Outside the Wildfire Circle one of the child care educators spoke about how every other Friday, she has staff self-care days at her center where they do professional development or they even just do an activity together to build staff morale and learning opportunities.

Discussion

IECE Leadership in the Territory

Oshki-Wenjack was the first post-secondary institution in Ontario to develop an Indigenous in-service professional development (PD) program based on the needs expressed by those Indigenous Early Childhood Educators (IECE) working in a First Nation context.

That PD program development was propelled by two intra-related absolutes. First, to dramatically move the needle of Indigenous school success,[8] at all levels of education, required innovative educational initiatives that existed outside of the prevalent notions of how education is done. Second, low levels of Indigenous school success are irrevocably tied to numerous socio-economic, socio-judicial, socio-health, socio-cultural inequities that dominate Indigenous communities today (Hodson & Kitchen, 2015). What is clear through the participant narratives is that to be effective innovation requires an in-depth support including Chief and Council as well as parents / caregivers.

The participant narratives of the experiences throughout the Institute One and Two revealed that Indigenous children and Indigenous educators require an alternative pedagogic / indigagogic approach to learning and teaching. Their communities have exploding populations, "around one-third of First Nations People (29.2%) were 14 years of age or younger in 2016" (Statistics Canada, 2018A). Poverty is the norm, "Ontario children living in First Nations communities are living in poverty with many inequalities, and the work of the IECE educators can have life-changing impacts on the young" (Huston, 2018, p. 53) and their future. A Senate Committee heard from Kelly Crawford, Director Anishinabek Education System: "We have an opportunity to use education as a tool to rebuild and strengthen our nation, our language, our culture, and our traditions." This concept is in the discussion of the federal legislation known as Bill C-61 (Francis, 2017).

Consider just the socio-judicial implications of Indigenous children leaving school before the completion of grade 12 and incarceration.

[8] In 2001, 12.10 percent of the Indigenous population in Ontario aged 15 years & over, had a high school diploma.
By 2016, 35 percent of the Indigenous population in the province aged 15 years to 24 years, had a high school diploma. In that same year 76.5 percent of the non-Indigenous population in Ontario aged 15 years and over, had a high school diploma.
Given the 2001 / 2016 rate of increase in completion rates, it will take until 2041 for Indigenous people to reach the 2016 rates of non-Indigenous high school completion in the province.

Hodson & Kitchen (2015) write,

> For over a decade, Canadian researchers have consistently found that a high school diploma decreases the likelihood of criminal behavior and provincial incarceration (see for example, Brzozowski, Taylor-Butts, and Johnson, 2006; La Prairie, 2002; Lochner, 2004).

Consider the implications of the Canadian moral compass where the dominant response to the low levels of school success is to warehouse unprecedented numbers of Indigenous people in cages,[9] many in deplorable conditions,[10] rather than deal with a major contributing factor to criminal behavior.

Relationships & Change

Oshki-Wenjack's long-standing relationship with IECE alumni in the northwest, many graduates of the Early Childhood Education Program (see Table 4.1), was the demarcation point for shifting educational practice, increasing high school graduation rates and lowering Indigenous incarceration rates. This can be achieved by enhancing the innovation and leadership skills of those same educators. The IECE narratives from the first Talking Circle dovetailed with the two motivating absolutes to reveal alternative ways of seeing the connections between community, childcare centres, and leaders with Indigenous perspectives. Not only do those IECEs have existing relationships with children and their immediate families but those relationships move outward into extended families, elementary schools, high schools, health and governance across a community.

Then IECE Program Coordinator wrote,

> The IECE students have the links in their communities to continue to move in their leadership journey. The students are committed to their ongoing work to bring actionable change to benefit the children and families in the Ontario First Nations communities (Huston, 2018, p. 53).

[9] According to Correctional Services Canada, "the overall incarceration rate of Indigenous people is 29.4 per cent (Blackburn, 2019, p. 2)".

[10] Adam Capay was held in pre-trial custody in Thunder Bay for four years. Superior Court Justice John Fregeau ruled Capay's time - totaling 1,647 days - in segregation was a "complete and utter failure of correctional officials to properly balance the accused's charter rights with the statutory objectives can only be described as profoundly unreasonable, unacceptable and intolerable" (Prokopchuck, 2019, p. 2).

Table 4.1: Graduates of the Oshki-Wenjack IECE Diploma Program

Cohort Year	Number of Graduates
2008-2010	12
2009-2011	9
2010-2012	11
2011-2013	6
2012-2014	No Intake
2013-2015	16
2014-2016	6
2015-2017	14
2017-2018	7
2018-2019	8
Total	**89**

In part, the narratives related that to meet the complex, multi-faceted needs of the communities they serve, IECEs leaders require different approaches to their leadership, certainly more leaders, but also leadership education that de-emphasizes the one-size-fits-all teaching practice, one that privileges and promotes healthy child development, cultures, languages, and community aspirations (Huston, 2018; Krieg, Davis & Smith, 2014; Kagan & Hallmark, 2001).

First Nation early childhood (birth to twelve years old) programs and services have different policy and funding focuses than their mainstream counterparts, managed by both provincial and federal governments. For example, the provincial government's Journey Together Program encouraged innovation that emphasized the integration of child and family services on-reserve (Northern Affairs Canada, 2019). The federal government's Jordan's Principle (Government of Canada, 2019) assures Indigenous children unhindered access to health, social or educational products, services, and supports even if jurisdictional disputes exist between provincial, territorial and the federal government.

Increasing IECE Capacity

The narratives associated to this study reveal expanded strengths of the PD participants, sharing responsibilities, advocating for the children and families in their communities and writing successful funding proposals. Of the four childcare centres associated to this study, half had completed successful proposals for Journey Together (N=2) and others were in the process of writing proposals for Jordan's Principle (N=2). Anecdotal evidence suggests that other

participants in the innovation have also made successful applications to both funding initiatives (*N*=6)[11]. Clearly, the inclusion of proposal writing in both Institutes resulted in immediate response by the IECEs.

The Nature of an Emerging Profession

Ontario's recent creation of a College of Early Childhood Education and the expansion of early years services in elementary schools across the province has propelled the emergent professionalization of Early Childhood Educators. This emergent nature of the profession situates those educators in a middle-ground in the education community, somewhere between a glorified baby-sitter and a provincially certified educator engaged in important early years education.

The challenges of this middle-ground are especially evident in the narratives of those IECEs participating in this study. IECEs reported that their role in the education of First Nation children are often misunderstood, or under-appreciated, their leadership skill-set rarely recognized in their communities.

Most disturbing was the low scale of pay often mentioned by those participants. Some had not seen an increase in salaries for over a decade. There were additional reports from half of the selected communities that some IECEs had chosen to leave the First Nation child care centre for employment in an urban centre. When asked why, the researchers were told that, "the salaries in town were significantly higher than on reserve."

[11] Out of the initial 24 IECE participants in Institute One, six (25 percent) submitted successful funding proposals. Reports from Shkoday suggest that IECEs continue to reach out for support as they develop their own funding proposals.

The continued professionalization of the ECE field is also evident in the recent release of the federal government's Indigenous Early Learning Framework (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2018) was created to support the needs of IECEs across Canada. Although not all IECEs are aware of the new framework, or have not viewed the document, that document does identify shared principles and goals that align with Ontario's Commitment to Reconciliation (Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, 2016) and the Truth and Reconciliation (2015) Calls to Action for early years education that highlights the valuing and inclusion of the voices of IECEs.

The goal of the federal Framework is to establish,

> High-quality, culturally-specific and well-supported early learning and child care (ELCC) programs, services and supports that are specifically designed for and with Indigenous families and communities will make a genuine difference in the early experiences of children (Employment & Social Development Canada, 2018).

Implementing the many Indigenous ECE policies has not be without difficulty. IECEs expressed difficulty in working within the Ministry of Education's three-hundred plus policy guidelines. At this time the Childcare Act does not provide separate consideration for licensed First Nation programs. IECE participants related they do their very best to adhere to the guidelines but many are culturally inappropriate or do not consider the limitations of resources that is the norm in a First Nation context. For example, the lack of qualified carpenters to construct a fenced-in outdoor playground, serving wild meats / fish to children, these are both areas that the IECEs require additional support from the Ministry Advisor to allow for a more precise understanding of options to eliminate those barriers.

IECE Future Research

Not surprisingly, the issue of IECE leadership in a First Nation context is underrepresented in the existing literature. For the most part, that body of literature is dominated by a small cadre of researchers (Krieg, Davis & Smith, 2014; Muijs, Aubrey, Harris, & Briggs, 2004) that often situate that research within a mainstream school setting. Naturally, that environment reflects a certain organizational structure and leadership culture, which is rarely collaborative, community-based, or as interconnected as the work of IECE supervisors and other front-line educators. This literature shortfall supports opportunities for future PD, research and publishing in the ongoing support of the professional development of IECE leadership.

The participants shared their vision of early learning programs, which begins with building their relationships with community members and band governance, the provincial and federal governments. Within this complex multi-lateral environment, finding common ground and a win-win outcome for all, is not easily achieved.

The most often referenced outcome, shared by many IECEs working in this multi-lateral operational environment, is they are not heard, or their role within education was often mis-under stood. Discussing issues of silenced conversations, Peter Moss (2017) observed that "alternative

discourses in early childhood are varied, vibrant and vocal, readily heard by those who listen" (p. 12).

In part, achieving this level of "discourse" in an Indigenous context, will rely on IECE's ability and confidence to share their personal stories. Increasing that skill was a major focus in both Institutes One and Two that included a total of four days training through Building Skills for Change Program. The students developed a better understanding for their core beliefs and values, their personal story connected to their profession and the overall strengths they bring to change.

With their permission some of those stories were included in the Building Skills website to inspire others. One IECE's story was highlighted during the anniversary of Ryerson University's Building Skills for Change Program (see http://oliviachow.ca/building-skills-for-change-2/).

In part the financial costs associated to travel in the Northwest is a prohibiting factor to further PD of all IECE supervisors and front-line educators. With this factor in mind the spirit that the Program promoted among the learners was a train-the-trainer philosophy. PD would be shared when learners fortunate to attend returned to their communities to affect change.

Each one of these elements – IECE leadership, the relationships necessary to bring educational innovation into the early years, increasing leadership skills, the professionalization of the sector - are underrepresented within the body of research associated to ECE in Canada and IECE in particular. Oshki-Wenjack has an opportunity to not only contribute to that knowledge but to promote best alternatives.

Ongoing IECE Support

The need for ongoing self-care emerged as an important everyday consideration for IECEs. It is difficult for many to come to terms with the depth of historic inherited or contemporary trauma and the many responses to that trauma that permeate First Nations in Northwestern Ontario. For example, in the twenty-four First Nations located in the Sioux Lookout District the suicide rate in the 10 to 19 age groups is fifty times higher than the rest of Canada (Frideres & Gadacz, 2012; Troian, 2018). In support of that need, PD teachers and the Elder encouraged IECEs to value self-care as an active response to the many challenges and ongoing trauma - suicide, poverty, and addiction - in their communities.

During the final day of Institute Two the IECEs acknowledged the importance of the learning community and the wish to continue that collaborative, supportive environment in their work. The result was the creation of a Facebook Group entitled, Indigenous ECE Mentorship. Participants envisioned this initiative to be the first stage to a full IECE mentoring innovation that would include regular check-ins, professional grief support, a sharing of resources, links to funding opportunities and related information. That innovation would eventually extend to include other IECE program graduates as well.

Often mainstream education policies and guidelines have created challenges to the reflection of community and culture in educational programming. For example, many of the participants spoke of the need for clear guidelines to support their culturally informed practices and traditional beliefs when writing about their program's philosophy statement which is a requirement of the Ministry of Education licensing process.

It is also important to point out that currently Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (CAAT) do not offer a distinct Indigenous Early Childhood Education Diploma Program that embraces a culturally responsive Indigagogy of relations. However, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities has identified a specific vocational learning Standard #11 that Indigenous ECE Programs must align.

> The graduate has reliably demonstrated the ability to: engage with Indigenous children, families and communities to co-create, implement and evaluate Indigenous early years and childcare and child and family programs and environments that are culturally sensitive and culturally relevant to the communities they serve (Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2018).

Stagg-Peterson, Huston, Ings, Mason and Falcigno (2020) provide a snap-shot of how the CAAT system meets the Standard at this time.

> Indigenous postsecondary institutes do integrate Standard #11 into their ECE diploma programs. At this time, these programs are offered in partnership with non-Indigenous postsecondary institutions, however.

The *Binoojiingyag Kinoomaadwin; Early Childhood Education Program* is offered at the Anishinabek Education Institute (AEI), in partnership with St. Clair College, for example. Within the AEI ECE diploma program are some courses on Indigenous cultures and practices, such as *Introduction to Native Studies and Native Cultural Expression*, that address Standard #11 (AEI Post-Secondary, 2019).

Similarly, the *Anishinabemowin-Early Childhood Education* is offered at Kenjegwe Teg Education Institute (KTEI), an Indigenous institute, in partnership with Canadore College. Developed in 2016, this program infuses ECE fundamentals with Anishinaabe teachings, values and world views. It is designed "to prepare proficient Ojibwe language speakers as early childhood educators in this highly specialized Anishinaabe immersion early childhood education program" (Kenjgewin Teg, 2019, p. 1).

Both of the Indigenous ECE diploma programs mentioned above have embedded local Indigenous community-generated curriculum, with local cultural knowledge, values, and practices, which are outlined on the course syllabi.

Additional ECE diploma programs that follow the core accredited program of Canadore College in North Bay, Ontario, are offered at Indigenous post-secondary institutions. They include First Nation Technical Institute (FNTI), located in Parry Sound, with a branch campus in Cochrane; [Oshki-Wenjack] located in Thunder Bay, and Seven Generations Education Institute located in Kenora, with a branch campus in Fort Frances. Although Canadore College's program does not include Indigenous content, the Indigenous institutions' programs include Indigenous Elders and educators, and an environment that is responsive to students' communities' cultures.

The current postsecondary regulatory environment does not allow Indigenous Institutes to offer accredited college diplomas or university degrees. As a result, Early Childhood Education Diploma Programs are predominantly the purview of the CAAT system and the needs of Indigenous communities are for the most part not represented in those programs. Stagg-Peterson *et al*., (2020) analysis demonstrates that Indigenous Institutes are forced to meet their community's expression of Standard #11 within the margins of those programs rather than at the centre.

Many Indigenous students attending Oshki-Wenjack are traveling from remote communities affected by the residential school, sixties scoop, and overall effects of colonialism are manifest through numerous socio-economic, socio-educational, and socio-heath realities. To develop innovative educational responses to their community's needs IECE learners require an education that supports their culture and language at the very minimum in all Indigenous Institutes.

International Examples

Gong & Kahu (2017), researchers of Chinese and Maori decent working in New Zealand developed the Heart Pedagogy as a double-edged education approach which claims to be inherently embedded in Indigenous practice. The Heart Pedagogy, defined as encouraging learners to connect to their highest self, or spiritual being, informs the mind. The way one communicates within a spiritual realm to do our work, is the way the heart works (Gong & Kahu, 2017). The IECEs naturally created a "values infused" approach throughout their learning and the training which is connected to their heart pedagogy. Elder Brenda also supports this theory of heart pedagogy, "the learning that occurred by the students while in connecting to their own identities as Indigenous people with the traditional spiritual practices during the institutes was transformative" (personal communication). Gong & Kahu (2017) explained the implementation of heart pedagogy shifts away from a service mode, for example, "information vs. transformation" with "every opportunity to forge relationships." The Indigenous ECE leadership program aligns with a double-edged education of both the heart and mind.

IECEs have described their ways of knowing and doing within their Indigenous culture by sharing the understanding of child development. This begins with the creation of relationships first, then considers the interrelationships among a child's spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical world. The holistic approach to the development of the child occurs in the context of the child's family experiences and community relationships. Through their narratives the IECEs have explained their community informed visions to enhance childcare centre, and how the knowledge of their culture has to come first to support the children.

From the first formative Wildfire Circle to the last held during the summative research, this educational innovation demonstrated how such a cultural approach could be developed and implemented through a deep commitment to Indigenous ways of learning and knowing. The Wildfire model, used to develop IECE's own innovation, allows the participants to start with a vision, which at the same time further supports and builds the relationships. The next two stages,

knowledge and action takes place after a firm foundation of Vision and necessary Relationships are established (Kompf & Hodson, 2000). The IECEs are very much still in the Vision, Relationships, and Knowledge phases and are just tapping into Action with the completion of some successful proposals. The IECEs in the First Nation communities will need continued support in their leadership journey to facilitate change.

There has never been a study of compensation-wages that compares IECE working in a First Nation context with non-Indigenous ECEs in the province of Ontario. IECEs report low salaries and / or zero wage increase for obtaining ECE certification or in some cases an increase in wages for a considerable amount of time. The province of Ontario recognized the need for investment in a workforce strategy for Registered Early Childhood Educators and early years staff with the release of the *Growing Together Report* which outlines key areas in which the workforce will be addressed by the government (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2018).

The five critical areas in the *Growing Together Report* (GTR) aligning with the findings of this study and the needs of a First Nation workforce working in a critical area of education, including,

1. Establishing Fair Compensation
2. Improving Working Conditions
3. Enhancing Skills and Opportunities
4. Valuing Contributions
5. Increasing Recruitment

Although the GTR was not specifically referenced by the participants these five key areas were heard both during the Wildfire Circle and outside the Circle. Participants consistently expressed the belief in self-advocacy to improve their working conditions.

The participants and educators have started to revision their outdoor learning environments to include and extend on land-based teachings. The journey together funding has allowed for the development of new programs to support cultural and language. Educators have also started to build relationships with the school and community members to support their vision of land-based education for the ELCC programs.

Opioid Replacement Therapy in First Nations: Possible Implications for Education in Northwestern Ontario

The purpose of this section is to represent the voices of those IECEs that have shared their observations / concerns related to children born to parents engaged in opioid replacement programs as well as to overview some of the limited research literature that supports a call to act. This issue is highly complex, heavily nuanced and the possible ramifications to all levels of education, health and other social service sectors potentially overwhelming, perhaps for decades to come.

The limited scope of this study is unable to fully represent the issue in this report. None-the-less, the issue has been identified by half of the four participating First Nation early childhood centres as an emergent concern that impacts some of the children in their care.

The authors wish to acknowledge the political leadership of the First Nation / Métis communities for championing opioid replacement programs in remote and urban communities in support of their citizens struggling with opioid addiction. Despite incredible people going to extraordinary lengths and measures the opioid crisis continues to undermine communities at multiple levels.

Overviewing the Demographics

As in all things Indigenous in Canada, accessing data that accurately describes the impact of the First Nations or urban Indigenous communities in the northwest is difficult, information is often limited, dated, or only tangentially relevant.

We remind the reader that this study surveyed four communities selected from the four Provincial Territorial Organizations (PTOs) in the northwest including, the Independent First Nation Alliance, Grand Council Treaty Three, Nishnawbe Aski Nation and the Union of Ontario Indians-Anishinabek that had IECEs participating in the PD.

The total population of those PTOs in Northwestern Ontario, as recorded by Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, Community Profiles is approximately, 40,000 (see Tables 1.1 through 1.4, pp. 10 – 12).

The aggregate demographic profile of the four selected First Nation communities chosen to participate in this study, includes a median age[12] of 25 years and forty-one percent of the population is 0 to 19 years of age. Combined, these data describe a young population, well within childbearing years. In fact, many First Nation communities are experiencing significant year-on-year population increases in this territory. What can be concluded from these data is that

[12] The median age is the age that divides a population into two equal groups.

a wave of children will be accessing education in both First Nation and urban centres across Northwestern Ontario.

Generally, the total population of First Nation communities in the territory is small. The average population of this study's four selected communities was 850 citizens. Many First Nation are closely-knit through extended family relationships and like other small communities, everyone knows everyone.

Grappling with the Scope of Opioid Crisis in the Northwest

Of the four PTOs associated with this study, NAN has published the most data and numerous anecdotal insights are included in newspaper reports that track this socio-health issue from the beginning. For the purposes of this study, and this report, the authors have chosen to rely on those data / reports, not with the intention of excluding the other PTOs, or the associated communities, but rather in an effort to provide a fuller glimpse of this crisis.

By 2012 opioid addiction and abuse across the country had reached a level never before seen in Canada and OxyContin was a contributing factor to that crisis. This prompted the removal of several formulations of opioids in favour of a new formulation less prone to abuse early in that year.

The collective concern expressed across the northwest was that removing opioids from those using the drug outside of the Non-Insured Health Benefit (NIHB) program would result in a potential of "mass involuntary opiate withdrawal" (Ubelacker, The Canadian Press, p. 1) and would cause a widespread community crisis.

But how great was the crisis? In an early 2012 news article, NAN Deputy Chief Mike Metatawbin suggested,

…the number of [NAN] community members addicted to OxyContin "is staggering." NAN estimates that at least 10,000 people living on reserves are addicted to OxyContin (Ubelacker, p. 1).

That estimate climbed steadily. In a 2013 journal article NAN believed that fifty percent of the adult population in forty-nine communities, "are prescription opioid drug misusers in need of treatment, according to a 2011 assessment prepared for the…Chiefs" (Webster, 2013, p. 2).

Describing the crisis at the grassroots, the Chief of Cat Lake First Nation, "declared a state of emergency, saying an estimated 70 per cent of community members had opioid addictions – including children as young as 11" (Ubelacker, The Canadian Press, p. 1).

To determine the possible scope of the crisis in NAN communities alone, consider the assessment data from 2013 (Webster, 2013, p. 2). If fifty percent of the overall population of NAN communities were opioid misusers, then as many as 22,500 people - women, men and possibly children - would be struggling with opioid withdrawal if an alternative formulation was not developed and a reliable local distribution system established.

In part, it was the impact of as many of 22,500 people in involuntary withdrawal in NAN communities, that propelled governments committed to a harm reduction strategy to fund numerous First Nation opioid treatment centres across the territory beginning after 2012.

The Impact on the Unborn?

Again, it is extremely difficult to access accurate population data that might describe the impact opioid replacement programs have on female populations of child bearing age. One Northern Ontario School of Medicine study that followed pregnant Indigenous women from Northwestern Ontario found that, "17% of 482 pregnant Aboriginal women…misused prescription opioid drugs during pregnancy" (in Webster, 2013, p. 2).

An early glimpse of that impact to schools may be seen in a 2012 CBC News article that quoted Constance Lake First Nation Chief, Roger Wesley, who observed, "[s]o now we've got opiate children [and] methadone children and they're starting to come into the classroom now…[w]e're starting to see a lot of behavioural issues, so do we have to turn our school into a special needs school?" (Porter, p. 2).

Early in the field work of this study, one of the four early childcare centres selected to participate had similar anecdotal observations. Two IECEs in one childcare centre's Wildfire Circle identified, "irregular sleep patterns, lack of self-regulation and unidentified behavior issues" connected to children born of mothers involved in opioid replacement treatment.

IECEs also reported that some parents were resistant to, or openly rejected their observations that may have resulted in early interventions or supports of their children.

Further inquiries of the other three participating childcare centres resulted in one additional centre making similar observations. To be clear, of the four First Nation childcare centres selected to participate in this study, a total of two, or fifty percent, identified similar concerns related to children exposed to of opioid replacement therapy in utero.

What About the Research?

A brief synopsis of the research completed by a Norwegian doctoral candidate, Carolien Konijnenberg was published on-line by ScienceNordic. That research included similar age groups of children in First Nation childcare centres. That synopsis concluded that,

> [F]our-year-olds prenatally exposed to methadone or Subutex has found that these children develop more problems involving attention span, fine motor coordination, self-control of behavior, and working memory - symptoms known collectively as disorders of behavioural and emotional regulation (Fugelsnes & Lie, 2013, p. 1).

A more detailed overview of Konijnenberg's doctoral research was published in 2014 (see Konijnenberg, Lund & Melinder). That article overviewed the statistical analysis of data collected from a cohort of thirty-five, four-year-old children prenatally exposed to opioid maintenance therapy (OMT) using three risk models.

Konijinenberg *et al.,* concluded that,

> [C]hildren prenatally exposed to methadone or buprenorphine were given scores within the normal range when assessed by the [Child Behavior Checklist/1,5-5]. While group means for children were within the nonclinical range, a number of mothers reported clinically significant child behavior problems, which appeared to be related to methadone / buprenorphine dose during pregnancy, maternal stress and maternal drug use after pregnancy (p. 11).

The So What Factor

What is especially interesting about Konignenberg's work is the breadth of the research and the analysis. The research model not only considered children exposed to opioids in utero but also measured other known factors that influence postnatal child behavior, especially the overall stress in the familial environment.

What is equally interesting is how the IECE's preliminary observations dovetail with Konijnenberg study and conclusions.

The long-term impact to children exposed to opioid replacement therapy when in utero may be unclear. However, the intersection of multiple contributing factors including significant population increases in Northwestern Ontario and the high percentage of child bearing aged Indigenous people engaged in opioid replacement programs in the territory would strongly suggest the need for more localized research that reflects a First Nation perspective.

Highlights of Success

The narratives of IECEs are replete with practical examples of change that can be directly attributed to participation in the PD innovation. Consider the following.

Seeking Out Leadership Opportunities

An increased in leadership capacities resulted in multiple instances of increased leadership involvement. IECEs shared that they have run for council positions in their communities, accepted positions on education councils representing the early years and stood for election in the Ontario College of Early Childhood Educators.

[FNC2] I sit on their [school] education board so I helped collaborate with school and the center to come together, it's a slow start and it's still slow. I want to do more together.

[FNC1] Through the sessions, [Institutes 1 and 2] we gained confidence in speaking, whether it was online or in a circle, that allowed us an opportunity to speak up and gave us the tools with confidence and how to prepare so that was very valuable.

Three of the participants are members of the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO) Truth and Reconciliation for Childcare Committee.

Increased Funding Opportunities

Including the practical skill of proposal writing resulted in a number of successful proposals that brought new financial resources into childcare centres.

[FNC3] We got $194,000 in funding under the Journey Together proposal

[FNC3] We got a brand-new van last week

[FNC3] I hear proposals I jump on it right away

[FNC2] I'm actually working on one, the proposal I'm working on is Jordan's Principal Funding.

Language, Culture & the Land-Based Opportunities

A heightened awareness of the importance of identity resulted in a myriad of expressions of language, culture and land-based learning.

[FNC4] We received some extra funding and we were able to purchase more Oji-Cree resources and books. We now have more books with Native people and culture.

[FNC4] We also write syllabics ourselves and share those charts in our classrooms.

[FNC4] We hosted a hunting camp for all women and girls between the ages 3 to 57 years old, went and they shot and cleaned a moose together. We spent three days in the camp.

Seeking Other Professional Development Opportunities

Professional Development that was grounded in a culturally responsive and relational indigagogy spawned a hunger for more learning.

[FNC1] But now we're looking at the Indigenous Early Childhood framework…. I think it's through the federal government, we will use that framework, it's very new [November 2018].

[FNC1] We would have our own policies and procedures, that would be different for First Nation communities, because there is a big difference between Traditional practices and Municipal practices.

[FNC3] We have advocated to use some of the new funding we received to hire a consultant to create some manuals. One will be how to create a language nest program and the other one is land-based learning program.

[FNC3] I'm going to see if I can send my two new workers to get the puppetry training with the [Kwayaciiwin Education Resource Centre] language teacher to receive the same training I did at Oshki [Institute One]

A total of twelve of the twenty-one teacher candidates enrolled in Oshki-Wenjack's Aboriginal Bachelor of Education (Primary / Junior) Degree Program in the fall of 2019 were participants in the PD.

Finally, consider the following IECE observation that speaks to a balance between increases in confidence and practical skill that is positioned at the centre of this PD innovation.

> [W]e gained confidence in speaking whether it was online or in a Circle. That [confidence] allowed us an opportunity to speak up. [The PD] gave us the tools…[the] confidence…to prepare…that was very valuable.

CHAPTER 5:

Knowledge Mobilization

A Culturally Responsive Research Method of Relations

The importance of respecting IECE's stories and experiences was critical to mobilizing the knowledge revealed through this study. Respect was operationalized in a number of ways that were informed by the establishment and maintenance of transparent and open relationships between all involved. Hodson (2013) explains within, "Indigenous culturally responsive research methods, there is no space between the researched and the researcher. It is the relationships that create a more in-depth conversation to allow for a complete understanding" (p. 355). This spirit of being in good relations is further supported in the Tri-Council Policy Statement, Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2014) position on Indigenous research. The three primary principles include, "respect for human dignity – respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice" (p. 113).

Those research relationships could not have expanded without a foundation that already existed through Oshki-Wenjack's decade of service to early childhood education in the territory, operationalized by then program coordinator, Lori Huston, now a research associate in this study, and Elder-in-Residence, Brenda Mason.

Multiple Expressions of Respect

The Wildfire Sessions (Kompf & Hodson, 2000) were weaved throughout the two years of the study that emphasized the experience of the IECEs. The inclusion of Indigenous spiritual practices, orchestrated through the consistent presence of Elder Brenda Mason, in each Wildfire Circle was primary, and the insight gained through those discourses determined what was included in the PD.

The first Wildfire Circle took place in 2017 as a means of assessing the needs of IECEs and this created the supporting framework for the entire project. In reality, Oshki-Wenjack took the position that the IECEs could not only delineate the problems they faced day-to-day in their educational practice, but that they also had the solutions to resolve those issues. Oshki-Wenjack then became the facilitators of the PD, bringing together experts that aligned with the expressed needs, caring for a myriad of logistical issues and responding to the ongoing realities of a dynamic educational environment. A closing Wildfire Circle was held at the end of Institute One and Two to understand the participating IECE's experiences and to direct the evolution of the program.

The Wildfire Circles continued into the four communities in an effort to reveal the local impact of the project. In a final act of respect in those chosen communities, the Wildfire Circles were open to all IECEs, staff, parents and Elders.

An Indigenous Conception of Knowledge Mobilization

Conferences

The final conference Wildfire Circle was held at University of British Columbia during the SPARK Conference (see Table 5.1). As in all gatherings associated to this project the spiritual relationships were mediated by Elder Brenda Mason, who also included teachings on the protocol of Sharing Circles.

The content of this presentation provided an overview of the PD program highlighting the associated formative as well as summative Indigenous research results. Two IECEs, one an Institute participant and the other a participant in the community research, provided their insights as well. Finally, the Wildfire Circle participants were asked to respond from their perspectives on the knowledge shared by the Elder, former coordinator, and IECE participants in the project.

The Project embraced an Indigenous informed approach to knowledge transfer and the sharing of knowledge revealed by including the IECE's voices that experienced the vision, goals and how communities storied their work in early learning. In total, the Project included four conferences with IECEs co-presenting.

Including IECEs as active co-presenters at the many Conferences was another expression of Indigenous knowledge mobilization. That experience left the IECEs feeling very proud and inspired to continue their work in early learning to effect change. The IECE co-presenting outside their FN communities in the academic settings further allowed them to experience a broader audience and receive the feedback directly on the impacts of their work. At times the IECEs felt overwhelmed with the positive feedback and the process of sharing in this format. When asked to expand on being "overwhelmed" they described how well their stories were received, and the support that was given. The experience for all involved was connected to their hearts.

Finally, Conference attendance created bridges of knowing of Indigenous views and ways in the early learning sector with mainstream attendees working towards Truth and Reconciliation.

Scholarly Publication & Media

The Wildfire Circle at the SPARK Conference will be followed with a submission to the Canadian Association for Young Children Journal of Childhood Studies, a peer-reviewed article titled: *Culturally Responsive Indigeneity of Relations* (see Table 5.2).

In addition, four other scholarly publications based on this project have been included in the process to mobilize knowledge within the field of Indigenous education and ECE. The publications have all privileged the voices of the participating IECEs and created opportunities for co-authorship as well.

Media promotion was also significant to sharing the ongoing developments of this project (see Table 5.3).

Table 5.1: Conferences Attended

Conference	Date	Participants	Location	Format
NAN Education Conference	01/29/19	WS 1 - 30 WS 2 - 25	Thunder Bay, ON	(2) Workshops / Power Point
AFN National Forum 2019	02/14/19	6	Halifax, NS	Power Point
SPARK ECE Grad. Conference	05/11/19	38	Vancouver, BC	Sharing Circle
CICE Conference	06/26/19	8	Toronto, ON	Power Point
Total No. of Participants: 107				

Table 5.2: Scholarly Publication

Publication	Date	Authors	Format
ECELink AECEO	05/15/18	Lori Huston	Peer-Reviewed Journal
Brock University Education Journal	05/15/19	Shelly Stagg-Peterson, Lori Huston, Roxanne Loon	Peer-Reviewed Journal
Canadian Association for Young Children Journal of Childhood Studies	0/15/19 Under Submission	Elder Brenda Mason, Lori Huston, Roxanne Loon	Peer-Reviewed Journal
U of T Press: NOW Play Collection	08/23/19 Submission Deadline	Lori Huston, Stephanie Machano	Chapter in an Edited Collection

Table 5.3: Media

Media	Date	Source	Location	Format
Newspaper (see Appendix 3)	09/19	Wawatay News	Sioux Lookout, ON	Interview/Article
Newsletter	05/01/18	Healthy Together	Kelowna, BC	Highlighted the PD
On-Line	03/01/19	Building Skills for Change	Toronto, ON	Video – Student Testimonials
On-Line	05/11/19	SPARK Facebook	Vancouver, BC	Video – Sharing Circle

CHAPTER 6:

Calls to Act

The lack of Indigenous education success in this province has been shown to be linked to negative future health, judicial, education, employment, social, cultural, linguistic outcomes (see Brown, 2004; Hodson & Kitchen, 2015). Combined with the significant wave of Indigenous school aged children that are now beginning their education it is difficult not to conclude a human catastrophe is both imminent and entirely avoidable.

What should be clear is that the prevailing Indigenous educational strategies, enacted for over a decade (see Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007), in both First Nation and urban contexts, have done little to increase the school success of Indigenous children and youth (see Statistics Canada, 2018A; Statistics Canada, 2018B). Furthermore, a lack of school success can result in additional trauma in an already at-risk population burdened by significant levels of inherited trauma (see Bombay, 2015).

Instead of the next generation of Indigenous children moving into adulthood, raising families and propelling the ongoing movement to self-determination at all levels of Indigenous communities, we see the exact opposite (see Chandler & Lalonde, 2008).

There are multiple opportunities for all levels of education, employment training, boards of education, governance, service agencies, etc. - to take steps that will enhance the quality of life of Indigenous peoples in Northwestern Ontario. It is with this in mind that we offer the following Calls to Act.

Oshki-Pimache-O-Win: The Wenjack Education Institute

1. Educational Leadership

With the long history of Early Childhood Education Programming, the recent addition of the Indigenous Classroom Assistant Diploma Program and the Aboriginal Bachelor of Education (Primary / Junior) Degree Program, Oshki-Wenjack should take up the leadership role and be the voice of Indigenous teacher education in Northwestern Ontario.

2. Further Research

In part, taking up the leadership mantel requires supporting a culturally responsive and relational Indigenous education for all Indigenous children and offering evidence-based arguments that

result in significant change. At this time there is little reliable research evidence that represents the highly nuanced realities of Indigenous education in Northwestern Ontario.

i. Establish and core fund an Oshki-Wenjack Centre for Indigenous Research that is led by an Indigenous researcher / scholar with an extensive and demonstrable experience in securing research funding, publication and Indigenous community research.

ii. Maintain, expand and promote the Knowledge Collective approach to Indigenous research piloted in this study. The Knowledge Collective has proven to be an effective research structure that brings a wider community expertise to the centre of Indigenous inquiry and works within the Indigenous Institute culture.

iii. Working with the Provincial Territorial Organizations develop a research plan designed to reveal the numbers of and, potential impact to children born to parents involved in opioid replacement programs in the northwest.

iv. At this time there is no dedicated screening tool that IECEs can assess children of opioid replacement program parents that would result in early interventions. Collaborating with Provincial Territorial Organizations, health, and education authorities develop and pilot the use of an Indigenous Screening Tool for children of parents involved in opioid replacement programs in the northwest.

v. In collaboration with the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario (AECEO) undertake a research study that determines the number of registered / non-registered IECEs, and their salaries in the province with the view of providing recommendations to the Chiefs of Ontario, Tribal Councils and Chiefs and Councils in two areas - Compensation and Working Conditions of IECEs working in a First Nation context.

3. PD for Indigenous & Non-Indigenous Educators

In collaboration with the College of ECE and the College of Teachers, establish and core fund an Oshki-Wenjack Centre for Professional Teacher Development to offer PD opportunities to IECEs and approved PD to elementary and high school educators working in a First Nation context. The new Centre should be led by an Indigenous educator with an extensive and demonstrable experience in securing related funding, publication and Indigenous education in the territory.

4. Working with Indigenous Governance

In collaboration with the four PTOs develop a Chiefs of Ontario Resolution that recognizes IECEs working in First Nation and urban contexts as essential educators of the next generation of Indigenous children.

5. Working with Mainstream Governance

Oshki-Wenjack's leadership role in Indigenous childhood education will inevitably include a wider provincial responsibility as well.

i. In collaboration with Indigenous Institutes Consortium lobby the Ministry of Education to develop a Policy Framework for Indigenous Early Learning Childcare in Ontario that includes guidelines for a licensed Child Care operating in a First Nation context.

ii. In collaboration with Indigenous Institutes Consortium lobby the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to approve and fund the Consortium to develop a distinct two-year Indigenous ECE Diploma Program that would be offered exclusively by Indigenous Institutes.

CONCLUSION

A conservative analysis of the impact of the Anishininiiwi Awaashishiiw Kihkinohamaakewi Niikaanihtamaakew Program reveals at least a modest impact across multiple areas critical to early childhood education. In many instances that impact was almost immediately implemented by participants when they returned to their communities.

The narratives of those Indigenous Early Childhood Educators participating the PD innovation demonstrates a deep commitment to the children and families, often in difficult and under-resourced circumstances.

What should be clear through those narratives, are the multiple threats to all levels of Indigenous education, First Nation and urban, will face over the next decade. Maintaining the status quo is no longer an option it is a threat to the future.

Without serious and sustained upstream educational investment, that privileges Indigenous innovation, those threats will result in significant downstream costs to all levels of the society and will effectively slow the ongoing project of Indigenous self-determination.

To that end, the Calls to Act are strategically developed to extend Indigenous education innovation that began with Anishininiiwi Awaashishiiw Kihkinohamaakewi Niikaanihtamaakew, across all levels of education in the Northwestern Ontario.

Appendix 1

OSHKI
Oshki-Pimache-O-Win
EDUCATION & TRAINING INSTITUTE

Indigenous ECE Leadership Professional Development Program (IECELPDP)

Anishininiiwi Awaashishiiw Kihkinohamaakewi Niikaanihtamaakew

Starting November 2017

OSHKI'S Indigenous Early Childhood Education (ECE) Leadership – Professional Development Program is delivered through a special blended model that allows you to stay in your home community for the majority of the program.

- The program will start in November 2017 with an on-line preparatory session.
- The on-campus session in February will consist of a variety of workshops.

Partners:

- Maamaasisiiwin Education Research Centre
- Shkoday Abinojiiwak Obimiwedoon
- Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada

Admission:

Individuals who have met the registration requirements of the College and hold a Certificate of Registration in good standing may practice the profession of early childhood education.

Registered with the College of Early Childhood Educators as a RECE.

Hold an early childhood education diploma from an Ontario College of Applied Arts and Technology or a degree from a program on the Approved Post Secondary Programs List in Ontario.

Blended delivery schedule:

E-Learning Session:

- November 2017 - March 2018

On-Campus Session:

- February 11 - 18, 2018

For further information contact:

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Phone: 807-626-1880
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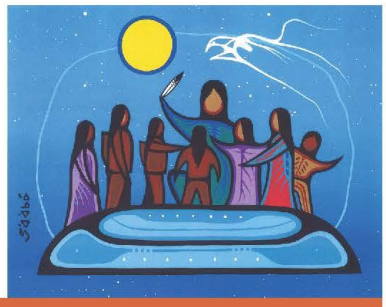

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A New Beginning

Appendix 2

On Campus Schedule

Indigenous ECE Leadership - Professional Development Program (IECEPDP) at OSHKI WENJACK

Anishininiiwi awaashishiiw kihkinohamaakewi niikaanihtamaakew

Sunday, February 11th to Saturday February 17th, 2017.

	DAY 1 SUN	DAY 2 MON	DAY 3 TUES	DAY 4 WED	DAY 5 THUR	DAY 6 FRI	DAY 7 SAT
9:00 am 9:15 am	Oshki Elder Opening Brenda Mason	Oshki Elder Opening Brenda Mason	Oshki Elder Opening Brenda Mason	Oshki Elder Opening Brenda Mason	Oshki Elder Opening Brenda Mason	Oshki Elder Opening Brenda Mason	Oshki Elder Opening Brenda Mason
9:15 am 10:00 am	Welcoming	Building Skills for Change Olivia Chow	Inno-vation 101 John Hodson	Healthy Together	Special Needs Training	KERC Language totally response	KERC Language Puppetry
10:00 am 12:00 pm	Building Skills for Change Olivia Chow	Building Skills for Change Olivia Chow	Inno-vation 101 John Hodson	Healthy Together	Special Needs Training	KERC Language totally response	KERC Language Puppetry
12:00 pm 12:30 pm	Nutrition break	Nutrition break	Nutrition break	Nutrition break	Nutrition break	Nutrition break	Nutrition break
12: 30 pm 3:30	Building Skills for Change	Building Skills for Change	Talking Circle Nadine & Brenda	Healthy Together	(U of T) Now Play project	Head Start	KERC Language Puppetry

pm	Olivia Chow	Olivia Chow					
3:30 pm 4:00 pm	Elder Closing Brenda Mason	AECEO Memberships	Elder Closing	Elder Closing Brenda Mason	Elder Closing Brenda Mason	Elder Closing Brenda Mason	Elder Closing Brenda Mason
		Elder Closing Brenda Mason				Drum Social & Feast	

Oshki Elder Opening and On Campus Support: Brenda Mason
Building Skills for Change: Olivia Chow, Ryerson University
Innovation 101: John Hodson, Nadine Hedican
Talking Circle: Nadine Hedican & Brenda Mason (Oshki Campus Elder)
Healthy Together: Childhood obesity, healthy relationships with food, family, community.
Special Needs Training:
Now Play Project: Shelley Franceschini, University of Toronto
KERC: Language totally response, language puppetry, Nelson Makoop, Sioux Lookout
Head Start: Marilyn Junnila, Drum Social & Feast
Oshki Elder Closing: Brenda Mason

INDIGENOUS ECE LEADERSHIP PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM
INSTITUTE 2 CALENDAR SUMMER 2018

OSHKI-WENJACK
OSHKI-PIMACHE-O-WIN
THE WENJACK EDUCATION INSTITUTE

	Monday Aug 20	Tuesday Aug 21	Wednesday Aug 22	Thursday Aug 23
8:30 -9:00	Arrival	Arrival	Arrival	Arrival
9:00 - 9:15	Opening - Introduction & Drum Group - Brenda Mason & Biwaase'aa	Opening	Opening	Opening
9:15-10:30	IECE Program Planning interwoven with cultural relationship building- Brenda Mason & Lori Huston	Building Strategic Community Vision-John Hodson	Brain Development - Connie Hartvisken	Spiritual First Aid/Traditional Teachings Lori Huston/Biwaase'aa
10:30-10:40	Snack	Snack	Snack	Snack
10:40-12:00	IECE Mentorship Program - Shkoday Tina/Marilyn	Building Strategic Community Vision-John Hodson	Brain Development - Connie Hartvisken	Traditional Teachings - Ribbon Skirts
12:00-12:45	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
12:45 - 2:15	IECE Mentorship Program - Shkoday Tina/Marilyn	Traditional Teachings - Biwaase'aa (Sweatlodge & Ribbon Skirts)	Making materials on shoestring budget - Connie/Marilyn	Building Skills for Change Part 2 - Olivia Chow
2:15-2:30	Snack	Snack	Snack	Snack
2:30-4:15	IECE Mentorship Program - Shkoday Tina/Marilyn	Traditional Teachings - Biwaase'aa (Sweatlodge & Ribbon Skirts)	Making materials on shoestring budget - Connie/Marilyn	Building Skills for Change Part 2 - Olivia Chow
4:15-4:30	Reflection	Reflection	Reflection	Reflection

YOUTH AGES 6-11 BIWAASE'AA PROGRAM IN AFTERNOON - Transportation will pickup prior to lunch and bring to Shkoday for those youth need
CHILDREN AGES 8 MONTHS - 5 YEARS - WILL BE WITH THE REGISTERED ECE'S FOR CHILD CARE

Accommodations Days Inn North, 1250 Golf Links Road Thunder Bay : Shkoday Abinojiiwak Obimiwedoon, 1610 John Street Road *80*

BIWAASE'AA SCHEDULE

	Monday Aug 20	Tuesday Aug 21	Wednesday Aug 22	Thursday Aug 23
12:45 - 4:30	Youth Sharing Circle	Youth - Sharing Circle;	12:45 - 1:00 Bus leaves SAO for Field Trip; to Splash Pad or Fort William Reserve (weather permitting)	Youth - Sharing Circle, Nature walk
	Sharing Circle Regalia Teachings (men's traditional, woman's jingle dress)	Sweat Lodge Teachings	Children will participate in field trip to observe the POWWOW grounds, nature walk, take their snack for picnic, learn powwow etiquette.	1:30 - 4:30 Students - Ribbon Skirt making for children
	Physical Activity - Dodge ball	Ribbon Skirt Making - all	Alternate Plan - if raining: 7 Grandfather Teachings, art work regarding the teachings/physical activity	

Appendix 3

6 Wawatay News SEPTEMBER 15, 2018 ᐧᐊᐧᐊᑌ ᐊᑎᒧᐧᐃᓇᐣ

Education

Oshki holds training for ECE's across the north

Rick Garrick/Wawatay News

Olivia Chow, founder and director of the Institute for Change Leaders, delivers a presentation during the Oshki-Pimache-O-Win The Wenjack Education Institute In-service Early Childhood Education Professional Development Program.

Rick Garrick
Wawatay News

Oshki-Pimache-O-Win The Wenjack Education Institute's In-service Early Childhood Education (ECE) Professional Development Program was a success for 19 Indigenous ECE's from across the north.

"It's been very informative," says Jennifer Meekis, an ECE from Sandy Lake. "I've been networking with a bunch of ladies from different parts of Ontario and finding out how we can help each other find funding and how to write proposals."

Meekis enjoyed the presentations by Olivia Chow, founder and director of the Institute for Change Leaders, on the last two days of the program, which was held at Shkoday Abinojiiwak Obimiwedoon-Aboriginal Headstart in Thunder Bay.

"She is a very powerful woman and it is great listening to somebody who gives you motivation to work hard," Meekis says.

Chow delivered presentations to the ECEs on building skills for change.

"I'm here for the second time to teach them about community organizing and I feel very blessed to share some time with them," Chow says. "We talked about the importance of celebrating their work (and) to be able to express the importance of their work to the community and to acknowledge their own accomplishments."

Chow encourages the ECEs to pursue their ideas on improving their communities and the lives of the children they serve.

"I want them to have the confidence and the skills to be able to express it and organize around it," Chow says. "So whether (it) is a play structure or a playground or a childcare centre, they know they need it in the community and I want them to lead people in the community to make it happen so that their community would be a better place for everyone, especially the children and the families."

Meekis says her community does not have a daycare facility, but it has an Aboriginal Headstart for parents and children to attend together.

"I want to network with other ECEs, other Headstarts, to see where I can expand for our children in our community," Meekis says. "And to hopefully find a funder where we can open a licensed daycare."

Marissa Nabigon, an ECE from Long Lake #58, says the opportunity to learn from Chow was "awesome."

"She's great — her spirit makes me look forward to coming the next day and staying and participating," Nabigon says, noting that she also attended the session in February when Chow delivered a presentation. "I was excited knowing that she was coming back for this session."

Nabigon says her community has a daycare but needs a playground structure.

"All we have is pretty much sand, so what I am learning here is where to start and how to start to ask for these type of things," Nabigon says.

Lori Huston, ECE program coordinator with Oshki, says the program was delivered through a partnership with Shkoday Abinojiiwak Obimiwedoon and Maamaawisiiwin Education Research Centre with funding from Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC).

"We are in our second Institute of delivery, where we are developing leadership skills with our Indigenous educators," Huston says. "We are giving them opportunities to mentor and high-end training through Ryerson University, University of Toronto (and) others have been involved in this program."

John Hodson, director of Maamaawisiiwin Education Research Centre, says the idea of the program is to increase the on-reserve capacity of ECEs.

"What (INAC) is interested in is increasing capacities in this area of Early Childhood Education, but also interested in the research associated to it, so what works and what doesn't work," Hodson says, noting that a talking circle was also scheduled to ask the ECEs what they liked about the program. "Our thinking is that anything we do to increase the capacities of Early Childhood Educators will have an impact down the line."

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