Tribal College and University
Early Childhood Education Initiatives: Helping Native-serving early learning centers blossom

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Early Childhood Development In Indian Country: Strategies for tribal communities to enhance the well-being of their youngest members
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TCU ECE Initiatives:
Wakanyeja ECE Initiative
Collective strategy of educational change

Vision: Building knowledge and scaffolding structures

Systems Development - Program, Partners & Curriculum: Information development and gathering

Implementation - Program & Curriculum Leading to Promising Practices: Deepening engagement and celebrating our emergent story

Authentic Assessment - Program Impact: Gathering more information together and writing our stories

Reflection, Sustainability & Dissemination: Sharing our collective story & envisioning the future
“The educational sovereignty of tribal nations is rooted in their cultures and languages and is enacted throughout the systems and structures of the tribes, emphasizing traditional knowledge and learning. Educational sovereignty recognizes the right of Tribes to socialize their own children and supports parents and extended families as the foundation of children’s education. With the support of tribal governments, relationships between institutions, children, their families, and their communities are seamless. **Tribal Colleges and Universities lead restorative collaborations inclusive of community-based participatory research, educator training, curriculum development, and tribally-appropriate assessment.**”

*(TCU ECE Strategic Planning Committee, June 2013)*
Levels of Inquiry

- **Individual Level**
  - TCU ECE student (i.e., increased learning opportunities and engagement for TCU ECE students)
  - Individual early learning classroom (i.e., instructional practices)
  - Children’s learning opportunities (i.e., collection of children’s work and increased culture-based and language-rich learning opportunities)

- **Institutional Level**
  - Pre-K to K-12 Education (i.e., professional learning communities, expansion of networks across systems, such as standards and accrediting organizations)
  - Across TCU institutions (i.e., systemic impact)
  - Across inter-tribal communities (i.e., best practices in ECE and culture-based instruction across diverse tribal communities: rural, suburban, urban, reservation/non-reservation, international)

- **Systemic Level**
  - Home-to-school (i.e., family and community engagement)
  - Tribal community (i.e., engagement with tribal leadership, elders, culture and language commissions)
  - Locally-driven inquiry, prioritizing key areas of need identified by the community/families/tribe

- **Community/Tribal Level**
  - TCU teacher education degree program (i.e., revisions to existing program curriculum and development of new courses and practicum experiences)
  - Early Learning Center (i.e., center-wide practices and trainings focus on the five domains of the initiative)
  - TCU institution (i.e., impact on institutional change and development of leaders as a result of the project)
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Wakanyeja Five Domains

- Increase cognitive and non-cognitive skill development by implementing best practices and research-based knowledge aligned with:
  - Family & Community Engagement and Empowerment
  - Native Language and Culture
  - Increase teacher and instructional quality
  - Address Pre-k to K-3 transition: School readiness
Improvement of early childhood teacher quality

“This ambitious project not only helped preservice Teacher Education students, Pre-K and primary classroom teachers but also moved to a strong focus on parents understanding and appreciating how their child’s Menominee (tribal) culture contributes to the child’s learning.” (CMN Annual Report, 2015, p.13)
Numbers of teachers “trained”

- Ilisagvik College: 1
- College of Menominee Nation: 58
- Northwest Indian College: 175
- Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute: 12
Empowering families and communities

- Chaperone field trips or attend a school event
- Visit their child's classroom (more than twice a month)
- Routinely read to your child
- Engage in collective inquiry, data analysis with teachers
- Engage in developing curriculum and implementation of specialized learning opportunities
Improve children’s development

Language & Literacy
• Improved culture-based instruction
• Cultural books
• Informational books
• Literacy-rich parent engagement

Numeracy
• Counting in different languages
• Culture-based concepts of counting
• Concepts of time (seasonal and cultural calendars)
• Sorting shapes and numbers with culturally relevant manipulatives

Socio-emotional development
• Large and small group learning
• Culture-based stories about relations with each other and with the natural world
• Parent engagement in play nights

Fine & Gross Motor
• Learning to dance & "hunt"
• Culture-based play nights
• Learning to sew
• Learning to draw, paint, and write
• Culturally-relevant games
Bridging early childhood and K-3 education, and beyond

“In Year 1 and 2 SIPI established relationships with families who were involved in the initiative. In Year 3 relationships were established with 3 families who provided report cards for their children during kindergarten. In Year 4 SIPI began to develop relationships with children who had experienced the cultural curriculum at the YDI site for two years. In Year 5 SIPI solidified relationships with transitioning children who had now experienced the curriculum for 3 years. SIPI also provided various interactive and informative workshops for parents throughout the year.” (SIPI Annual Report, 2015, p. 3)
Native language(s) and culture(s)

- Engage in collaborative vision, planning, implementation, evaluation, and reflection toward sustainability
- Lead with informed responsibility and engage in generous reciprocity
- Understand that Native culture- and language-based education is much more than material outcomes and resources
- Inherent in educational practices emergent from Indigenous/Native theories are different frameworks, protocols, lens, tools and measures
- Teams and members must be adaptive, responsive to dynamic changes, and persistent in creative thought
- Do not fear cultural protocols as barriers to progress – cultural protocols are protective and restorative practices that must be fully engaged and honored
Living our stories: Metaphors and impact for generations to come
Thank you!

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