

First Nations

*Partnership
Programs*

STRENGTH IN GATHERING

Proceedings from a Forum for Professionals involved in
Community-based Early Childhood Education
Training Programs and Practice in First Nations communities

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Forum Objectives

The forum was organized by Jessica Ball and Diana Nicholson of the First Nations Partnership Programs office in the School of Child and Youth Care of the University of Victoria. The forum was organized to learn about the experiences of others involved in community-based ECE training programs. It was expected that such learning would enable putting the experiences of the First Nations Partnership Programs (FNPP) in a broader context. Additionally, participants at the forum would have the opportunity to share and learn from one another. The forum was one activity in a larger documentation project, directed by Jessica Ball and Alan Pence, aimed at understanding the unique experiences of program delivery and outcomes in their partnership programs and other programs throughout B.C. The learning to date generated by the FNPP documentation project was also shared with forum participants.

Forum Participants

Twenty-five people participated in the group forum. Participants had affiliation and experience with the following programs, institutions and/or agencies:

- * University of Victoria First Nations Partnership Programs
- * T'lazt'en Nation ECE Program in partnership with FNPP, UVic
- * Nak'azdli ECE Basic Program with Infant & Toddler and Special Needs Post Basic in partnership with College of New Caledonia, Vanderhoof
- * Northern Lights College (Prince George) – ECE Certificate Program, Diploma Program in Special Needs and Infant/Toddler and Teacher's Assistant Training. Various delivery formats available.
- * Saik'uz ECE Basic Program in partnership with Native Education Centre, Vancouver Community College and CNC, Prince George
- * College of New Caledonia – Burns Lake and Vanderhoof
- * Lake Babine ECE Program in partnership with College of New Caledonia, Burns Lake
- * Malaspina University College, Chemainus
- * Speech and Language Therapy
- * Ministry for Children and Families Regional Child Care Coordinator
- * Ministry of Health Regional Licensing Officer
- * ECE Consultant

Issues in Community-Based ECE Training Programs & Practice

First Nations in Canada are putting increasing emphasis on the provision of healthy environments for children. Many First Nation groups have asked for training in early childhood education or some kind of educational supports to enhance community capacity to deliver services to young children and families. Many First Nations

communities do not want a “canned” curriculum. They want programs that fit with the remote, rural circumstances, cultural goals and values of the community, and programs that integrate traditional language. In short, First Nations groups want training programs that respond more accurately to the particular training needs of their communities.

Training institutions and First Nations organizations who have engaged in ECE training programs possess an understanding of the issues involved in attempting to design and deliver community-based programs that are tailored to the specific needs of individual communities. The forum participants identified a number of key issues encountered in delivering community-based ECE training, including effective components and processes of doing ECE training programs with First Nations. The key issues cluster around the following themes:

- < Program accessibility
- < Pre-program planning needs
- < Preparatory (“prep”) program elements and processes
- < Program elements and processes
- < Post-program supports
- < Articulating program experiences and courses

A. Program accessibility

One of the main challenges which remote rural communities face in launching ECE training programs is the availability of programs that address their specific needs. Accessibility is a key issue for these communities.

Most communities prefer a community-based delivery model for training.

“In order to respond to the requests of First Nations communities on reserve, we really need to be elaborating our off-campus program capacity, especially looking at ways to do community-based training.” (Jessica)

Training models that require students to leave their community involve a loss of support that is essential to student success:

“If you weigh community-based versus another approach, we know that community-based is way better than sending students out of the community. One of the problems is the support network; they’ve left their family, they’ve left everything, and they’re away. When we try to get help for them, from a rural community to an urban community, the support networks aren’t there ... and so they end up dropping-out or not completing because the accessibility isn’t there.” (Charlett)

Geographic accessibility:

An important part of delivering ECE training programs in communities involves student access to placement sites for practica. Forum participants highlighted some of the key challenges in accessing practica placements and determined that the need for flexibility in determining what constitutes a valid practicum experience needs to be communicated across the profession and to the provincial licensing authority. Without flexibility First Nations living in remote settings are significantly disadvantaged in accessing ECE training.

“This is a real dilemma. A lot of these communities are wanting this training in part so that they can mount a daycare. Most of these communities don’t already have a licensed daycare, they’re planning for a daycare. It’s a ‘catch-22’.”
(Jessica)

“Even in Prince George before ... there was nobody in Prince George who even had Post-Basic experience at all. And even some said ... they had to go down to Vancouver and do it.” (Lenora)

“Every community is at a different level. In the Nechako and Lakes District there are ample opportunities. It may not be in each individual community, but certainly there are daycare facilities. Licensed and certified is a different story. I think where it becomes more of an issue is in remote, smaller communities.”
(Karen)

Additionally, childcare centres in the closest large community can experience incredible pressure from the demands for practica placements that come from various programs in outlying communities.

Creating practical training opportunities by involving community children in short-term activities has been one way that some programs have tried to fill the “gap” in existing, accessible placements.

“They have one classroom and they bring the kids in from the community and they have one licensed person in there and it’s called ‘preschool practice’ and they get their experience that way.” (Lenora)

“When I was teaching a class (and realized), ‘okay, we’re not going to be going to a licensed facility before the next class’, so they would do things with their kids at home ... the kids up at the school. ...So they tried out some of the assignments at least with whatever kids were available and then we had to get them all together for the licensed facility practicum. ...Maybe if that was built-in to a program, saying that it’s okay to do that.” (Leisa)

Funding accessibility:

A prevailing issue in delivering training programs in remote communities is economic feasibility. Funding for pre-program development, a prep program, program delivery including practica placements, student support and post-program follow-up all need to be secured.

An important part of program funding that may be overlooked is providing transportation and support to students who must travel outside their community in order to access practica opportunities.

“Before the program goes, one of the first things you have to do is figure out where the practica are going to take place and nine times out of ten you can’t get all of them in your community. ...So we covered the province, basically, in order to get the practicums done. That becomes an economic cost of delivering the program, so it has to be set up (in advance).” (Karen)

While community-based delivery of training programs appears costly, the pay-off in terms of community impact must be considered in any cost-benefit analysis.

“You can put a lot of money into a program that is not successful and keep doing that over and over. Our program is, in part, a response to people who have said: ‘We’re sick of sending people away to schools and never seeing them again and putting a whole lot of money into expensive education and not getting anything back for it.’ So, we feel good about our program from the point of view of community impacts.” (Jessica)

Cultural accessibility:

Forum participants stressed the need to find ways of accessing First Nations ECE Instructors and the importance of developing role models within First Nations communities:

“Identifying (First Nations) people who would be good in that area, and help them to go past the Basic (certification) and work towards filling an instructor role.” (Liz)

Integrating traditional knowledge and practices is a critical component of ensuring relevancy in ECE training and facilitating community development outcomes:

“We know the importance of integrating First Nations language and First Nations culture into programs, and it’s just so hard to do that when students are at a distance from their home community.” (Jessica)

When a number of small communities come together to comprise a student cohort, a variety of First Nations cultures may be present within the class:

Addressing accessibility issues:

At present there are several sound options for ECE training in First Nations communities. Among these are the First Nations Partnership Programs at the University of Victoria, training partnerships through the College of New Caledonia campuses, and the Distance Education Satellite Model through Northern Lights Community College.

First Nations Partnership Programs, University of Victoria:

Working with a “Generative Curriculum Model” (Pence & Ball), the First Nations Partnership Programs (FNPP) offer a distinct opportunity for bicultural integration and emergent concepts of child development and care. The FNPP are a response to First Nations communities that have not wanted to use curricula that reflect only mainstream values and experiences in training First Nations community members.

Emphasizing a delivery model that is flexible to a community’s needs, the ECE training program in each First Nations community is unique. When communities are too small to bring a cohort of 15-20 students together, collaboration amongst several First Nations communities can be a good option, as was the case in a pilot program involving the Meadow Lake Tribal Council and another involving the Treaty 8 Tribal Association.

Distance Education Satellite Model (NLCC):

This model combines Distance Education with a local facilitator, ties in community and cultural context and involves teleconferences with instructor on-campus. This combination model was devised to respond to reaching communities that aren’t able to do a whole community-based cohort model.

“The local facilitator brings all the local expertise, the language expertise, the cultural expertise, brings in the support systems, the Elders and so on. They do the community stuff because they’re the community expert. Our instructors will go to that community for a short period of time and then leave and allow the students and the facilitator to integrate that information by themselves, supporting each other. We’re quite excited by this; it’s a different way. ...We have small communities who have a small group of students who are interested in taking ECE, either the certificate or the diploma, they come together, they usually have somebody to support them (i.e. a Skills Centre). The Skills Centre can get together with the students and provide some space, help with hiring a facilitator. The facilitator supports the students while they’re doing the distance education. ...We want that local flavour to be reflected by the facilitator. ...We view the facilitator as an enhancement. The instructor in our program does everything with the group that she would do with the typical student taking distance education, such as teleconferencing. The facilitator enhances that. ...In the Williams Lake program with seven diploma students who already have their ECE certificate, I don’t think there’s an issue with the mainstream. It’s the same diploma program as anybody across the province gets.” (Robin)

Partnerships with campuses of the College of New Caledonia:

Branch campuses of CNC in several small centres that are situated close to First Nations communities have worked in partnership with First Nations groups. For example, Burns Lake campus of CNC worked together with the Lake Babine Nation to deliver a unique ECE training program. The Nak'azdli First Nation collaborated with the CNC in Vanderhoof in delivering their ECE training program.

B. Pre-program Steps

The Forum identified several activities that should occur during the pre-program development phase of launching a community-based training program. These activities focus primarily upon recruiting, selecting and orienting students, instructors, Elders and practicum supervisors. Additionally, initiating community involvement and integration of community services and ensuring that community based administrators of the program are properly oriented to the program's credentialing requirements need occur during this period. Within each of these activities key issues emerge that are critical to the successful delivery and outcomes of any program.

i) Recruiting/selecting/orienting students

Administrators of the Nak'azdli Band's ECE training program stated that their pre-program process for selecting students was very successful:

"We do a series of three interviews. The first step we just introduce the program and what the intention is and we let them go away and think about that. Then we come back and talk about all the components of the program, the requirements and the timeframes and then on the last interview we talk about commitment and their responsibility and how it's going to look in their family unit ... and what will be the end result, employment options, and will they be able to commit to a program like this. ... Some people that aren't able to (commit) recognize it at this point. And the ones that are committed are ready to go ahead and step forward to the next stage. ... You can't dump it on them all in one phase. ... We try to talk people into owning the decision. We don't like to make decisions for people. By doing these series of interviews you get people to really wrestle with it."
(Charlett)

Offering a variety of training options in addition to ECE training enables prospective students to orient themselves to numerous possibilities.

Forum participants agreed that a variety of barriers exist in attempting to qualify a community's best people for childcare. Among these issues is the impact that a criminal record can have on a community member's eligibility for ECE training.

Student retention during the actual ECE program can be improved by exposing prospective students to many aspects of the Early Childhood Education profession before the actual program commences:

“I got a grant from PGNEATA and I took them to two ECEBC conferences before we even started the ECE program. I actually listed a whole bunch of workshops that I thought they should take ...at the conference, and that really helped them with their studies too when they got into the program. ...And we visited a lot of centres ... I took them to Westcoast Resource Centre in Vancouver and to different reserves and showed them different daycare centres. ...We lost some students along the way. We had all the students do the family day home course first and do their first aid, but we did lose a couple of students ... the ECE just wasn't for them.” (Lenora)

Other issues that were suggested to relate to student completion rates were course sequencing and prerequisites,

“Some of the courses are prerequisites and if they (students) had failed one course, they weren't able to go on their practicum, they weren't able to take this class or this class. And that made them lag behind while other students were moving forth and they weren't able to continue on with their classmates because they failed that one course. That was kind of a downfall for some of our students.” (Lenora)

Cultural role responsibilities were additional challenges for some First Nations students:

“We also had a lot of hereditary chiefs that were part of the ECE program and they had other duties that they had to do. They had to miss class because they had to throw dinners and do what was their protocol for their community. ” (Lenora)

ii) Recruiting/selecting/orienting instructors

Discussion of issues involving recruitment, selection and orientation of instructors highlighted the issue of having non-community members in instructional roles in First Nations communities. It seems that presently, few communities have their own community members to draw on for instructor positions, although one of First Nations Partnership Programs communities (Mount Currie) was able to hire three of their own community members as instructors. More often, non-community members are placed in program instructor roles and they must orient themselves both to the program and to the community upon arrival. An important part of this orientation is learning about and becoming comfortable with differences between non-native and native styles of communicating and interacting:

“One of the problems ... a non-First Nations person teaching the FN students and not knowing what the culture was all about. It made it hard on the instructor

because she didn't know what was appropriate, what to do in class and then when she did something wrong, she had the students really bite her head off. So, it would have been nice, if instructors are non-native to have some kind of understanding, some knowledge prior to teaching the courses, about the First Nation they're teaching the program to." (Lenora)

"I just lucked out that my temperament allowed me to fit in. We've all talked about how nervous we were at first, because we just have a different style. So if I had been prepared for that at the beginning, it would have been better. I just waited, and listened and sat back and I think we came to a pretty good understanding of how to communicate with each other ... but it took time. ...So if you could develop that in a group (beforehand). ...We're only looking out our own window. ...Unless you know what the other person is seeing out their window, you're always questioning it. ...Whereas if you can really communicate what you're seeing out your window then you're right on track. And people don't get right down to that. You wait for a long time to interpret what people are seeing." (Liz)

iii) Recruiting/orienting Elders

Recruiting Elders to participate in programs depends on the degree to which a program encourages Elder involvement and the extent to which Elders are present in the community and willing to participate.

Forum participants questioned how best to maximize Elder involvement in ECE training programs and acknowledged the following issues:

- < how to respond to conflicts of mainstream practices and Elder contributions,
- < how to address the impact of residential school heritage in ECE training programs,
- < how to help Elders feel comfortable in a classroom setting.

iv) Recruiting/orienting Practicum Supervisors

Forum participants generally underscored the critical role played by practicum supervisors in ECE training. Ensuring a supportive environment for students during practicum placements is tied to initiating communication and developing a good working relationship between program administrators and instructors before the program begins.

Practicum supervisors need to be informed about the details of the ECE program and the expectations for each practicum:

"There's so many programs going on ... there's confusion about what program ... not really knowing too much about a program. ...So I did up an introduction about the program and made sure that each practicum site had that. ...It helped

to get their cooperation and their support. ...It's really important to have good communication with the practicum sponsor teacher because they had certain expectations but were dealing with a wide variety of students coming in. ... Communication is pivotal. And it's cooperation between everyone involved. The instructor, the practicum supervisor, the sponsor teacher or caregiver, the student ... and it's a learning process for everybody.” (Janis)

“I think that during the planning period is when that (liaison with practicum sites) has to begin. ...Contact is already established when the program begins ... and then keep that communication strong.” (Karen)

A positive practicum experience for students hinges on the fit between program expectations and a supervisor's expectations for performance and evaluation. It is important to communicate with practicum supervisors about how “success” will be evaluated:

“They need to have something to evaluate on. They need to know what the goals are. They need to have that information, and then they can guide the student through. Is the student expected to present so many activities? If the sponsor teacher knows that then she can support and guide the student through that. ...The student should be having that same information.” (Janis)

“We sent our students into Prince George where a lot of the CNC students had gone and what we called our Practicum 2 was not like the CNC Practicum 2 and they were thinking: ‘We know what CNC students are supposed to do’, and they were looking for all of that and that's not what we sent our students to do. And Janis had to talk to them a lot about what we (were doing). It was a big shift for the sponsor teachers to make.” (Leisa)

It is also very important to ensure that placement opportunities will be open and accepting of First Nations students. Demands on centre staff and cultural biases detract from learning experiences for First Nations students:

“You had to be very careful how you matched it up. ...Do a lot of interviewing, discussing. ... It has to be a place where ... it's not going to be really negative. When placing a First Nations student there has to be an openness. You can give them a list of competencies, but they may interpret it in a way that the student doesn't or we don't. So there's a lot of ground work to be done in matching.” (Linda)

“There hasn't been any training for staff or sponsor teachers in centres and they're already stretched to your limit, maximum capacity and minimum staff ... it's an extra stress for the actual centre. Given all those dynamics, it's very difficult and unfair to everybody and not the best thing around. We need to look at how to better cope with these situations, to make it more positive for students. And then when you look at the cultural biases, and unfortunately, there are a lot

... the sensitivity and the understanding. ...When students come from a First Nations community into a larger centre, instead of being welcomed as a wonderful experience ... it's really sad that there isn't something that could happen to make it a more positive experience. When you've got a centre in the community, that's a bonus. ...Children in care have to be cared for and that is primarily the work of the staff in the centres. ...I think there should be a component in the ECE training on how to be a staff person in the field working with practicum students. ...It's very challenging." (Glenda)

v) **Community Involvement and Integration of Services**

Several Forum participants commented that one of the great predictors of program success is the extent to which a program has garnered adequate community support. Ensuring that the process of launching a training program is community-driven is crucial:

"At Meadow Lake, our first partnership, the Tribal Council said: 'You can't just get out ahead of the communities.' ... Needing to stay at pace with the communities, keeping in tune with what the communities want, and the extent to which they want to go." (Jessica)

"I think that's (outsider initiative) a problem with a lot of the programs. They're one-shot, they bring in the experts who are not part of the community, they don't know the customs or the people so they can't build that support so much in the community." (Lenora)

Access to wide community support and involvement in programs requires a base level of support from a number of community members at the very start of the pre-program phase:

"In some of our communities, the Education Coordinator has come to us and we've said: 'In addition to meeting with you, we'd like to meet with a group of people who are in leadership positions in the community and who can say we're all behind this.' ... If it rests with just one or two people's initiative, we don't automatically have confidence that the community would own it and take responsibility for it." (Jessica)

Forum participants identified some steps that can be taken to bring forward support of community members for ECE training.

Informing the community about a proposed training program can be accomplished through community meetings or dinners, or even through door to door campaigning:

"When we were doing the development of these plans and doing the community assessment, we took it to our Annual General Assembly and got the community's input on what we were planning on doing. ...And we were developing our daycare while we were also doing ECE (training), so there was a goal and there

was confirmed employment at the end of the training. ...So with that, the community was able to understand what we were doing, how we were going to do it and those that were interested in the training were getting the information and they could apply to be a candidate. ...And then we did a lot of campaigning on our own. ...We asked the community to drive it, like suggest what they wanted to do with it and how far they wanted us to go with it.” (Charlett)

“I think you have to really educate the community. Sure you have these wonderful meetings and you want the community to come, but the community is not always available to you. We had to go door to door.” (Lenora)

For a program to be delivered most effectively, attempts should be made to secure the participation of other community training services and community social services:

“Tie in not just the ECE training, but other areas of training too, to involve all aspects of it together. It was a heavy load for us to bring in the ECE training and deal with everything. We needed much more connection with all of the different services, have more discussion, more communication about all these particular issues.” (Robin)

“In Burns Lake, one of the ways we involved the community was to gain the support of all the preschools, daycares, family daycares, and playschools both on and off reserve. And all of these centres opened their doors to us. Ours was a night program and a summer program, and they made us feel really welcome. We were able to go there any night of the week, hold our class in their centre, try out the equipment and activities, and this way the students got to be exposed to all the different centres and parents whose children go to those centres heard about this and that way they were able to learn a bit more about what was going on. ...Involved the community in a small way. They let us go in and do mock licensing inspections and everything. It was just incredible.” (Diane)

vi) Orienting Community Administrators to Program Delivery and Certification Issues

Training processes, regulations, and steps towards certification all need to be communicated with clarity to community-based administrators. While well known to training institutions/organizations, this information may be new to administrators in the community and may need to be communicated a number of different ways over a period of time.

“The perception is, the day after graduation the students are ready to take over the community daycare, the community facilities. Not realizing there’s still some provincial licensing requirements that have to be met etcetera. And if the community is aware of that at the outset, I think the transition will be a little easier. The expectation on the students won’t be so demanding.” (Ginny)

C. “Prep” Program – elements and processes

Student success in ECE training programs appears to be closely aligned with the content and process of a preparatory program.

Forum participants suggested that an ideal prep program would be 5-6 months long and consist of the following elements:

- < Several levels of English upgrading courses
- < Life Skills (including time management, money management, stress reduction, communication)
- < Study Skills
- < ECE activities
- < Computer Skills
- < Learning through Play
- < Some ECE work experience
- < Personal Development
- < Work ethics, professionalism
- < Acculturation to the student role
- < Completing assignments, punctuality

An important part of a prep program is ensuring that students have a solid opportunity to experience success:

“I think the prep has to be multi-level to encourage them (students) to carry on (regardless of their current skill level), rather than getting them frustrated because they can’t keep up.” (Charlett)

“The English instructor ... would work with the students to figure out where they are and then at the end we knew where they could go from there. So they all didn’t go into the English program at the College, some went into upgrading and some went into the English program. So, it was much more suited (to each student) and they weren’t just geared for failure.” (Linda)

An ECE oriented prep program can also serve the needs of community members who do not intend to continue into the ECE program:

“In Treaty 8, because there was such a strong element of ECE activities in the prep program, a number of students were invited to take the prep program whom everybody expected would not take the actual (ECE) training. They did it mainly to enhance their own parenting skills and confidence.” (Jessica)

A prep program can also be a useful screening process, facilitating a more student group throughout the duration of the ECE program:

“We were doing a bit of that (commitment testing) in the prep program. We were showing them how committed we were expecting the students to be and the ones who weren’t ready for that didn’t make it past the prep program.” (Leisa)

D. Program Elements and Processes

Tailoring ECE training programs to the needs of individual First Nations communities requires careful consideration of program elements and processes.

i) Program Elements

Integration of First Nations culture, language and teaching techniques

The integration of culturally specific knowledge and awareness in ECE training was deemed an essential component by some forum participants:

“In every one of our courses, what the students learn is just a sampling of mainstream theory, research and practice and the remainder of what they learn is generated by community members and sometimes by the students themselves but most often by the Elders and community resource people. They elaborate on how each of the topics in early childhood education is conceptualized and manifested in behaviours from their particular First Nations culture. ...And one of the things that a few of our communities have really emphasized is traditional language learning for the early childhood trainees. So, for example, in Mount Currie, students there have learned a lot of Lil’wat language in the course of their two years in the ECE training program.” (Jessica)

“Having taught mainstream courses in two different colleges, can I say that doing the Generative Curriculum is so wonderful. It’s so empowering for the students and it gives such credibility to their own experiences. The self-esteem, the feeling that they’re going to succeed, that they’re coming in (to the program) with lots of information. And when you’re doing a mainstream kind of course that doesn’t happen. It’s that old thing of we’re filling an empty vessel. And I just can’t say enough.” (Linda)

“I think that when we’re rebuilding our communities, language is a really important part of it. ...One of our goals is that eventually the daycare will be unilingual, with only Carrier spoken ... or at least bilingual. ...We really need to ground ourselves again in who we are as a people and that’s where language and

culture come in. ...We have so many people who don't speak the language any more. ... Language loss is really bad right across Canada but especially in B.C. Some people have only 5 speakers and they're all over 60 (years old), so when they die the language is dead." (Deborah)

ii) English requirements

Some Forum participants commented that training institutions/organizations should engage in reviewing English competency requirements of ECE training programs:

"How to help students meet that English requirements. It takes a long time, it takes practice (to acquire good English skills). ...We had the English prep course ... and then we tried to move into the mainstream, from the Chemainus Nation and the students really struggled with that English component. And they were the best of people to take care of children. It was so frustrating that we couldn't do something about that." (Linda)

Including courses/information on managing challenging behaviours

Students would benefit from a Basic ECE program that was more holistic:

"The students weren't able to deal with those challenging behaviours. Some of them got frustrated, they quit their jobs. Some of them thought, 'oh, this is not the field for me' because of the challenging behaviours of some of the children. I think that the programs should offer an introduction to special needs: FAS/FAE, challenging behaviours, that kind of thing. Our daycare runs on a ratio. We try to run on a 1 (caregiver) to 4 (children) because of challenging behaviours. ...Just understanding them and knowing how to deal with them because the program didn't show them how to deal hands-on with behaviours like that." (Lenora)

iii) Career Laddering

Employment opportunities are expanded by programs that include some child and youth care content:

"With our program, it's an early childhood education and youth care program and there is some look at the development and caring for children 6 to 18 years of age. And in every community we've partnered with, one or more of the students have taken the program because they're interested in working with youth, not working with very young children. There's a built-in alternative career track within the program. ...Also ... every one of our partners have requested that the program ladder into 3rd year and not be a dead-end or a one-off program, that it left room for students to develop other career tracks." (Jessica)

iv) Children's communication abilities

Some people are very concerned about the issue of the development of communication skills among First Nations children and would like to see more training and practice in language facilitation included in ECE training programs:

"As a speech pathologist, I'm really concerned with children's levels of communication. I would like to see a practical language facilitation course for early childhood educators. Something where there's actual practice in the home, in a very controlled setting, before they go out to do practicums. It's expected in the field, but unless you practice it, it's not necessarily the way that most people talk with children." (Barb)

"Having language programs for First Nations children, if they're not sensitive to the culture, I've seen First Nations children be labeled special needs in the language department. ... You really have to watch for that, have the right kind of instructors there." (Liz)

ii) Delivery Processes

Flexibility

ECE training programs delivered in First Nations communities must be flexible.

"I think that one of the things about all of these programs ... is that they've all been flexible. I think that the rigidity of the university or college calendar of terms, when they start and finish and when grades have to be submitted, that itself undermines a lot of aspects of First Nations culture. If the culture is that when there's a death, people are not able to continue with their usual routine, then for us to require it because of our rigid schedule is antithetical to the very goal of revitalizing and supporting indigenous culture." (Jessica)

Part-time versus full-time studies

There was some disagreement among forum participants regarding the effectiveness of part-time versus full-time program participation:

"There seems to be such a huge process of reacculturating to the student role that is required and the cohesion of the students with each other is a vehicle for maintaining the student life, that students who are popping in once a week for a course don't seem to really acculturate to being in school. ... It can also be very demotivating for a program to take 5 or 6 years of your life." (Jessica)

"But for our daycare, we wouldn't have been able to get the funding. We had to go part-time. ... We had to recruit and get them working in the daycare and go to school part-time in order to get those funds to build our daycare. ... All of our students were part-time. ... All the staff worked in the daycare, but in order to secure a position in the daycare, they had to be enrolled in the program. ... The

ECE program was designed around the daycare and the community needs. ...When our ratios (at the daycare) went down in the summer, then they'd go to school full-time in the summertime. I'd pull other ECE people in from the community to sub just over the summer." (Lenora)

"In our program too, we found that part-time works much better than full-time experience. ... Some of the students are either working, are parents, have other commitments, and the 10-month program is a killer program to begin with. Even on-campus, right in Fort St. John, part-time worked much better. Students are able to integrate the knowledge and use their experiences." (Robin)

"Part-time students have a harder time with the transition into practicum. ...Sometimes there's that gap in keeping skills fresh." (Janis)

Involving Elders and other Community Members

Elders in some of the FNPP communities have stressed that they believe the ECE program is just as much for them as it is for the students. They say they need to understand the current challenges for children and families. Having an ECE program become a mutual learning experience that will impact the whole community requires strong Elder participation in the program:

"It's also a healing experience (to have Elders involved in ECE training programs). I think that people forget that most of the Elders were taken off the reserve at the age of six and taken to residential school until they were 16 and they never had a chance to have a childhood, they never learned how to be parents themselves. ... And this is a chance for them to go back and heal." (Deborah)

Involving students' families

Forum participants generally agreed that the support which students receive during their program participation is a key factor in determining student success. Students' families are usually their main source of support and therefore family members must be closely aligned in the educational pursuit:

"In our program in Chemainus ... there was a lot of suspicion about what was going on, by family members. Like why were the moms spending so much time away from home? Just because they didn't know what was happening. That's something we tried to address by bringing family in or just making contact with the family. ...They often wanted to come see where their mom or their partner spent the day. And that seemed to really help and it also seemed to help them see it was a need for support. It seemed that when the students would get stressed out, during mid-terms or whatever, then the whole family would get stressed out because the mom was sort of the centre, holding everything together. And so we felt that we had to give extra support somehow." (Linda)

Practica preparation

The practicum experience can be a totally new experience in many ways for First Nations students from remote communities. Careful attention must be given to adequately preparing students for practica placements:

“A lot of students were failing just because they’ve never had a job before, been in an early childhood education setting before. They needed the job training skills in order to succeed in the practicum.” (Lenora)

“Students need to understand the structure of the existing program they’re in, the work ethic, but there’s communication skills coming in to it, communicate with other staff, talking about things that are happening, trying to communicate and demonstrate some of the things they’re learning and be able to talk about it.” (Janis)

“It would be better if you could prepare us before we go into our practicum, how to deal with the special needs children in the program.” (Mary Ann)

The communication and collaboration initiated with practicum supervisors during the pre program development phase needs to be continued and strengthened during program practicum placements.

Supports for students

In addition to reacculturating to the student role, ECE students were reported to struggle with many issues in their personal lives that increased their need for support. Among these personal issues were high rates of accidental death and suicide in communities, and high birthrates among students.

The community-based administrators of ECE training programs must be active in their role of encouraging support for students.

“(Nak’azdli Education Coordinator) and I very closely evaluated students and when there was a problem, we were out there finding them and finding out the problem and working that through. The college, although they would send somebody out to do the same job, it was an intrusive way to the community members. So, in us doing it as the Band employees, it was less intrusive and it built the success model.” (Charlett)

Program participants identified a number of possible ways to create a circle of support for students:

- < Have a designated support person in place for the students. Some programs identify two mentors for each student *“to be there in a practical and emotional way for the students.” (Diane)*

- < Urge the community to make decisions about designated support people:
“What we’re talking about here is the community support. Even if you have professional associations or whatnot, they’re still one step removed. It’s the community support that really makes the difference. And how it works in each community is going to be different.” (Karen)
- < Ask students to take responsibility for communicating their needs for support:
“A lot of it went back on to the students themselves, the responsibility to identify what supports they needed.” (Robyn)
- < Consider accessing funding for homemaker assistance from community home support services:
“Some of them have two or three families in the home. Some of them have their grandchildren, foster children, their children. It’s really hard for them to come home deal with all this and get their homework done.” (Lenora)
- < Ensure student access to counselling and supports for healing as needed:
“Some of the students were involved in the counselling that Lake Babine Nation had to offer. We have hired therapists on staff that some of the students went to when they were in need of support.” (Lenora)

“Students being involved in studying early childhood and working with children can trigger a lot of memories and community-wide issues about children and about childhood ... this field is particularly sensitive and students taking this program are likely to need more support than students taking a forestry program. ... In our programs, this has sometimes involved Elders leading various healing circles or sweats.” (Jessica)
- < Provide adequate financial support to students
“Another thing we did for our students was they were all enrolled as post-secondary students and given the same post-secondary student allowance that they would (have received) if they had gone off-reserve to do post-secondary. ... Financial support was really important.” (Leisa)

“(When) not all the Bands are supporting (students) to the same level, ... there can be tension among students. We would never get involved in that conversation because it’s not our place to do that. But it may be something that we would want to flag for the communities as they plan the program. That this may be something that they’d want to have a meeting among different Band representatives to come up with some kind of a plan to handle the discrepancies or make sure there aren’t discrepancies.” (Jessica)

“In our program we wanted everybody to be treated equally. So the non-native students got free textbooks, free schooling and everything ... fairness. The college

paid for the non-native students. It was a shared thing between the Band and CNC. It was very nice.” (Lenora)

Support for instructors

Instructors for community-based ECE training programs require support too. Forum participants noted that one of the best ways to support instructors is to make sure that students are adequately supported.

The supportive role assumed by the Nak’azdli Band’s program administrators was reported to benefit the program instructor:

“That enabled the instructors to have a role (in supporting students), but a little bit removed. That worked quite well.” (Karen)

A study buddy system implemented in the Lake Babine program helped students take responsibility for their studying and assignments:

“(Student support) was one aspect of our program that turned out to be quite successful. ... What we tried to do was set up a study-buddy system ... and carried it on over the two years and it was great. The students were given time in class to study together, if there was an observation course, they’d go over each other’s observations. They’d just generally help each other out, call each other at home. ... If somebody was away for some reason, their study buddy would collect things for them, inform them regarding what happened in the class. ... It proved to be very helpful to the students. ... And it took a lot of work off the instructors.” (Diane)

Post Program Processes and Support

Forum participants clearly stated student “success” is best defined by the community itself and includes more than the “completion rate” indicators commonly used as indicators of success by training institutions.

“We’re not just trying to get FN community members certified. The whole point isn’t just certification, it’s the development of services for young children in reserve communities. And that can be through ECE training, but ECE training in itself doesn’t accomplish that.” (Jessica)

“I recently attended the honouring ceremony that was held at one of our partnering communities. None of the students have completed the program, but the community wanted to celebrate their success at their 2 years of being in the program. We know that many of those students will complete their diploma and their ECE certification, but the community and we expect that some of those students will not. But the spirit of the event, it was very clear that the community

really wanted to honour them as being successful in a way that if they came to the (UVic) convocation, they wouldn't be allowed to walk across the stage.”
(Jessica)

Community-based support for program completion

Community administrators need to be aware of the ongoing need for supporting students to complete their program requirements after a program has officially finished in the community.

Forum participants emphasized the following needs during the post-program period:

- < budget funds need to be set aside for post-program support,
- < students need to be able to access information in their own community on course articulation across training programs, and
- < students need help accessing placements to satisfy their 500 hour work experience required for ECE licensing,
- < a designated community contact needs to students' successful completion of program requirements to the training institution/organization.

Support to ECE workers in the field

Forum participants stated that the support to students and their communities needs to continue on an ongoing basis. Support should not end when students have “officially” completed their program participation.

“All caregivers need to have ongoing personal development opportunities. Because when you give and give and give to children and their families who are going through abusive situations and stuff, it's draining to the caregivers. Just knowing how to rejuvenate yourself, those things are ongoing.” (Ginny)

“(Continued) support to the wonderful training centres that have been started. And I see that happening over and over again. We're in there and then we're out.” (Robin)

Work as an early childhood educator in First Nations communities may bring with it unique stresses that practitioners in mainstream, urban settings may not experience:

“Those kids touch our pain daily. You need to be able to talk about it and have support systems ... so that people don't burn out of just can't handle it.”
(Deborah)

Networking/articulating program experiences and Courses

A challenge encountered by many students who have a few course credits left to complete at the end of their program involves trying to find a comparable course through a different institution. This is an issue of course or program articulation.

There exists a nationwide need for more work on course articulation to increase transferability options for students.

At present, many of the students known to forum participants have accessed ECE courses through Northern Lights Community College's Distance Education program.

The University of Victoria offers additional ECE/CYC education and credentialing through partnership with a number of community colleges and through their Distance Education department.

Conclusion

This forum for professionals involved in community-based ECE training programs and practice highlighted many salient issues and yielded many practical recommendations for improving the accessibility and effectiveness of ECE training programs in rural First Nations communities. Continued networking and communication between community-based and institutional representatives of ECE training programs will further encourage culturally sensitive, appropriate and accessible ECE training programs in First Nations communities.