

ARBOS AWARD

OREST MURAWSKY'S STORY

2023 ARBOS FOR DISTINGUISHED SUPPORT OF EDUCATION AND THE TEACHING PROFESSION



For over four decades, Orest Murawsky has worked to make an impact on the education landscape in this province, touching the lives of thousands of individuals and shaping their success. Orest's greatest contribution has been through his work within the Indian Teacher Education Program, a four-year

education program designed for First Nations students seeking to obtain a bachelor of education degree.

Since the program's inception, Orest has been an instrumental figure working tirelessly to ensure its success and the success of its students. His commitment to ITEP has earned him widespread recognition as a leading advocate for Indigenous education as well as high praise from Indigenous communities across the country.

Orest received a bachelor of arts degree in Far Eastern studies, followed by a B.Ed., and M.Ed. His decision to switch careers as a surveyor, proved to be one of the most important points in his professional career, ultimately changing the lives of thousands of his future students and colleagues.

Teaching for Orest didn't stop at the end of the day; he supported his students 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Many of the students that went through ITEP faced many barriers to traditional on-campus education, and Orest worked extremely hard to help students overcome all of these barriers.

A colleague and friend of Orest, Dr. Murray Scharf shares, "Orest is the reason many people were able to complete the program and become teachers, providing personalized support all while honouring their privacy and dignity. Orest never sought any credit for what he did. He really got a lot of fulfilment when his students succeeded. Above all else, he wanted his students to be successful personally, academically and in every area of their lives."

Through his work with ITEP, Orest facilitated communication between the University of Saskatchewan and numerous First Nations communities, advocating for access to post-secondary education and delivering many programs on reserves, allowing many individuals to grow their skill set and improve their lives. As Orest remarks, "That was my goal; to have Indian control of Indian education, run basically, by First Nations Peoples. So, it's happening. I just go there to visit now."

Orest has contributed to the success of thousands of individuals and helped improve the lives of generations of children. He constantly advocated for First Nations People and their education. Through his tireless efforts and commitment, Orest has become a beloved figure in the education community, supporting countless individuals to achieve their full potential. He has had a profound, life-changing impact on so many people, and the education community is incredibly fortunate to have him.

A CONVERSATION WITH OREST MURAWSKY

What are some accomplishments you've achieved during your career?

One of the main accomplishments I have achieved as the director of the Indian Teacher Education Program (ITEP) and am most proud of, is seeing the wide diversity of accomplishments our graduates have achieved over the years. They have been instrumental in educational, institutional, and political change. ITEP graduates have become chiefs, counselors, chancellor of the U of S, directors, principals, CEOs, presidents and of course the most important role as teachers and parents and community leaders. Over the past 50 years, ITEP has been recognized as a major educational force with the graduates being change agents in both the provincial and First Nations schools.

What are some of the things you find most rewarding about your past or current work?

One of the most rewarding things for me now is when a student in my class comes up to me and tells me that their parents or grandparents want to say “Hello” and they all tell me stories they have been told about their times in ITEP. I feel I have accomplished ITEP’s initial mandate of having ITEP being recognized as a one-of-a-kind program that has led to Indian control of Indian education at the community level. I realized that the best way to serve the First Nations communities was to consult with them and set up off-campus B.Ed. programs. It took a lot of travel, meetings with chiefs and councils and tribal councils resulting with successful programs in the following communities.

Another major initiative of mine was to form a partnership with Arctic - Aurora College, N.W.T., whereby their students would receive a B.Ed. on site or attend the U of S. The Elder In-Residence Program was initiated and ITEP was able to have this position staffed for many years after. A Cree language teaching area was established in the early years.

Tell us about some of the people who have helped shape your life and leadership approach?

There were many people over my 40 plus years in ITEP that have influenced me. Many of the students came to the program with special life experiences that they carried with them. Many students were taught in traditional ways and were immersed in cultural protocols and ceremonies. These students assisted me to make the proper decisions to support the ITEP mandate and goals. They served as Knowledge Keepers and Elder’s helpers throughout the entire program. Some of the people who provided guidance and protocol for ITEP during their tenure were Chief Delbert Wapass, Ralph Morin, and Karen Rabbitskin, and Joseph Naytowhow and many others.

The most influential people in my years at ITEP were Elders Danny Musqua, Edwin Tootoosis, Mary Lee, Cecil King and Dr. Murray Scharf. These people gave me the necessary knowledge and skills to make myself and ITEP responsive to the communities we served.

What are some of your most important career defining moments?

One of the most important events for me was when it was evident that we could deliver both on-and-off-campus four-year bachelor of education degrees. Partnership with the Continuing and Distant Education Centre and the Colleges of Education and Arts & Science provided the mechanism for this to take place from 1977 to present.

It is very rewarding for me to see ITEP grads taking on leadership roles with direct impact in community and educational development.

Defining Moments:

- The first ITEP grad to receive a PhD – Stanford University – 2002 (This paved the way for others.)
- When Dr. Danny Musqua received an honorary doctor of laws degree in 1995. Danny held the office of Elder in Residence for ITEP for many years.
- Another career highlight was when an ITEP Alumni became the chancellor of the University of Saskatchewan.

What are some of the challenges you have faced during the course of your career?

As with any new endeavor the main challenge was to get the funding necessary to operate and deliver a successful program. ITEP funding was on a year-to-year basis – it was always a challenge and a worry that funding might not be available for the next year.

It was always challenging to coordinate and negotiate on-campus and off-campus (community-based) programs at the same time. Coordination of courses, timetables instructors, and travel was always a challenge. Many of the ITEP community-based programs were in communities that were not easily accessible; weather was always a challenge in the delivery model, for example, river crossings, poor roads, long distances, accommodations for instructors.

The main challenge in the early years was to facilitate partnerships with First Nations, bands, tribal councils and schools. ITEP was a new form of teacher education and had a specific mandate that had not been seen before; Indian control of Indian education was a new dynamic for Canada. One of the challenges we had to be cognizant of was that many students had attended residential schools and were affected by different school experiences.

The challenge of delivery of programs that were situated in two jurisdictions – provincial federal and First Nations – took considerable negotiation.

The challenge today is to continue delivering community-based B.ed programs to the communities we serve – more First Nations teachers are needed in all jurisdictions.



CONNECT WITH US

   @SaskTeachersFed www.stf.sk.ca