elink

Spring/Summer 2018

Peer Reviewed Collection: Indigenous Knowledges and Pedagogies

AECEO's Truth and Reconciliation Commitment

Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario | Canada Post Publication Contract No. 40014752

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The eceLINK is a quarterly publication of the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO). Since 1992, the publication has been distributed across Ontario to all our members and affiliate organizations. The eceLINK has a circulation of approximately 3000, reaching Early Childhood Educators working in different early learning and child care settings. They include students, frontline practitioners, administrators & supervisors, trainers and policy makers.

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AECEO Welcomes Community Organizing and Communications Coordinator

The Board of Directors is very pleased to introduce Sonia Tavares as the AECEO's Community Organizing and Communications Coordinator.

Sonia has a diploma in Early Childhood Education and a certificate in Early Childhood Education, Advanced Studies in Special Needs. She brings a strong background and rich experience in the Early Childhood field, and has worked within the Ontario child care sector including many years as a Resource Teacher working with young children with special needs and their families. She has also worked with parents of young children, developing community based programs and instructing ECE students.

Sonia recently moved back to Ontario from British Columbia where she brings her experience as the Success By 6/Children First Regional Manager where she supported early years coalitions and community planning and development. She brings a wealth of knowledge and skills in planning regional and provincial conferences and more importantly her work with the Early Childhood Educators of British Columbia where she has served as a board member and held the portfolio of Director of Conference and participated in many committees and campaigns.

Sonia strongly believes that early childhood educators have the vision, creativity, flexibility, patience, courage and perseverance to achieve the best for children in their care and their families. These qualities will serve to move the profession forward to the recognition they deserve for the valuable contribution they make in the lives of children and families. She is committed to working with policy makers to recognize this issue and respond accordingly.

In these very exciting times of change in the early years and child care field, Sonia's passion for change that matters to ECE's and to children and families are key assets in supporting and furthering our mission.

CALL FOR ARTICLES

Issue: Fall 2018

Submission deadline: June 1, 2018

Please email manuscript submission to info@aeceo.ca

Author Guidelines

Subject parameters (unless a special issue is announced): Early Childhood Policy, Early Childhood Practice, Early Childhood Pedagogy, Social Justice in ECE, Professionalism, Disability and Inclusion in ECE, Environmentalism in ECE, Collaborative Practices, Diversity in ECE, Action Research in ECE, Early Childhood Classroom Issues at the Program Level, Pedagogical documentation, Engaging How does Learning Happen?

Form and Style

Style should be consistent with the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (6th Edition). The journal uses Canadian spelling; please consult the Oxford Canadian Dictionary. The editors welcome manuscripts between 5000-8000 words. ***Please email info@aeceo.ca for the full submission guidelines***

Please note that you can submit manuscripts following the subject parameters at any time to be considered for the peer review process, please send manuscripts in Microsoft Word format to info@aeceo.ca. You can also submit general content articles (non peer reviewed) at anytime to be considered for publication in the eceLink magazine, please send general content to info@aeceo.ca

SAVE THE DATE

AECEO Annual Meeting 2018

The Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario will hold its Annual Meeting of Members on June 20th, 2018. The online AGM provides an opportunity to engage with Provincial Board and candidates and to be involved in the governance of the Association.

Date & Time: **Wednesday, June 20 @ 6:00 p.m.**
Where: **Online via Zoom meetings**

Further details will be distributed prior to the AGM.

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The AECEO would like to acknowledge & thank the following contributors:

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COVER ART

Detail from "Next Generation" by **Kevin Belmore**. The full work may be viewed on page 46. Work by Kevin Belmore will be shown at:

Café Pamenar
307 Augusta Ave
Toronto

Opening night May 31, 6-10 pm
and on display until June 30

You can follow Kevin on facebook at: **https://www.facebook.com/kevin.belmore.351**

ABOVE GRAPHIC

ECE Power Banner

COVER PAGE & LAYOUT

kim nelson design

AECEO's Active Commitment to Truth and Reconciliation

In this issue of eceLINK we are proud to share a powerful Peer Reviewed Collection of articles that focus on Indigenous Knowledges and Pedagogies in Early Childhood Education. This special issue is symbolic of the AECEO's first steps toward reconciliation with Indigenous people in Canada. We will continue to move forward: Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators together, through AECEO's newly established Guiding Committee on Truth and Reconciliation.

Ontario is covered by 46 treaties and other agreements, such as land purchases by the Crown signed between 1781 and 1930. Treaties are the legally binding agreements that set out the rights, responsibilities and relationships of First Nations and the federal and provincial governments.

By acknowledging the territory and the treaties that govern it we hope to show our recognitions and respect for Indigenous peoples. We recognize the presence of Indigenous peoples and communities both in the past and the present and we understand that recognition and respect are essential elements of establishing healthy, reciprocal relations. These relationships are the key to reconciliation, a process to which the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario is committed.[1]

As early childhood educators working with young children in communities across the country we have a responsibility to learn and share with our children the truth about Canada's darkest history: the residential school system. Through our pedagogical knowledge and practice we can open opportunities for all children to have conversations about healing and building new relationships that will strengthen future generations and allow all of Canada's children to thrive.

As the Honourable Murray Sinclair has said, "it was the educational system that has contributed to this problem in this country and it is the educational system, we believe, that is going to help us get away from this."[2]

For over 150 years, residential schools operated in Canada. Over 150,000 children - seven generations - attended these schools. Many never returned[3]. The residential schools were created for the purpose of "separating Aboriginal children from their families, in order to minimize and weaken family ties and cultural linkages, and to indoctrinate children into a new culture of Euro-Christian Canadian society"[4]. The last residential school was closed 1996.

In 1991, four Indigenous and three non-Indigenous commissioners were appointed to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) and tasked with investigating the complex issues facing First Nations, Inuit and Métis people and communities across Canada. The commissioners held public hearings, visited communities and consulted experts across Canada. Throughout the lengthy consultation process many Indigenous people spoke to the commissioners about their residential school experiences[5].

The central conclusion of the Commission's final report (1996) was that, "the main policy direction, pursued for more than 150 years, first by colonial then by Canadian governments, has been wrong"[6]. The Commissioners made hundreds of recommendations to repair Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples and communities. A key recommendation was for a separate public inquiry into the history of the residential school system.

Nearly twenty years later, on June 11, 2008 then Prime Minister Stephen Harper made an apology on behalf of the Canadian government to the approximately 80,000 living former students, and all family members and communities affected by the residential school system. Following in 2009, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada was finally able to begin a multi-year process, to listen to Survivors, communities and others affected by the residential school system. The final

1 Thank you to the Ontario Federation of Labour Aboriginal Circle (OFL, 2017) for sharing their resource for acknowledging traditional territory in Ontario. Retrieved from: http://ofl.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017-12-04-Traditional-Territory-Acknowledgements.pdf

2 Truth and Reconciliation Commission,2011 https://vimeo.com/25389165

3 National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. Retrieved from: https://nctr.ca/about-new.php

4 Truth and Reconciliation Commission Final Report, 2015. Retrieved from: http://nctr.ca/reports.php

5 CBC News, 2008. Retrieved from: http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/a-history-of-residential-schools-in-canada-1.702280

6 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996). Retrieved from: http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100014597/1100100014637

report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was released to the public in 2015 and includes multiple reports and 94 Calls to Action.

It is the responsibility of all people in Canada to rise to reconciliation by implementing all 94 of the recommendations. As early childhood educators we know that our early years and child care programs support children's natural curiosity about their world. Education is the second priority area of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. The Commission calls on Canada to provide culturally based education for First Nations children, and to educate all Canadians about Indigenous peoples to prepare them for the important work of reconciliation. Within the TRC Calls to Action on education is the specific call for "federal, provincial, territorial, and Indigenous governments to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families."[7]

During a meeting in 2017 the AECEO Board of Directors passed a unanimous decision to make an active commitment to participate in and support the process of reconciliation with First Nation, Métis and Inuit people and communities in Ontario and across the country.

We knew this meant the AECEO would need to work internally on its own policies, practices and procedures and externally to share Indigenous ways of knowing and learning with our members and all ECEs and early years staff in Ontario. During the meeting it was acknowledged by the Board that there were no Indigenous voices at the Board level and we asked the question: what opportunities does the AECEO provide to Indigenous communities to have their voices heard? The AECEO's mission is to build and support a strong collective voice for early childhood educators and so it is our responsibility to provide culturally safe opportunities for First Nation, Métis and Inuit educators to have their own voice within the AECEO.

After initial conversations with members of the Indigenous community we felt that establishing a Guiding Committee on Truth and Reconciliation could support the AECEO in this important process. We are still in the initial stages of structuring the Guiding Committee and developing a work plan but we hope to establish a formal statement and action plan for how the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario can contribute positively towards reconciliation with all First Nation, Inuit and Métis peoples.

The Guiding Committee has had two online meetings and is focused on recruiting participants with the goal of establishing a committee that is lead by Indigenous educators. We are reaching out through our membership, networks and partners to encourage Indigenous ECEs, leaders, Elders and non-Indigenous allies to join the AECEO's Guiding Committee.

AECEO is committed to a process of shedding our colonial processes that have failed, in the past, to provide equitable opportunities for Indigenous educators to share their knowledges, traditions and teachings.

Special thanks to long-time AECEO member Sherry Lickers, RECE, AECEO.C, Supervisor of Six Nations Child Care Services, who has agreed to Chair the AECEO's Guiding Committee on Truth and Reconciliation. Thank you also, to Elder Brenda Mason from Sandy Lake, who has graciously agreed to share her knowledge and wisdom as the Guiding Committee's Elder.

Resources:

KAIROS Canada
https://www.kairoscanada.org/

10 children's literature books about residential schools
http://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/10-books-about-residential-schools-to-read-with-your-kids-1.3208021

Video: What is Reconciliation?
https://vimeo.com/25389165

Video: CBC News, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Release Their Final Report
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lKKLgwlosaw

Video: Namwayut: we are all one. Truth and reconciliation in Canada
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zuRQmwaREY

Further Reading:

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996)
http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100014597/1100100014637

From Truth to Reconciliation: Transforming the Legacy of Residential Schools (2008)
https://fncaringsociety.com/publications/truth-reconciliation-transforming-legacy-residential-schools-0

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Final Report (2015)
http://nctr.ca/reports.php

A History of Residential Schools in Canada
http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/a-history-of-residential-schools-in-canada-1.702280

Inuit relocations throughout the arctic
http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/inuit-get-federal-apology-for-forced-relocation-1.897468

Guide to Acknowledging First Peoples & Traditional Territory (Canadian Association of University Teachers, CAUT)
https://www.caut.ca/content/guide-acknowledging-first-peoples-traditional-territory

7 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Final Report (2015). Retrieved from: http://nctr.ca/reports.php

Professional Pay & Decent Work Project Update:
Building ECE Power for Change

This year, the Professional Pay & Decent Work project continues to build power as early childhood educators from across the province join together in an ECE led movement for decent work. From sharing our stories, to hosting local events that raise awareness and increase support for improved wages and working conditions - RECEs, early childhood staff, and parents are effectively organizing for quality, affordable, accessible early years and child care programs that have decent work for educators at the heart.

The AECEO has been working closely with our partners, the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, Institute for Change Leaders and the Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development. Together, we are focused on honing the strength and skills of the early childhood (EC) workforce to build an ECE led movement. We will continue to build the power needed to induce public policy progress on wages and working conditions for Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) and staff in Ontario. Engaging a critical mass of informed supporters will build the AECEO`s power - bring our campaign to the next level and cement our position as the voice for the EC workforce.

Project achievements to date:

- **Trained over 100 RECEs, parents and child care workers across Ontario**
- **Established 5 local Communities of Practice/Decent Work Teams**
- **Secured Workforce Strategy as a pillar of Ontario's Renewed Early Years and Child Care Policy Framework (2017)**
- **Decent work teams hosted local events across the province for ECE Appreciation Day and the Week of Action in October 2017**
- **Over 2000 individuals have pledged to support the campaign**
- **47 Organizations/employers have endorsed the Early Childhood Sector Decent Work Charter**
- **4,000 RECEs, staff and other professionals from the sector responded to AECEO's Workforce Strategy Consultation Survey**
- **AECEO's Decent Work Task Force delivered its Workforce Strategy Recommendations to the Ontario Ministry of Education in November 2017**
- **Secured 12M in funding to child care operators across the province to stabilize fee increases related to new minimum wage**
- **Professional Pay for Professional Work Petition achieved its goal of 10,000 signatures!!**
- **Ontario government announces plan to provide free child care for preschool aged children and a wage scale for early childhood educators**
- **Ontario Ministry of Education releases the Growing Together: Ontario's Early Years and Child Care Workforce Strategy that includes 5 key action areas:**

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

Early Childhood Educators fighting for decent work!

When early childhood educators come together to build power we have a much stronger collective voice as a profession. An over-arching goal of the AECEO's Professional Pay & Decent Work project is to unite all RECEs in influencing positive change that will benefit us all. We strongly believe that all RECEs need to support one another no matter where they work. We all face different challenges depending on where we live and work but at the end of the day we are all early childhood educators and we are stronger together.

Local Communities of Practice/ Decent Work Teams

In 2017 we partnered with Olivia Chow and the Institute for Change Leaders to host the Building Skills for Change leadership training in four cities/ regions: Toronto, Ottawa, Waterloo Region and Thunder Bay. The training curriculum is based on the successful work of Marshall Ganz, a Harvard professor who was a key organizing strategist during the Obama U.S presidential campaigns of 2008 and 2012.

This innovative 2-day training workshop helped to spur the creation of 5 local Communities of Practice (CoPs) that are working with the AECEO as decent work teams to organize and build capacity in their local communities:

- Early Years Professionals Rise Up – Toronto
- Early Years Coalition Waterloo Region
- Halton Advocates for Quality Childcare
- ECE Unite – Thunder Bay
- ECE Power – Ottawa.

This year, we provided a second training workshop to follow up with these teams. The goal of the follow up training was to build on the success and momentum achieved in 2017 by deepening local team engagement and infrastructure, expanding reach, visibility and partnership, and continuing to foster credibility and relevance to build our effectiveness and capacity.

Task Force

Under the leadership and direction of Bernice Cipparrone-McLeod, the AECEO's Decent Work Task Force has accomplished the important work that we prioritized in 2017:

1. Develop policy recommendations to address issues and challenges that were documented during our Professional Pay & Decent Work for All mobilization forums in 2016;
2. Develop a Decent Work Charter for employers to endorse and support our Shared Vision of Decent Work in the Early Years and Child Care sector.

In June 2017 the AECEO claimed a significant win in our fight for professional pay and decent work when the government of Ontario announced they would develop a workforce strategy to improve compensation, recruitment and retention of RECEs.

The Decent Work Task Force immediately began researching and drafting recommendations to inform the strategy, and a key part of our process was to engage RECEs and staff in this important policy action. The Task Force's Consultation Survey was in field from October 20th – November 23rd and garnered 4,000 responses from RECEs, staff and other professionals from the sector that informed and backed the workforce strategy recommendations, *Transforming Work in Ontario's Early Years and Child Care Sector,* that were delivered to the Ministry of Education on November 30th 2017.

At the same time, the Task Force launched the *Ontario Early Childhood Sector Decent Work Charter*, an aspirational HR document to support the shared vision of decent work that was developed with mobilization forum participants in 2016 (chapter 1 of our project). We are confident that the sector supports the principles of decent work. *Transforming Work in Ontario's Early Years and Child Care Sector* addresses the systemic and structural supports required to achieve the principles of decent work that are set out in the Charter. The Task Force and the AECEO know that providers and operators need more funding and support from provincial and municipal governments; that is why our approach is two pronged.

Engaging RECEs and the broader sector in this important policy process has brought new visibility to the AECEO and increased our relevance with the early childhood (EC) workforce. With over 100 RECEs trained in the Ganz-based community organizing framework and 5 local Communities of Practice (CoPs) working with us as campaign teams our project has shown us that building an ECE led movement is no longer just a dream.

The next phase of this project through 2018-19 will see the AECEO optimize its strength as the professional association for all RECEs in Ontario so that we can continue to support and promote RECEs and the early childhood profession for decades to come.

Decent work for the EC workforce is a realistic and long overdue goal. As an almost entirely female workforce performing a critical social service through caring for and educating young children, decent work for RECEs and early years staff means a better society for us all.

Ontario Votes 2018: Where the Parties Stand on Child Care

	UNIVERSAL CHILD CARE IS POSSIBLE	green PARTY OF ONTARIO	LIBERAL ONTARIO	ONTARIO NDP	ONTARIOPC
Develop a universally accessible system of high quality child care	Free daycare for working parents with children under the age of three.	Advance the goal of universal accessibility.	Make sure every family can access affordable, high quality, not-for-profit child care.	No plan for child care services; instead, a tax rebate for some expenditures on child care.
	More accessible but not universal	*On the road toward universality*	*On the road toward universality*	*Not universal*
Spending	Not specified	$2.2 B over 2 years + on-going $1.6 B	$11.4 B over 5 years	$389 M / year
Low fees or no fees for every family – address affordability by providing funds to child care programs instead of individuals	Free daycare for working parents with children under age three and support for stay-at-home parents.	Free licensed child care for all preschool aged children (2.5 – 4 yrs old). Funding to reduce fees and increase subsidies for infants and toddlers.	Free public, non-profit child care for households with income under $40,000. Others pay based on incomes —average est. at $12 per day.	A child care tax rebate that will pay up to 75% of child care expenses – up to $6,750/child - for parents of children under 15 years of age.
	Low fees or no fees	*Low fees or no fees*	*Low fees or no fees*	*Does nothing to lower the high cost of child care*
Decent Work & Professional Pay for Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECE)	Additional ECE supports.	Implement a wage grid for RECEs and staff to align with RECEs working in Full-Day Kindergarten(FDK).	Immediately begin increasing wages for RECEs to $25/hour.	Not Mentioned
	Additional supports not specified	*Increasing wages for RECEs will attract qualified educators*	*Increasing wages for RECEs will attract qualified educators*	*Does nothing to attract qualified educators*
Limit Expansion to Public & Non-Profit Child Care programs	Provide incentives to offset the capital costs for businesses to set up onsite child care.	Building 45,000 spaces in schools and community spaces + 14,000 new spaces in non-profit sector.	Expand the number of non-profit, spaces in Ontario by 202,000 –including Lab Schools at Ontario Colleges.	Not Mentioned
	Limited details for expansion plan	*Non-profit and public expansion*	*Non-profit and public expansion*	*No plan for expansion*

	UNIVERSAL CHILD CARE IS POSSIBLE	green PARTY OF ONTARIO	LIBERAL ONTARIO	ONTARIO NDP	ONTARIOPC
Commitment to work with First Nation, Métis, Inuit and urban Indigenous peoples to strengthen and expand child care	Not Mentioned	Provide First Nations communities with operating funds for new and existing child care programs on reserve; capital funding to create 4,500 new spaces. Support Métis, Inuit & urban Indigenous organizations with funds for new spaces and programming.	Work with experts, advocates, and First Nations leaders to identify the supports Indigenous children need to thrive including access to culturally appropriate child care for First Nation, Métis, Inuit, and urban Indigenous communities.	Not Mentioned
	No plan to support Indigenous early childhood education	*Steps toward Reconciliation*	*Steps toward Reconciliation*	*No plan to support Indigenous early childhood education*
Commitment to improve and expand access to child care for children with special needs	Not Mentioned	Continue to work with stakeholders to support inclusion of children with special needs in early years and child care settings.	Expansion includes spaces for children with special needs, the right resources and specialized training for educators.	Not Mentioned
	No plan for child care inclusion	*Steps towards inclusion*	*Steps towards inclusion*	*No plan for child care inclusion*
Commitment to review and improve Full Day Kindergarten	Not Mentioned	Continuing efforts to improve communication and collaboration among educators.	Will enforce class size caps on every kindergarten classroom	Not Mentioned
	No plan to improve FDK	*Some efforts to improve FDK*	*Improvements to FDK class size*	*No plan to improve FDK*

All information presented has been garnered from party platforms, websites and communications with election teams of the political parties.

Ontario Green Party:
https://gpo.ca/vision/people/#1521514742535-df3e310b-61ed

Ontario Liberal Party:
http://budget.ontario.ca/2018/chapter-1.html#s-13

Ontario New Democratic Party:
https://www.ontariondp.ca/platform

Ontario Progressive Conservative Party:
https://www.ontariopc.ca/doug_ford_s_plan_for_the_people_will_put_more_money_in_the_pockets_of_ontario_parents
https://globalnews.ca/news/4174635/doug-ford-announces-tax-rebate-child-care-ontario/

This chart was co-developed by the **AECEO** and the **Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care**

AECEO MEMBER PROFILE

Marilyn Grudniski

In 1975 I completed my BA BEd from Lakehead University and within 5 days of writing my last exam, I was on my way to the Northwest Territories as a single parent with a three-year-old daughter in tow. I began my teaching career in Fort Simpson, which is on an island in the Mackenzie River. I taught in several other northern communities over the next five years, including Nahanni Butte – I challenge you to find that on a map!

Then, in the middle of a cold, dark subarctic winter, someone posted an ad for a teaching position in Africa, as a joke. I thought about the -40 weather outside (for about a minute) and then decided I needed a change! As a volunteer with World University Service of Canada, I moved to Lesotho, a small kingdom in southern Africa, where I began a twelve year experience of living in the developing world. This experience continued in Niger (West Africa) and Malawi (central Africa) where I taught in both local and international schools. During those years, I married, had two more children, and lived as an expatriate in some of the most beautiful and unique areas of the world.

My husband's career took him to Afghanistan, a country that was far too dangerous for the family, so the children and I moved to Pakistan instead. Whenever the war escalated, my husband was evacuated and we would all be together. This was not an ideal way to raise a family but it was an experience that we will always treasure.

The next big move was to Cochabamba, Bolivia where I taught a combined grade one/two class for three years. This gave me a completely new perspective on education, largely due to the fact that this school had a Human Rights curriculum. In this school, if you did not do something to further human rights in your class each day, then you had not really taught. During those years I had the unique experience of teaching my own daughter. The perspective I gained was quite a revelation. My daughter was somehow able to separate "mom" from "Miss Marilyn" and each day after school, she would tell me what she did at school that day. What she saw and what I saw in the classroom were often two vastly different things. The insights into the working of the 6 and 7 year-old mind made a huge impact my skill as a teacher.

I then moved to LaPaz, Bolivia where I taught high school English, journalism, and play production. A highlight of this time was a beautiful partnership that developed between my grade 10 class and a remote community on Devils' Tooth Mountain high in the Andes outside LaPaz. My interest in community development started at this time, building on what I had learned about the importance of human rights at the school in Cochabamba.

Despite the enjoyment I had teaching those grades, my stint there was cut short because I unexpectedly had the opportunity to move to Santiago, Chile where I taught the middle grades. My home room class was an inspiring group of young people who embraced community work. We fundraised for a "Babies Home", and did a lot of community service. It opened my eyes to the need for this age group to develop empathy through interactions with infants. After two years there, in 2001 we returned to my home in Thunder Bay.

When I was preparing to move back to Canada, someone in Santiago jokingly asked me what grade I would teach when I returned because by that point I had taught every grade, including adult education and a few college courses. I responded, "Just watch. I haven't taught kindergarten yet. That's likely the next thing." And it came to pass just like that. I accepted a position at Little Lions Waldorf Daycare & Kindergarten (now Child and Family Centre) where I remained for the next 17 years.

When I was in Chile, a visitor from the US State department asked me if I was

an ECE. I regretfully said that I was only a teacher. In many international schools, ECE is a desirable training to be sought when recruiting staff. It came as a surprise to me when I returned to Canada that the ECE designation was not as highly regarded here as it was overseas. I never did have the opportunity to become a "mainstream ECE" as we refer to it in Waldorf education, but I was fortunate to be able to attend the West Coast Institute in Vancouver to take my Waldorf Early Childhood training and additional training called "Gradalis" which focuses on infant reflexes. I was also able to take the Amazing Babies training from the author, Beverly Stokes.

Over the years at Little Lions, we grew from one small centre to twelve, creating a thriving organization that is firmly embedded in the community. During this time I was also greatly influenced by the book Raising the Village which asserts that social change should be driven from the field of early childhood. My work overseas combined with my Waldorf Early Childhood Training and insight from this book in particular were all a great preparation for my work as CEO of this organization.

This training and my work at Little Lions only confirmed what I already knew, that to teach any grade, a solid background in early childhood is critical. I see that "mainstream teachers" are at a distinct disadvantage because they lack this knowledge. When I reflect on my years as a teacher, I can remember the puzzling cases that I sometimes faced, particularly in the developing world where there is a shortage of expertise for teachers to tap into. I struggled blindly in a few cases and in retrospect I can see where I would have been able to help children so much more if I had had prior early childhood training. We say that often "we don't know what we don't know" and I think this is true. If mainstream teachers would take ECE or at a minimum have a solid grounding in child development, they would come away with more respect for this field and be better teachers. Fingers crossed that this will one day be a requirement and ECEs will be given the credit they deserve for this important work!

The AECEO has been working tirelessly toward this end: respect for RECEs and fair compensation for the work that they do daily. Not only does the AECEO watch the political climate and keep us informed, they help us to help ourselves through opportunities such as bringing Olivia Chow to our communities. While supporting the organization through the purchase of a membership, we are also able to tap into professional development to keep our skills sharp. Belonging to the AECEO is of benefit to us in so many ways and I would urge RECEs to take advantage of what is being offered. We need to be looking out for each other and each doing our part to raise our profile. It's important that we take on this work for ourselves. My experience in other parts of the world has taught me how fortunate we are in Ontario that an organization such as the AECEO exists. We are not alone!

Marilyn Grudniski

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THE PEER REVIEWED COLLECTION

Volume 2, Number 1

From the Editor

Welcome to eceLINK's second collection of peer reviewed articles. This group of four articles is devoted to Indigenous knowledges and pedagogies in early childhood education. It is exciting to offer this large number of articles, written in total by ten authors, signalling the tremendous importance of responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action (2015).

This collection reflects the AECEO's commitment to the TRC's call to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families. As Ontario's professional association for early childhood educators, the AECEO has a key role to play in the journey toward reconciliation alongside Indigenous communities.

We envision these articles being read by practicing early childhood educators and faculty and students in professional preparation programs across the province, as part of the very first steps towards our work of reconciliation. Collectively, the articles can be used as conversation starters in your own communities and as ways forward to reconciliation.

Thank you to peer reviewers who generously took time to review the articles.

Rachel Langford PhD

Introduction

She:kon tahnon teyethinonweratons.
(Hello and welcome.)

Dawn yontiaats.
(My name is Dawn.)

Konkwehonwe kanienkehaka.
(I am an original being who is Mohawk.)

Toronto Nikiteron.
(I live in Toronto.)

Wa'skarewake itskote niwaketohroten.
(I sit with the Bear Clan.)

Kateriwaweienstha.
(I am a (life-long) learner.)

On days like today, I shower in the memories of my days at Makonsag Aboriginal Headstart in Ottawa, where I taught my daughter and her classmates some Mohawk language using pictures, songs, and dance while I was a volunteer there and sat on the board. I have always been drawn to working with children, and to education in general. While attending the Queen's Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (ATEP) near the turn of the century, I spent a semester teaching kindergarten in Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory; my home community. Having that opportunity to connect with my community in a deeper way, particularly for someone who grew up off reserve, changed my life and relationships; and I still have deep appreciation for the students, staff and faculty I worked with in those days.

These memories, and the lessons I learned while working with Indigenous children and communities,

Introduction continued…

taught me the crucial nature of early childhood education: that early exposure to language, culture, strengths & values-based approaches positively impact children's learning, their sense of identity, and their ability to become fluent in a language. Further, exposure to role models in their community increases their sense of belonging, identity, and connectedness. This in particular, in light of historically inadequate and harmful methods of education for Indigenous children throughout the history of Canada, helps to counteract negative experiences, while further serving to provide children with the tools they need to thrive at school and throughout their lives.

We are growing the number of qualified Indigenous ECE workers across this country, and slowly but surely, we are increasing the quality and depth of the programs we are able to provide for Indigenous children. TRC Call #12 calls on all governments to develop culturally appropriate ECE programs for Aboriginal families. By including Indigenous ECEs in every program in the future, we are suddenly addressing multiple TRC Calls to action: increasing equity, diversity, inclusion, and access to Indigenous leadership and teaching for everyone. This only serves to enhance our programs, communities, and the learning of our students. This also strengthens us as teachers; grows our hearts, and offers us the experience of watching these children grow in fertile soil.

In a parallel fashion, many of us are also increasing Canadian's knowledge about the Truth and Reconciliation Report (TRC) and the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) with their findings/calls to action, in order that we can grow opportunities to create more allies across the country. Our next steps are to increase funding for Indigenous ECE programs across the country, while also encouraging all ECE programs to hire Indigenous teachers.

Education for Indigenous children is currently underfunded. Attawapiskat went from 1979 until 2014 without a school building in their community; and there are currently 44 other schools needed on reserves across the country in Canada. Every child in Canada deserves equal access to the same quality of education, and that includes the same quality buildings with libraries, gyms and science labs. TRC Call #8 calls for the federal government to eliminate this discrepancy. Shannen's Dream (https://fncaringsociety.com/shannens-dream-participate) is a campaign that also addresses this issue. Please sign, share and tell your MP to support, if you believe that every child deserves this.

Also, Canada delivers $8,189 per francophone for language programs in Nunavut, while providing $186 per Inuktut speaker—meaning the federal government spends 44 times more on French in Nunavut than it does on Inuktut. This is no longer acceptable behaviour by the government; if it ever was. We must change this; and TRC Call #10 (iv) calls for the protection of the right to Aboriginal languages; while Call #13 states that Aboriginal rights include Aboriginal language rights. These must become reflected in the Canadian reality; and we need allies across Canada to help amplify these Calls and put them into action.

While we are working in alignment with TRC and RCAP calls to obtain equal funding for education steeped in language and culture, we are growing in developing and sharing Indigenous ECE theory and practice. With that, I am excited to introduce you to this superb publication: Indigenous Knowledges and Pedagogies in Early Childhood Education. We hope you enjoy, learn, share and walk alongside our efforts to improve Indigenous practices throughout early childhood education in our communities, and across this country. We all benefit from diversity, building relationships, and from knowing the history of the land we occupy.

Dawn Maracle, BAH, B.Ed., M.Ed.

Decolonizing and Co-Constructing Contexts that Welcome Indigenous Practices and Knowledges in Early Childhood Education

Karyn Callaghan, Faith Hale, Michelle Taylor Leonhardi, Monique Lavallee

Abstract

Colonialism takes many forms. In early childhood education, the dominance of the normative gaze of developmentalism and the tendency to compartmentalize and sidestep spiritual aspects of life serves to marginalize other ways of knowing, distancing mainstream culture from opportunities to recognize and reconsider assumptions and established practices. In this article, Indigenous and settler educators draw on lived experience to critically reflect on perspectives and practices they have been taught and consider, with optimism, possibilities arising from the intersection of Indigenous knowledges with *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years*.

Key words

Indigenous knowledges; colonialism; developmentalism; early childhood education

Author Biographies

Karyn Callaghan taught in ECE programs at the college and university level for over 3 decades and coordinated the Artists at the Centre project in Hamilton for 15 years, having learned to question much of the dominant discourse of ECE by being close to and thinking with children and educators. She is the president of the Ontario Reggio Association, a board member of the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance, and a member of the Reggio Children International Network. The documentation created in the Artists at the Centre project that shows children's curiosity and complex thinking has helped to inform policy in the Ontario Ministry of Education.

Faith Hale is a founding member of Ska:na Family Learning Centre (SFLC), becoming Executive Director in August of 2003; prior to that Ms. Hale was the Director of Head Start for the Can-Am Indian Friendship Centre of Windsor since 1998. Ms. Hale is dedicated to improving the lives of children and families and is supported by her Master's in Education, Bachelors in Education – Aboriginal Adult Education, Bachelors of Arts with a Major in Sociology and is a Registered Early Childhood Educator. Ms. Hale has been the President of the Can-Am Indian Friendship Centre since June of 2014, overseeing its recovery and expansion, has served on numerous provincial and national Indigenous committees and boards, serves provincially with the Ontario College of ECEs, the Progressive Early-learning Aboriginal Centres of Excellence (PEACE) Network and is a consultant to various First Nations, Urban Indigenous communities and CMSMs.

Michelle Taylor-Leonhardi, RECE, NECE, Coordinator of Oshkiigmong Early Learning Centre in Curve Lake First Nation. Michelle was one of the first graduates of Binoojiiyag Kinoomaadwin at Cambrain College in Sudbury, Ontario. She is a proud Anishnaabe Kwe from the Otter Clan with a passion to continue learning alongside of our children and educators, focussing on pedagogy through an Indigenous lens.

Monique Lavallee is a passionate advocate for embedding Indigenous pedagogy across the education continuum. Monique is an invited speaker to local, national, and international forums to highlight the importance of land-based education and the right of Indigenous learners to have access to culturally relevant education and self determination. She is the President of the Hamilton Executive Directors Aboriginal Coalition and Secretary for the Ontario Aboriginal Head Start Association where she contributes to the development of cultural curriculum that is rooted in traditional knowledge, language and ceremony.

Decolonizing and Co-Constructing Contexts that Welcome Indigenous Practices and Knowledges in Early Childhood Education

Indigenous knowledges offer opportunities to recognize the assumptions and perspectives foundational to the Western discipline of early childhood education that have been presented as truths and would benefit from critique. Graduates of most Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs in Ontario have been taught a curriculum that privileges Eurocentric knowledge. Indigenous educators themselves have had their views of early childhood education influenced by this colonialism. As they come to terms with these influences, they are giving voice to their knowledges as part of the process of decolonization. *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years* (2014) (*HDLH*), with such notable features as an articulated view of the child, educator, and family (pp. 6–7) also invites critical reflection on the foundational assumptions of our profession. The intersection of Indigenous knowledges and *HDLH* offers the possibility of new realizations and changes in practice.

Transformational change is not easily achieved. Taking issue with the concept of silenced discourses, Peter Moss (2017) holds the view that "alternative discourses in early childhood are varied, vibrant and vocal, readily heard by those who listen" (p. 12). This listening has not happened, but we may be seeing the beginning of change. In the remainder of this article, four educators with lengthy experience in early learning programs in Ontario consider the opportunities we now have to re-cognize practices that resist listening only to voices that traditionally have been privileged and co-construct contexts that welcome Indigenous knowledges and practices.

Faith Hale

Some years ago, I had an epiphany regarding Indigenous ways of knowing in early learning. As a member of the Mandan/Hidatsa Nations, Prairie Chicken Clan, and a Registered Early Childhood Educator (RECE), I always felt the Western ways of educating children in the early years was somewhat paralyzing and traumatizing. My Indigenous teachings provided me with an understanding that education is to be holistic and experiential in design, and life-long learning primarily comes through celebratory moments.

I realize that *paralyzing* and *traumatizing* are not words we generally use in the early learning field, and, yet, I feel these responses need to be acknowledged from an Indigenous perspective. For example, plastic fruit in the classroom seems benign. However, when we put a plastic apple in the infant room, what is the infant brain mapping? The brain sees the red, apple-shaped plastic form—what is it teaching? It is a representation. There's no apple taste, no apple smell, no connection to a living thing, no "apple" truth. What are we teaching the infant? Apples are always red and always plastic perfect? That's not reality. This is what I mean by paralyzing and traumatizing. To the infant, "What is this thing, if not an apple? And what is this apple that's not what I was shown?" Compare that to the mother who shares the rib bone (or chicken leg bone) with her teething infant—form, function, sharing. The bone contains substance, and what is that substance? Spirit. Natural, organic, real. Today, the teething infant is given a rubber teething ring. There's relationship in the bone with the spirit of the animal and the world around the infant, while the rubber teething ring has no organic connection to the world around the infant.

In thinking of spirit and real and found objects, what is universal truth? I realized that water is universal and should be explored with children from this rich perspective. This was the beginning of my early learning "project approach" research. We asked the learner questions such as, *What do you know about water?* and, after exploring water, *What did you learn about water*? and then, *What do you still wonder about water?*

As a child, I first learned that water is a medicine, a sacred gift from the Creator. Water has spirit and must be respected. Sixty-five percent of the human body is composed of water—over half of our bodies. About 70 percent of Mother Earth is covered with water. In early learning, water is primarily used to teach "sink" and "float," and washing hands and brushing teeth. As I explored Indigenous ways of knowing, I began to explore holism—ideas about mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of teaching children. This simple concept caused me to consider truth in how I teach children how to experience the world around them and their relationships with it.

Indigenous ways of knowing are transferred orally by way of storytelling, which is transmitting our truth. Storytelling in early learning practice is largely entertaining, fantasy based, poetic, and skews truthful teachings. When I consider "Santa Claus" as a story, it is shared with children who then believe in Santa. When they grow older and learn Santa does not physically exist, are children learning NOT to trust adult teachings? When I observed similar stories shared

with children about "Where Do Babies Come From?" the answer to this amazing wonder varied over many years from stork, sperm and egg, to mummy's tummy. I saw children's wondering-stage-of-life questions to be truth seeking, and I wanted to give children the truth that is connected to our bigger story of life. Now, parents may be inclined either to avoid the subject or provide biological facts that, while accurate, are clinical. As a RECE and an adult with truth and wisdom who knows where babies come from, I had to find a way to give the children our truth. I used the Indigenous ways of knowing that teach us about "new life"—babies are new life. In the core of Mother Earth, there is fire, water, and rock, and new life is created all the time when these three elements come together. When children still wondered, we looked at new life as the creation processes in all living things, including plants and animals. When the youth wondered about new life, knowledge of human conception, the foundational knowledge, was already in them. We had explored fire, water, and rock responsibilities and their relationship in creating new life; the youth could build on the new life creation as it applied to human beings: more truth. As an educator, I found peace and celebration in applying Indigenous knowledge to my practice.

Western research and Indigenous knowledge have finally intersected in the belief that true, sustainable learning is rooted in play. What we love and find meaningful, we will do over and over throughout our lives. Traditional knowledge keepers teach us about our inherent four gifts: kindness, truth, generosity, and belief. Children are born with this knowledge and explore the world to confirm these ways, which are known as the "Good Life" teachings. What I know about our truth is that it is universal and in everything that we see and experience.

I strongly believe in the Medicine Wheel Teaching: the four directions of mankind (red, yellow, black, and white), and that people are constructed in four quadrants (Mental, Physical, Emotional, and Spiritual) and must maintain them equally to live a balanced life. When these four directions teachings are applied within the "Good Life" teachings in relation to *HDLH*, this is the only way we can experience well-being, belonging, engagement, and expression.

Within *HDLH*, I considered the idea of meaningful, sacred elements that support human life, including the earth, fire, water, and wind, and how we can experience new ways of learning. And again, I discovered truth: the "relationship" of the *HDLH* framework applied within the Medicine Wheel teaching proved the "Good Life" teaching because we are always going back into ourselves.

When designing outdoor classrooms, my discovery was using how the elements (rock/earth, fire, water, and wind,) supported the growth of children. Children and educators designed gardens and explored ways of growing food for themselves and their families in the outdoor classrooms. Educators, cooks, families, and children journaled their learning experiences and celebrated learning as a community. Food harvested from the gardens was fed to children. Empathy for the earth, fire (sun), water, and wind was discovered along with knowledge of how these elements support life.

The teachings of our truths are endless, as I have discovered through *HDLH*, one small step towards reconciliation. At the conference where the *HDLH* document was announced with the promise of change, I was excited about the notion of permitting individuals like myself to explore their Indigenous ways of learning and sharing with others, respectfully and without judgment! I felt respected and honoured for the first time as a mother and grandmother and inspired to share my life-long learning journey with others.

Michelle Taylor Leonhardi

I am a proud Anishnaabe Kwe and member of Curve Lake First Nation, one of the first graduates of Binoojiinyag Kinomaadwin Native Early Childhood Education Course. I have been employed at Curve Lake First Nation Day Care Centre (called Oshkiigmong Early Learning Centre since 1993), where I am now the Coordinator (Figure 1).

When I started as Coordinator, changes had occurred, and a lot of growth had happened with me. I attended one of my first and, I believe, one of *the* first First Nations gatherings organized by the Ministry of Education after they assumed responsibility for Early Years. I was there with my new Manager of Education Louise Musgrave, our General Manager Brian Hamilton, and Dixie Shilling, the founder of the daycare centre. There was a discussion regarding the Native Early Childhood Education Conference, a conference that had not been held for a number of years. Our general manager stood up and said that in 2013 Curve Lake First Nation would host a Native Early Childhood Education Conference. It was my first year, and BAM, just like that, we were off and running, planning a conference. The staff of Curve Lake were awesome! We hired an event planner who oversaw major and minor details, and, together, we had one heck of a conference!

Around that time, there were several information sessions regarding a new Ministry document called *How Does Learning Happen?* After attending a few Ministry meetings, I decided to check out this new emergent curriculum that was all the talk. I did a little research and sent some of the staff to workshops. There wasn't a lot out there, or maybe I wasn't looking in the right places, but we had to start somewhere.

Four of our staff took part in a four-week session that Rama Day Care hosted. This is where we first heard of "Loose Parts," "Learning Stories," and "Documentation." We also started to invite people from outside of our context to think with us. We started to talk about our values… we discussed our Whys… we discussed our DREAMS!

We reminisced about our own childhoods, what was important to us back when we were children, where we played, and our favourite "toys." Most of us recalled the enjoyment of being outside more than the experience of playing with a toy. We took time to remember what it was like to be a child: to draw pictures; play with clay, buttons, and loose materials; and SING!

We began thinking about environments, our values, and what was important to us, our children, and our centre. The school-age room was the first of our environments to change. Once the staff started looking at the children's interests and adding more of what they were playing with, taking out what they weren't playing with, and adding new ideas, we noticed that the children's behaviour changed. There may always be challenges with behaviour, but now that we look at each child through this new lens, we view challenging behaviours differently.

The next year, we started from the beginning with discussions about our values. Staff started documenting and making environmental changes WITH the children. As we made these changes, we became aware that something was missing. Our rooms were beautiful, and the children and staff were thriving in them, but something wasn't there. We realized that our rooms didn't reflect that we were First Nation People in a First Nation Community. Thus, began our second year of emergent curriculum with a First Nations Lens! The values we had created in year one of our transformation had really started to come to life. Our Oshkiigmong Early Learning Centre Values are:

Spiritual: Jichaag

Wiingushk (Sweetgrass), Getsiinyag (Elders), Bboon (Winter), Naakshik (Evening)

Value Statement: We believe children and adults deserve rich learning experiences. Our environments invite engagement and provide opportunities so that we can explore and discover the joy of learning together.

Mental: Nendmowin

Semaa (Tobacco), Binoojiinhs (Infants), Mnookmi (Spring), Gizheb (Morning)

Value Statement: We appreciate the guidance and wisdom of our elders and promote the use of our language, cultural beliefs, and traditions. We believe that children and adults are unique and capable communicators and we value all forms of expression.

Physical: Wiiyow

Zhgob (Cedar), Shkiniigewin (Adolescent), Niibin (Summer), Naawkwe (Noon)

Value Statement: We believe children are holistic beings and believe in nurturing the mind, body, and soul. We believe that by honouring each other with loving, respectful relationships, we in turn also honour the Seven Grandfather Teachings.

Emotional: Enmanjiwang

Mshkwoodewashk (Sage), Ntaawgid (Adult), Dagwaagi (Autumn), Naakshik (Evening)

Value Statement: We believe that children are a gift from the Creator and celebrate the wonder of childhood. We value the contributions of our families, children, and community and cultivate a sense of belonging and cultural identity.

Together, the Oshkiigmong team started living our values. With the assistance and leadership from Aricka Fleguel, Curve Lake's Student Success Coordinator, we created another document entitled "Early Learning Success Plan," which incorporated our values, along with the Four Foundations of the *HDLH* document. Our cultural practices started to come to life in our environments. We brought in medicines and started introducing them to the children. We brought in the drum and songs. The children and staff ate this up as though they were starving for it! We started documenting... thinking... rethinking.... How can we show we are First Nation People?

Our values stated that we honoured the Seven Grandfather Teachings. We realized that this should show in our documentation. I asked the staff to create documentation, as they had been doing, but, at the end of their documentation, I asked them to add the Grandfather Teaching that had been evident in their work. I asked them to find "love" for one whole month. Document love: Where do you see love in the infant room? How do toddlers show love? Is love easily spotted in the preschool room? What do the children of the school-age program know about love as part of the Seven Grandfather Teachings? The pieces of documentation that came out of that first month were incredible!

The other Grandfather Teachings are: wisdom, respect, truth, humility, honesty, and courage. Each of these teachings must be used with the others. You cannot have wisdom without love, respect, truth, humility, honesty,

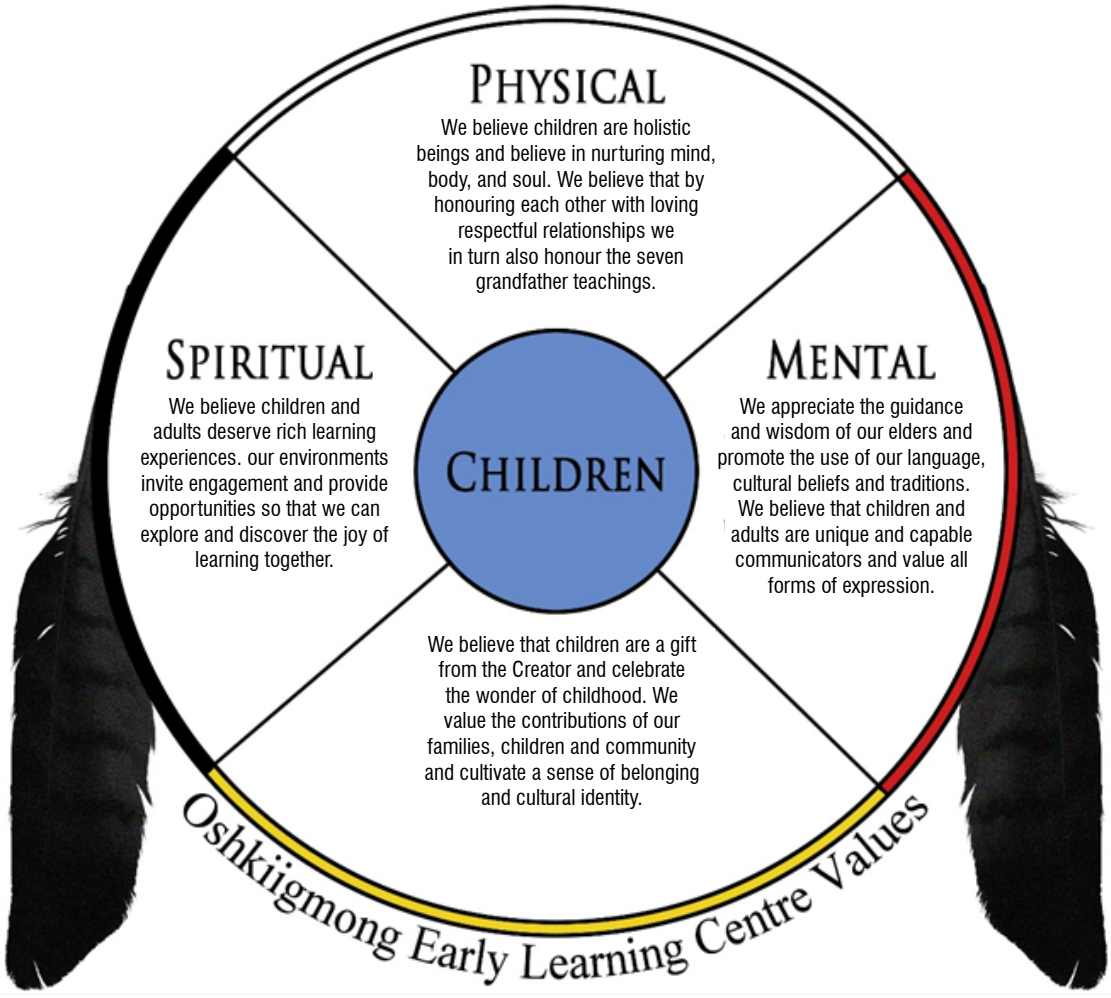

Figure 1: Oshkiigmong Early Learning Centre Values

or courage. We use these teachings in everyday play and communication. It is a part of our success plan that each child will have these teachings instilled in them when they leave our care. We had found what was missing. First Nation People are natural storytellers. This is evident in the documentation we create today. We even created a video that is available to watch on YouTube.[1]

The *HDLH* document had a huge impact on me when I opened it for the first time. Ironically, I went right to the image of the four foundations and noticed it was in the form of our medicine wheel. I think right then and there I realized this document was a positive one. We use both *HDLH* and our values when documenting. They go hand-in-hand.

Change is hard, it's scary. In my experience, we First Nation People tend to dislike any changes being put to us. This is a natural feeling. Not just for First Nation People but for everyone. I can't express enough that everyone learns differently, and everyone is exactly where they are supposed to be when they start their journey. Listen to our children, listen not only with your ears but with your heart... they have much to teach us. Miigwech

1 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sj0eqPWB5ow&t=9s

Monique Lavallee

I am an Anishinaabe Kwe from Neyaashiingamiing, and I currently reside in Stoney Creek, Ontario. I am the Executive Director of Niwasa Kendaaswin Teg, where I have worked for 15 years. I began my journey with Niwasa in 1997 as a Head Start parent and a member of the Board of Directors.

I am going to share with you the story of Niwasa Kendaaswin Teg and our journey to land-based learning. It started with a composting project. The project asked us to consider what early learning and education meant for Indigenous children, their families, and community.

I once heard an elder give a teaching on the importance of connection to the land and all of creation. She said there is an ancient code of life that is written on the land and that all of creation lives by this code. The only ones who have strayed from this code are human beings. We are living out of harmony with the rest of creation. To reconnect with the code, we need to reconnect with the land. In order for our children to walk with pride and resilience, carrying the gifts of their ancestors, we need to find ways to connect them with Mother Earth and allow her to imprint them with the code that is their birthright.

In 2009, educators at our Early Learning and Care Centre brought a composting bin into the classroom. The idea of having worms inside the classroom was exciting for the children. The educators shared how the bin worked and what our responsibilities to the worms were. They had conversations with the children regarding what kinds of things they could put into the composting bin— anything that grew outside could be put in and the worms would eat it. The educators then asked the children, "Can we put cake in the compost bin?" And the children said, "No." Then the educators asked, "Can we put apples in the bin? Where do apples come from?" The children answered, "The grocery store." The conversation continued, and it became apparent that the children in our urban programs were not making the connection between their food and the land where it was grown. This made the educators pause; the teams began having conversations about how they could begin to change their thinking about outdoor education and how they could introduce the children to land-based education. We did spend time outdoors each day, however, we were not focusing on our traditional teachings; those happened inside the classroom.

Joaquín Leguía Orezzoli, founder of the Association for Children and the Conservation of their Environment (ANIA) visited Niwasa to share the Children's Land methodology, which he had developed. We educators decided that this methodology would be a starting point for reconnecting the children with the land. The Children's Land methodology requires adults to gift a piece of land to children, who become the caretakers of that land. The children make all the decisions about what happens with the land, and the adults support the children's decision making. The only guidelines are that each child begins by selecting three plants for the land: one plant that will benefit themselves, one that will benefit the environment, and one that will benefit their community (Leguía Orezzoli, Personal Communication, April, 2009).

Niwasa gifted the children with their very own piece of land to plant in at their centre. The children and educators began discussions on what the gardens would look like and what would be planted there. To inspire ideas, the educators brought in books on plant species native to Ontario. This sparked the children's interest, and the children and educators became co-researchers, searching the Internet to find plants for their space: which plants needed full sun, which plants didn't like the sun, and so on. The children sketched out what their individual garden plots would look like. They gathered and shared ideas with one another. The educators assisted the children in incorporating their ideas into a master blueprint. The children hung the blueprint outside so they had the plan to refer to.

We decided to invite Grandmother Renee, an elder from Six Nations, to visit with the children. Storytelling is an important way to pass down ancestral knowledge, and Grandmother Renee is gifted at connecting with children. Grandma Renée brought puppets and shared the Mohawk creation story of Sky Woman and how, when she fell from the Sky World, she grabbed some soil and brought original seeds to Turtle Island. Grandma Renée taught the children the seed songs that were used by our ancestors to honour the spirit of the seeds. Renée spoke to the children about offering traditional tobacco, one of our sacred medicines, to the land, plants, and seeds. She then instructed the children on how to ask the seeds to grow and provide nourishment for them and their families.

The children were excited about the idea of planting in their own space, but there was some work to be done to ensure the gardens were ready. We needed to clear the area where the children would plant, line the area with heavy plastic to prevent weeds, and haul new soil for deposit along the planting line. This was going to be heavy work, so the educators invited parents and caregivers to a weekend event to prepare the garden beds for the children. We received a tremendous response from the families, and we had an unprecedented number of fathers participate. Families shared stories about their children constantly talking about planning their gardens at Niwasa, and they felt it was important to come out and help their children with their project. The entire garden area was prepped and ready for planting in one afternoon.

It was time for the children to plant their seeds: the garden area was prepped, all the research into what plants would be chosen was done, and the garden plots were organized. The children started their seeds indoors in clementine boxes. Each day the children arrived at the centre excited to see if there was progress with their seeds. One child, River, was observed each day spending quiet time with his seeds. River would take his clementine box to a table and crouch down very close to his plants, and it appeared that he was talking to his seeds. Just a few short days after River planted his seeds, they began to grow, while others were still waiting for their seeds to sprout. When River was asked, "Why do you think your plants grew so quickly?" he responded that he had created a song for his plants and sang to them every day. He sang "I love you, plants; I love you, plants; I love you, plants." Before River watered his plants, he prayed to the spirit of Grandmother Water; then, he put good thoughts, his love, and his wishes into the water for his plants. Traditional teachings on water were shared with the children, and they learned how to sing the Water Song. The children prayed to the water so that their seeds and plants would receive spiritual nourishment.

Educators observed River's relationship with his plants and how he acknowledged the spirit of each of his plants. When we think about relationships, we usually think about friends, family, and partners. However, the concept of relationship goes much deeper in the Indigenous culture. We speak of being in relationship with the land, water, animals, stars, ancestors—with all of creation, and we acknowledge that everything in creation has a living spirit.

River continued to talk and sing to his plants once they were transplanted into the garden. River's parents were so inspired by their child's excitement and commitment to learning how to grow his plants, that they began their own garden at home. River honoured the spirit of his plants each day. And in return, the plants provided spiritual and physical nourishment to River and his family.

When River was old enough to transition into our Head Start program, he began to ask the educators why there was no garden at "big" Niwasa. River began to share his experiences with the other children in the Head Start program, and about how he had planted at home with his mom and brothers. He told everyone who would listen about his garden at "little" Niwasa. Soon this sparked the interest of students and educators at Head Start. River was instrumental in bringing the garden project to the Head Start program.

River and all the children and families at Niwasa inspired the team at Niwasa to think differently about education. Most of us experienced an education that was embedded with colonial ideals that feed oppression. At some point, most of us were touched by residential schools, or we experienced intergenerational trauma that held the underlying belief that Indigenous ways of knowing, of being, and of learning were not valid. That for education to be valid, it must meet the Western norms of a classroom setting with the teacher as the authority. That children must line up, sit in circle, and speak only when spoken to; the thought that young children would have their own ideas, thoughts, and questions about the world was considered a behavioural issue. As an Indigenous organization, we had to challenge those colonial ideals, but how were we going to do that? We had certainly begun with our cultural framework, but the journey is never-ending. Many discussions ensued, and we always landed back at our Indigenous pedagogy—our traditional ways of knowing and being held the answers.

After we began a journey to nourish and grow our curriculum, we began to infuse the learning in the classroom with the learning that took place outdoors. Our curriculum is based on the seasonal and moon cycles; we sought out traditional knowledge keepers and elders to support our learning so that we could continue to pass that knowledge down to the children and add to our own sacred bundles. We began to spend more and more time outdoors; this took some planning, and we had to have our parents and caregivers on board.

When the Ministry of Education introduced *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years*, our team began to unpack the four foundations, and we immediately saw the intersections with our values of providing environments that create opportunity for children, families, and educators to learn and grow from their own positionalities. The document embraced sensibilities of well-being and a sense of belonging, which have been foundational ways of knowing and being in Indigenous communities for centuries. *HDLH* invites us to question the status quo and consider the diverse views on early learning environments and relationships that can positively contribute to meaningful learning environments for children and families. The children at Niwasa Kendaaswin Teg now spend three days a week in outdoor learning environments. Our children thrive in the outdoors. You can often hear their laughter before you spot them climbing in the trees; they love to dig in the dirt, find insects, and design and build insect homes. They jump in puddles to see how high they can make the water splash. At the same time, our children are learning their language, their traditions, their unique cultural practices, and how to live in harmony with the land and all of creation.

One of the most heartfelt lessons that we learned was how connecting to the land could build relationships and connections in the community. Our gardens were

overflowing with abundance; the children were using the fruits and vegetables in their lunch and for their snacks; they were taking baskets of produce home to share with their families. One day, a woman was passing by the Head Start program and stopped to look at the garden, and she began to pick and eat some green tomatoes that were growing outside of our fence. This began a conversation with the children about how our garden could help people in our community. The children placed a table in the garden with vegetables and fruits that they had picked and a sign that said "Please Take Some" so the children could share their love and abundance with the community. This exemplified our traditional values of taking care of our community, sharing what we have with others, and the value of reciprocity.

Our journey at Niwasa Kendaaswin Teg is not only about connecting children to the land and all of creation but also about continuing to shed the layers of systemic oppression for Indigenous learners, while nurturing and harvesting our traditional ways for our children and the future generations. The Creator gave us the gift of love in our heart, the gift of spirit that cannot be harnessed, and the ancestral memories that live in our blood. Our belief that children are gifts from the Creator and that they carry the wisdom and knowledge of our ancestors is the catalyst for the continued critical reflection of our practice.

Karyn Callaghan

I am an educator of European descent—a white settler—whose family has lived in Canada for over a century. I was raised in Hamilton, Ontario, not far from the Six Nations and New Credit reserves. In 2009, when I was 55 years of age, I was seconded from the college where I had been teaching in the ECE program for 25 years to the Ontario campus of Charles Sturt University, an Australian university. It was there that I first heard a gathering open with an acknowledgement of the traditional custodians and residents of the land upon which we were living and working. I felt ashamed that I had never heard such an acknowledgement before and that this omission had not occurred to me. Nothing in my education had helped me see that I was participating in colonialism. I have been involved in efforts to address injustice throughout my adult life. But this one had not come into my limited field of vision. I had to come to terms with my ignorance and complicity. I have had the good fortune to encounter patient, generous teachers, three of whom have contributed to this article. I have much to learn. I have much to unlearn.

My practice in the first half of my career, working with young children and teaching ECE students, conformed to what can be described as Eurocentric thought, with a strong foundation in psychology and developmentalism, both of which served to chop children into pieces of discrete skills and domains, while at the same time talking about the whole child. By the mid-1990s, I was increasingly dissatisfied with the content of our college courses and was questioning much of the dominant discourse. The combination of becoming aware of the work of the educators and children in Reggio Emilia and, more recently, of Indigenous ways of knowing, has caused me to explore different ways of thinking.

Our profession is ostensibly built on relationship. However, one of the first skills taught to students in most ECE programs is to be objective observers—that is, to be detached, deny emotion, describe children's "behaviour" in clinical language, and see them as "other." ECE students are taught that written observations are to be free of language that suggests the observer might know what the expression of a human emotion looks like, wonder what the child is thinking, or be surprised or curious or delighted or puzzled. I have come to see this constraint as a kind of violence that is done to both educators and children. Children are not informed of what the observer has noticed or what s/he has interpreted from this data. In my view, this practice pulls educators away from children instead of bringing them into the kind of relationship that one can have with another human being; a relationship that is curious, respectful, and aware of and questioning assumptions. Assumptions would include the idea that we can come to know a child through child development theories and that children who don't fit the norms must be identified and fixed.

The stories Faith, Michelle, and Monique have provided throw into relief the impoverished ways we tend to think about relationship. They describe deep connection to the universe, to the land, the water, the trees—a view of relationship that is far richer than a list of social skills. In addition, these authors' descriptions of children's rich engagement with the outdoors highlighted for me that we see forest schools as an *alternative*, that outdoor play is more typically viewed as another compartment, another box to fill in on a planning chart, often focusing on activities to develop gross motor skills. But the spirit and curiosity of children and educators could be fed, and our thinking could be enriched, by focusing on these broader relationships and how they are intertwined with all aspects of children's lives and essential for the survival of the planet. Perhaps we all need "to find ways to connect ... with Mother Earth and allow her to imprint [us] with the code that is [our] birthright," as Monique has advised.

Ontario now has *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years,* a document that has opened the door for critical reflection on views and practices. Although the 44-page developmental continuum of the previous provincial document, *Early Learning for Every*

Child Today, is no longer part of the current pedagogy, it still holds sway in many college programs and early learning settings, and clinical observations are still considered foundational. Lists of developmental norms include skills that are valued in the mainstream society; those are the skills we can observe. Typically, these norms and practices are not critiqued, nor are they contextualized within an explicitly stated view of the child. They can marginalize children whose ways of engaging with the world do not conform to the list.

Criteria used to signal the need for remedial early intervention for young children have been critiqued for the assumption that there is a single trajectory of development; in fact, the trajectory is not consistent across all families and cultures (Van Widenfelt, B. M., Treffers, P. D., De Beurs, E., Siebelink, B. M., & Koudijs, E., 2005). Indigenous children are deemed to be at risk at a higher rate than those whose culture more closely fits the norms, a situation that may result in intervention. We must acknowledge that institutional intervention in the development of Indigenous children often reproduces colonial practices that are harmful to children's cultural identities (Ball, 2008; Chapman, 2012). Findlay, Kohen, and Miller (2014) provide one of the first studies documenting the attainment of developmental milestones for the early skills of Métis, Inuit, and off-reserve First Nations children in Canada as assessed using population-based data. The findings suggest that there may be differences in the timing of milestone achievement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children, highlighting the importance of establishing culturally specific norms and standards rather than relying on those derived from general populations:

> Other research has also suggested that Aboriginal children achieve gross motor skills earlier and language skills later than non-Aboriginal children. Aboriginal children are often raised in a bilingual environment, which may be associated with a lag in the development of some language skills, albeit with eventual mastery of both languages.
>
> Moreover, differences in milestone attainment compared with non-Aboriginal populations may not necessarily indicate a risk, especially in the case where culture-specific norms and practices may be influential. However, milestones attained outside of the age window achieved by the majority of children within the same culture group may be more likely to be an indicator of risk. Failure to consider population-specific age-ranges can lead to over- or under-identification of children at risk for developmental delays. (p. 244)

HDLH articulates the view of the child—every child—as competent, capable of complex thinking, curious, and rich in potential. By contrast, the implicit view of the child in approaches that foreground developmental norms reflects a cookie-cutter mentality. Monique, Michelle, and Faith have described other possibilities within the educational contexts we are all responsible to co-construct, based on *HDLH.* Underwood, Ineese-Nash, and Hache (2017) summarize this sensibility clearly: "Indigenous cultural understanding of differences in child development are embedded in the value of children as gifts from the Creator. Differences in children are part of the gifts that they hold and that make them gifts to their community" (p. 1).

Respect for children and the use of story as a means of teaching and learning are strong features of both Indigenous ways of knowing and the work in Reggio Emilia. When I read the stories of Faith, Michelle, and Monique, I am certain that moving in the direction of education based on relationship and the view of the child, educator, and family as capable and competent is right. Similarly, the move toward embracing multiple ways of learning and knowing is necessary. This does not mean that child development theories and norms should be discarded, but rather that they should be contextualized and critiqued and should be brought into dialogue with other ways of thinking, so tensions can be recognized and explored. The stories shared by my co-authors offer a kind of truth that invites us in and that ignites empathy. I am working to better understand the relationship between transmission of culture through stories that are passed on generation to generation and knowledges that are co-constructed through hearing stories of others' experiences and meaning-making.

As educators, how does *our* learning happen? What contributes to certainty, to our knowledge becoming petrified? I recognize that there are limits to my ability to comprehend Indigenous knowledges and ways but feel strongly that they must be acknowledged and welcomed in the preparation of early childhood educators, whether the students are Indigenous or not. Indigenous knowledges should not be presented as a binary opposite or as exotic but as adding complexity, as contributing to the reduction of certainty and arrogance and as acknowledgement of the limitations of Eurocentric theory. They offer "a fresh vantage point from which to analyze Eurocentric education and its pedagogies" and bring "(Indigenous knowledges) into the mainstream to establish a body of knowledge that can be drawn on for the common good" (Battiste, 2002, pp. 5-6).

I am aware that I must continue to unsettle myself, especially when I recognize that I am getting comfortable with my understandings and assumptions. The first, and

perhaps most important, lesson I continue to learn deeply is to listen— to listen with humility, empathy, and respect to children, Indigenous educators, and elders. To listen also to water, to wind, to trees, to honour the relationships we need with the other-than-human world, the relationships that feed our spirit. As Battiste (2002) states:

> Recognizing the interpretative monopoly that Eurocentric thought reserves for itself is the key to understanding the new transdisciplinary quest to balance European and Indigenous ways of knowing. This academic effort seeks to identify relations between the two generalized perspectives of Eurocentric modernism (and postmodernism), and Indigenous knowledge (and postcolonialism). The contradictions, gaps, and inconsistencies between the two knowledge systems suggest that the next step needed in the quest is a deeper understanding of Indigenous knowledge. (p. 10)

We have a responsibility to decolonize ourselves, to recognize the knowledge that comes not only from theory in textbooks, but also from introspection and reflection, meditation, stories and songs, sharing circles and ceremonies, and enjoyment. While a lengthy list of references at the end of an article or chapter may signal that the perspective offered is worthy of serious consideration, we can consider that this, too, may be indicative of the elevation of a Western approach to knowledge. There are other ways to co-construct knowledge; listening to the stories and lived experiences of elders is one way for us to broaden our scope and strengthen our empathy. In this article, we are not merely writing *about* Indigenous knowledges; we are offering voices informed by and informing of Indigenous knowledges, so, together, we can learn how to listen differently, to recognize how we are all influenced by colonialism and begin to broaden our scope. In Ontario, we now have a pedagogy for early years that has openness and strives not to judge other ways of knowing and being as less or diminish them implicitly through exclusion. This article brings four distinct voices together, not to establish one unified perspective but rather to underline that a multiplicity of perspectives helps us to recognize our assumptions and blind spots. It invites the participation and dialogue that are essential to democracy. The stories give life to the values that are foundational to *HDLH:* belonging, well-being, engagement, and expression of children and educators. The pedagogical challenge of those engaged in early childhood education is not just reducing the distance between Eurocentric thinking and Indigenous ways of knowing but "engaging decolonized minds and hearts" (Battiste, 2002, p. 22). We must learn how to listen, in Faith's words, "respectfully and without judgement," in Michelle's words, "not only with your ears but with your heart," and to act in ways that contribute to reconciliation.

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Gizhaawaso[1]: Culture as a Protective Factor for Indigenous Children with Disabilities

Nicole Ineese-Nash

Abstract

This article examines Indigenous approaches to health and treatment in order to critique the current early intervention system for children with disabilities. Seeing disability as a social construct, this article suggests that disability as defined within the early intervention system is based on Eurocentric ideals that pathologize Indigenous ways of being. From this conceptualization, this article will illustrate the gaps within the current early childhood support service systems and offer suggestions for developing culturally appropriate support services for Indigenous children with disabilities.

Key Words

Indigenous disability, Indigenous early childhood, early intervention, cultural healing

Author Biography

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1 *Gizhaawaso* is an Ojibwe word meaning "protects the young"

Gizhaawaso[1]: Culture as a Protective Factor for Indigenous Children with Disabilities

"All things are connected; whatever befalls the earth, befalls the children of the earth."

Chief Seattle (Retrieved from Best Start Resource Centre, 2010, p. 4).

Indigenous children with disabilities represent a unique group among Canada's childhood population (I use the term *Indigenous* here to refer to Canada's first peoples, inclusive of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities). Indigenous children are often regarded as *at risk* within educational and health settings due to perceived differences of knowing and being (Ball, 2012). Indigenous children are more likely to suffer from poor health outcomes (Greenwood & de Leeuw, 2012), experience social marginalization (Ball, 2004), and be identified as having a disability (Durst, 2006). When Indigenous children interact with Canadian social institutions, they must navigate multiple contexts that conflict with their traditional worldview (Ball, 2012). Mainstream social institutions within Canadian society are premised on Eurocentric ideologies that reinforce a colonial agenda of assimilation for Indigenous peoples (Battiste & Barman, 1995). These institutional practices can have significant impact on the health and wellbeing of Indigenous communities, resulting in the negative social conditions described above (Czyzewski, 2011). Indigenous families must therefore maintain their cultural ways of life within a system that actively attempts to erase Indigenous traditions and practices (Tuck & Yang, 2012). These continuous conflicts facilitate the present and ongoing colonization of Indigenous peoples, which can contribute to ill health and disablement (Czyzewski, 2011).

The purpose of this article is to illustrate the ways in which Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island (North America) have promoted the health and well-being of their children through cultural practices and traditions and mitigated the social disablement associated with developmental difference. This will be achieved through the examination of Indigenous frameworks of health, disability, and treatment methods as they pertain to Indigenous children with disabilities and gifts. From this conceptualization, this article will illustrate the gaps within the current early childhood support services system and offer suggestions for developing culturally appropriate support services for Indigenous children with disabilities.

Conceptual Frameworks

Indigenous Well-being through the Medicine Wheel

Indigenous cultures vary in their conceptualization of health and wellness, though many believe that well-being is achieved through a balance of the four realms of the medicine wheel (Lavallee & Poole, 2010). The medicine wheel is a cultural framework for understanding life, well-being, and traditional teachings (Battiste, 2011). It is a sacred circle comprised of four quadrants that are intrinsically related (Lavallee, 2007). These quadrants represent the four aspects of well-being: the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual realms (Battiste & Barman, 1995). The four directions are also represented in the medicine wheel by distinct colours, and some communities have additional features to represent Father Sky, Mother Earth, and the self (Best Start Resource Centre, 2010). The life cycle can also be understood through the medicine wheel, as the four quadrants represent four distinct stages in life: childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and elderhood (Battiste & Barman, 1995). The circle itself is representative of the belief in the interconnectedness of all things (Lavallee, 2007).

Ill health within the framework of the medicine wheel is understood as an imbalance in one of the four realms of well-being (Lavallee & Poole, 2010). Further, it is believed that what impacts one aspect of an individual will inevitably affect the other aspects as well (First Nations Information Governance Centre [FNIGC], 2012). Spiritual health is particularly important to overall health and healing, as illness is thought to begin in the spiritual realm (Lavallee & Poole, 2010). Health from an Indigenous perspective is also understood within the context of individuals' relationships with the people and world around them (Ross, 2014). In this way, individual health is entwined with overall community wellness, and individual healing occurs when harmony is restored to the relational networks within the community (King, Smith, & Gracey, 2009).

1 *Gizhaawaso* is an Ojibwe word meaning "protects the young"

Unique Gifts: Indigenous Concepts of Disability

Disability is not a concept that is often discussed from an Indigenous perspective, largely because Indigenous communities do not see disability as it is defined in the Western sense (Lovern & Locust, 2013). Most Indigenous languages have no word for disability (Durst, 2006), perhaps due to the structure of these languages. Indigenous languages tend to be verb-focused and often describe people by what they do or their role within the community (Alberta Education, 2005). Indigenous languages reflect Indigenous worldviews (Battiste, 2011), which suggests that Indigenous peoples associate individuals with what they can do, rather than with what they cannot. Indigenous peoples believe in the value of every member of their community and regard disabilities as part of what makes an individual unique (Durst, 2006). In this context, disabilities are seen as gifts from the Creator, bestowed on an individual for a reason (Alberta Education, 2005).

Traditionally, Indigenous peoples did not consider certain individuals as disabled, instead there was an understanding of the unique gifts that person possessed which offered teachings to the community (Durst, 2006). Indigenous people with disabilities have their own understandings of their differences based on their cultural ways of knowing and their connection to the spirit world (Lovern & Locust, 2013). These gifts would have been valued in traditional community structures. Some individuals with disabilities held prestigious roles within the community, such as lodge keepers and medicine people, and facilitated cultural ceremonies (Lovern & Locust, 2013). Indigenous people with disabilities therefore had a position within their community and were valued for the strength they brought to the community overall. The Western perspective often conceives of disability as an individual's inability to support themselves or contribute to society (Durst, 2006). However, Indigenous communities were structured in ways that facilitated support for all individuals to participate within the group (Durst, 2006), mitigating the social disablement associated with particular differences.

Indigenous Healing

Indigenous communities vary in their traditional medicines and protocols, though most agree that healing occurs over time through relational processes that foster balance and harmony (Ross, 2014). For healing to occur, all aspects of the medicine wheel must be restored to balance (Robbins & Dewar, 2011). This means taking into account not only the particular condition but also how it impacts the whole person and community (Lavallee, 2007). For example, a child's emotional health may be disrupted at the onset of a physical impairment. Rather than treating the physical needs of the child in isolation, Indigenous models of care seek to foster a positive self-identity and emotional response alongside physical interventions (Lavallee & Poole, 2010). Additionally, health conditions may continue to have negative impacts on an individual until they accept and understand the relationship between their condition and the natural law of universe (Lee, 1996). Therefore, healing for Indigenous peoples also entails cultural learning and connection to spiritual beliefs (Ross, 2014).

Traditionally, treatment occurred through spiritual ceremonies, facilitated by a healer or medicine person that used sacred medicines and cultural practices to promote community well-being (Robbins & Dewar, 2011). As ill health is ultimately tied to the spiritual realm (Lavallee & Poole, 2010), Indigenous communities may have perceived disability as a disconnection from spirit, rather than an impairment residing in a specific developmental domain. This is illustrated in the ways in which some communities treated certain conditions. For instance, a child born with a congenital anomaly affecting their limbs may have had their participation in community life supported by their family (Lovern & Locust, 2013), whereas someone with addiction issues may have been exiled (Ross, 2014). This has to do with Indigenous beliefs in natural law—naturally occurring differences are regarded as intended by the Creator (Lovern & Locust, 2013). Addiction, on the other hand, is often seen as self-inflicted and therefore disabling to the spirit (Rowan, et al., 2014).

Colonialism as a Social Determinant of Health

Colonialism in Canada continues to impede Indigenous wellness through the disruption of spiritual relationships to land, histories, and traditions (Czyzewski, 2011). Indigenous children are born into a settler-colonial legacy that results in low socioeconomic status, prevalent disease and infection, and increased interactions with child welfare and justice systems, among other detrimental outcomes (Greenwood & de Leeuw, 2012). Colonialism can thus be understood as a social determinant of health that contributes to ill health and disablement for Indigenous peoples in Canada (Mitrou et al., 2014). The social determinants model offers a holistic perspective of health that accounts for social impacts on individual and community well-being (Marmot et al., 2008). The purpose of the social determinants of health model is to understand the external factors that negatively impact well-being in order to mitigate them (Marmot et al., 2008). These factors are prevalent for marginalized groups, creating health

disparities that particularly impact individuals living in poverty (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010).

Indigenous status has been regarded as a social determinant of heath for some time (Raphael, 2009), yet it is only relatively recently that colonialism has been seen as a cause of health inequality (Czyzewski, 2011). In seeing colonialism as a social determinant of health, it exposes not only the causes of poor health for Indigenous peoples, but also the underlying "causes of the causes" (Greenwood & de Leeuw, 2012, p. 381). The health of Indigenous children in Canada is hampered by the ongoing mechanisms of colonization that permeate the interrelated systems within a child's life (Czyzewski, 2011; Greenwood & de Leeuw, 2012). On a societal level, colonization has led to the development of laws and policies that discriminate against Indigenous children and institutionalize them at a disproportionate rate (Blackstock & Trocmé, 2005; Greenwood & de Leeuw, 2012). On an individual level, Indigenous children are impacted by their immediate environment, which can be hazardous in communities without infrastructure that supports optimal health (Greenwood & de Leeuw, 2012).

Early Intervention for Indigenous Children with Disabilities

Support for Indigenous children with disabilities in Canada occurs predominantly through the early intervention system (Underwood, 2012), a patchwork of targeted programs and services intended to mitigate potential risks that may position a child at a disadvantage (Guralnick, 2011). These programs tend to be organized as distinct treatment categories that offer treatments specific to developmental domains (Underwood, 2012). Within these programs, children are assessed and classified using normative trajectories of development and behaviour (Guralnick, 2011). Disability is thus identified when a child is unable to accomplish a prescribed task or exhibits behaviours that are seen as problematic (Durst, 2006). Indigenous children are twice as likely to be identified as having a disability than their non-Indigenous counterparts (Durst, 2006); identification is predominantly with behavioural and learning disabilities (Wright et al., 2005). This is a projection of a cultural ideal on children who are expected to behave and develop in particular ways rather than authentic manifestations of disability (Ball, 2007).

The early intervention approach is inconsistent not only with Indigenous treatment methods but also with Indigenous perspectives of child development. Indigenous peoples believe that every child is unique and will develop at their own pace (Ball, 2007), which may result in less intervention in the early years. Assessments and interventions can pathologize Indigenous children who have challenges within mainstream educational settings due to their differing mechanisms for learning (Ball, 2012). These problematic assessments, however, are essential for accessing the service system, as clinical and targeted interventions are largely dependent on individual diagnoses (Underwood, 2012).

Indigenous children are often additionally participating in cultural programs within their schools and communities; however, these are not generally considered sites of disability support. The model of intervening early in an Indigenous child's life with clinically based services may hinder children from being able to learn in cultural ways by limiting their access to cultural programs (Ineese-Nash, Bomberry, Underwood, & Hache, 2018). Providing support to young children with developmental delays and differences is an important aspect of early years programming, however, the way in which it is offered and the ideology behind those support services have implications for Indigenous children and families (Ball, 2007; Gerlach, 2008).

Intervention as Colonial Violence

In order to better support Indigenous children with significant support needs, it would be useful to consider how the current service system can perpetuate colonial violence through assimilative practices. Early intervention is largely regarded as essential for promoting positive outcomes for children with disabilities (Brown & Guralnick; Bruder, 2010; Guralnick, 2011); however, this may not be the case for Indigenous children. Benevolent institutions have historically intervened in the lives of Indigenous children and families at an alarming rate with devastating and long-lasting consequences. It is well documented that the residential school system (Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2014), Sixties Scoop (McKenzie, Varcoe, Brown, and Day, 2016), and the present-day apprehensions of Indigenous children through the child welfare system (Blackstock, Trocmé, & Bennett, 2004) continue to have significant impacts on the overall health and well-being of Indigenous children and their families.

In the above examples, Indigenous children were regarded as deficient, and interventions were established in order to assimilate them within settler-Canadian society (McKenzie et al., 2016). These interventions removed Indigenous children from their families and their communities with the intention of erasing their cultural understanding of the world and replacing it with Eurocentric ideologies (Wolfe, 2006).

Within the current intervention system, children are removed from their cultural context and placed in settings

that foster a particular type of behaviour or outcome (Ball, 2007). This can be challenging for Indigenous children who exhibit behaviours or skills in ways that differ from other children (Ball & Bernhardt, 2008). Intervening in the development of Indigenous children can therefore constitute colonial violence, if the strategies employed are not culturally appropriate or devalue Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

For the most part, early intervention programs perpetuate Eurocentric ideals through the promotion of particular knowledge systems, languages, and standards of behaviour (Ball 2004; Ball & Bernhardt, 2008). Interventions are predominantly offered to children in segregated spaces, removed from their relational contexts (Ball, 2007). In Canada, these services are largely offered in English, regardless of the preferred language of the child or family (Underwood, 2012). In speech and language programs, little attention is paid to the dialectic differences that impact children's performance in the English language, and very few supports are available for children to thrive in their Indigenous languages (Ball & Bernhardt, 2008). Behaviour supports can be difficult for Indigenous children, as particular behavioural outcomes, such as eye contact, may be discouraged within cultural spaces (Gerlach, 2008). The main premise of mainstream early intervention is to produce an archetype of the normative Eurocentric ideal child, which is in conflict with Indigenous values of difference (Ineese-Nash et al., 2018). The imposing of cultural ideals inherent in the intervention system continues to replicate assimilistic strategies of control over Indigenous children, which are harmful to the formation of cultural identity and Indigenous self-determination (Greenwood & de Leeuw, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Culture as a Protective Factor

Fostering positive child development from an Indigenous perspective is based largely on the teaching and practice of culture (Gerlach, 2008). This is especially true for Indigenous communities in Canada that have had their traditional parenting practices disrupted due to colonization (Muir & Bohr, 2014). Indigenous families support young children in developing a positive self-identity that is holistic and relational (Gerlach, 2008) and could mitigate the social impacts related to having a disability or difference. From a very young age, Indigenous children learn who they are, where they come from, and where they fit within the group (Best Start Resource Centre, 2010). Some believe this gives children a very strong sense of self that enables them to adapt well to adverse situations (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008). Promoting cultural identity could therefore serve to improve outcomes for Indigenous children with disabilities by fostering cultural resilience (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008) and reducing the stigma associated with difference from a Western perspective.

Implications for Practice

The current early intervention system fails to integrate Indigenous perspectives of child development and methods of treatment and therefore can be harmful to children's cultural identities (Gerlach, 2008). For this reason, many Indigenous families resist mainstream early interventions, choosing instead to support their children in other ways (Durst, 2006). Some Indigenous families, however, seek interventions for their children so that they will be able to participate in the dominant society (Durst, 2006). As Indigenous peoples have continued to be marginalized in Canada (Ball, 2004), there is a need to bridge this gap and offer children and families supports that are effective as well as culturally appropriate so that Indigenous families will not be forced to make these choices.

Early Intervention Services Need to be Culturally Safe

The dominant ideology of early intervention conflicts with Indigenous conceptualizations of child development, however, that does not mean that intervention is always harmful (Gerlach, 2008). Intervention services can be offered with cultural diversity in mind and with the flexibility to adapt to the particular needs of the child and community (Ball, 2004). That said, many social institutions, such as educational and clinical settings, continue to represent colonial practices for Indigenous communities, which makes these spaces potentially triggering (Durst, 2006). Offering intervention services in places that allow Indigenous communities to feel welcome and safe, such as within Indigenous service agencies, allows for more effective relationships between service providers and families. In this way, early intervention professionals can partner with Indigenous health providers and educators to adapt practices to suit the culture of the child and family. Indigenous peoples should also be supported in the development of their own models for early intervention through these relationships.

Early Intervention Services Need to Account for the Whole Child

The early intervention system is currently structured to offer supports for children in specific developmental domains (Underwood, 2012). This can be problematic for those who have complex support needs, as well as for those who believe in a holistic model of treatment (Gerlach,

2008). Indigenous peoples believe in supporting children in each realm of their being simultaneously, which does not occur in most targeted support programs (Ball, 2007). The spiritual realm is of particular importance for Indigenous families and is largely absent from mainstream services (Best Start Resource Centre, 2010). Supporting a child in understanding their disability in the context of their connection to the spiritual world can help foster a strong sense of identity on the basis of both culture and difference (Ineese-Nash et al., 2018). Understanding the emotional impact of diagnosis can also be helpful in supporting a child and family. This practice of multi-domain care would not only benefit Indigenous children, but *all* children as they can begin to see their differences as gifts and learn strategies to use them in conjunction with their other abilities.

Early Intervention Services Need to be Accessible

The pathologization of children in the early years affects Indigenous and racialized peoples at a disproportionate rate (Durst, 2006). Poverty and other social conditions can compound the experience of disability and hinder access to formalized supports (Durst, 2006). The reliance on diagnosis for early intervention programs creates barriers to access, especially for those who have experienced discrimination and colonial harm (Czyzewski, 2011). Some Indigenous families resist formalized programs and services because of their experiences with the child protection system (Durst, 2006). Indigenous families are therefore less likely to seek supports for fear that their children may be taken from them (Blackstock & Trocmé, 2005). In many other Indigenous communities, such as First Nation communities in northern Canada, these supports are not available (Durst, 2006).

Early intervention services need to be structured to offer supports to Indigenous children and families in ways that support trustful relationships with parents and communities. This might entail developing service partnerships in community-based programs rather than clinical settings, so that all families can access supports regardless of diagnosis or designation.

Conclusion

Indigenous children have innate strengths through their cultural ways of knowing and being (Best Start Resource Centre, 2010). Within the current educational and disability service system, however, these strengths are largely disregarded. Indigenous culture has been integrated within the context of educational (Aboriginal Head Start Initiative, 1998), health (Browne et al., 2012) and addiction programs (Rowan et al., 2014) but has yet to be considered within the context of disability support. Due to the Eurocentric ideologies of the early intervention system, services engage in practices that are culturally unsafe for Indigenous children with disabilities. There is thus a need to decolonize these programs and supports in order to meet the needs of all children who access them.

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Dramatic Play in Northern Aboriginal Head Start Classrooms: Supporting Indigenous Children's Learning of their Culture and Language

Shelley Stagg Peterson, Tina Gardner, Eugema Ings, Kayla Vecchio

Abstract

Three Aboriginal Head Start educators and a university professor report on a collaborative inquiry that examined video recordings of children's dramatic play with Indigenous cultural materials to learn how children interacted with materials and see the role of the Ojibway language in their play. In their play, children imitated Indigenous cultural practices carried out in the home, at sacred ceremonies, and on the land. The children showed an understanding of Ojibway words but did not speak them in their dramatic play. We propose suggestions for non-Indigenous educators who wish to introduce children to Indigenous cultural practices and languages or to incorporate the cultural practices of children's families into classroom dramatic play.

Key Words

Aboriginal Head Start (AHS), Indigenous cultural practices, teaching Ojibway language and culture, play-based learning, pedagogical documentation

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Dramatic Play in Northern Aboriginal Head Start Classrooms: Supporting Indigenous Children's Learning of their Culture and Language

Eugema, Kayla and Tina: It was a mild winter morning. During outdoor time, the children in our northern Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) program asked about snow in the trees. We educators saw this as an opportunity to take the children for a walk into the bush area in the backyard of our AHS to explore nature and teach them about different trees, especially the cedar trees because cedar has great significance as a sacred medicine in our Indigenous culture. During the nature walk we picked cedar branches to bring back into the classroom. As part of our Indigenous traditions when picking medicines, we left an offering of tobacco to the Creator Mother Earth. Back in the classroom, we boiled the cedar in a pot of water so the children could taste cedar tea. We talked about cedar being one of the four medicines used in our daily smudge/cleanse. Later, during playtime in Kayla's class, two girls were playing in the home centre. They picked items from the floor as if they were cedar foliage and placed them in a jug. While one of the girls pretended to drink from the jug, the AHS educator asked: "Is that cedar tea?"

Introduction

Supporting Indigenous children's learning of Indigenous language, cultural practices, and teachings is an important part of the curriculum in AHS classrooms (Ontario Aboriginal Head Start Association, 2017). Eugema, Kayla and Tina, the three AHS educators co-authoring this paper, extend children's Indigenous cultural learning by making connections to the Indigenous culture when participating in the children's play in their Aboriginal Head Start classrooms in northern Ontario.

In this article, we report on an inquiry project where the three educators used video recording to document children's cultural learning during dramatic play with Indigenous cultural materials and then discussed the children's cultural learning with each other and with other Indigenous educators. We looked at ways that the children, aged 2–5 years, interacted with Indigenous cultural materials and used the Ojibway language in their dramatic play.

We begin by describing the goals and components of AHS in Ontario and the context in which AHS has been initiated, then introduce the theoretical underpinnings of our inquiry. We introduce ourselves and our inquiry practices (we use this term for educators' investigation into new practices rather than for children's inquiry, as the Ontario Ministry of Education's (2014) documents suggest). We present our findings through telling stories from the three educators' AHS classrooms. We conclude with a summary of what we have learned and explain how the findings will inform future practice. We propose suggestions for ways that non-Indigenous educators might integrate dramatic play related to Indigenous cultural teachings and the cultural practices of the families of children in their early years settings.

Aboriginal Head Start in Ontario

Ontario's AHS Initiative was launched in 1995. The goal was to support Indigenous parents and children who live in urban centres and large northern communities in building a better future for themselves (Government of Canada, 2010). AHS pre-school programs are intended to enhance Indigenous children's academic success and cultural awareness and aid their development of a positive sense of identity and belonging (Barrieau & Ireland, 2003; Ontario Aboriginal Head Start Association, 2017). Throughout

Smudging to Start the Day

At our AHS, we start the morning with a smudge/cleanse to show that we are thankful that we are here for a brand-new day. The smudge consists of four sacred medicines: sage, cedar, tobacco, and sweet grass that are grown in our AHS yard. The medicines are combined and placed in a smudge bowl or a large clam shell and lit with matches. During this smudging ceremony, we say Ojibway words such as *shkoday* (fire), *miigwan* (feather), and *meegwetch* (thank you). Girls cannot sit on the ground, so they sit on their knees. Boys can sit crossed-legged. During a smudge ceremony, a woman who is menstruating (moon-time) does not use, carry, or touch any of the four medicines. We begin to brush the smoke unto our bodies to cleanse our eyes, so that we will see good things; our ears, to hear good things; our mouths, to say good things; our hands, for gentle touches; and our hearts. During the smudging ceremony, the smudge bowl is passed clockwise within a circle to those who would like to participate.

the history of AHS, educators, parents and other family and community members have designed curriculum and administered the programs together (Ngyuen, 2011).

Of the six components of AHS, the revival and retention of Indigenous cultures and languages is primary. Children in AHS programs participate in activities that feature their communities' languages, values, beliefs, and cultural practices, which are integrated into all aspects of daily programming, and administration.

Parental involvement is a very important component of AHS. Parents volunteer to tell stories, read to children, and do crafts and baking with them. Alongside their children, they learn their Indigenous communities' languages and engage in Indigenous cultural activities.

A third component is education and school readiness, as the AHS program is intended to prepare children for a smooth transition into elementary school and provide a foundation for children to enjoy life-long learning. Health promotion is a fourth component, involving partnerships with various local health agencies and providers (dentists, speech therapists, physiotherapists, etc.), as well as engaging children in indoor and outdoor play to promote a healthy and active lifestyle. A fifth component, nutrition, is addressed by introducing children to healthy foods, including those of the children's Indigenous cultures. A sixth component, social support, involves supporting parents' awareness and use of resources and services within the community (Ontario Aboriginal Head Start Association, 2017).

In this article, we focus on the first component, supporting Indigenous children's learning of their communities' languages and culture. We believe that this component is especially important in countering the assimilationist and genocidal policies and practices of governments (Battiste, 2008; McCarty & Nicholas, 2014; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). From 1880 to the latter part of the twentieth century, staff in federally sponsored and church-administered residential schools prohibited Indigenous children's use of their own languages and cultural practices, enforcing the prohibition with harsh punishment (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Because children were taken from their families and forced to attend residential schools, they did not experience intergenerational transmission of important cultural teachings. Overcoming the impact of residential schools on individuals, their families, and communities requires programs such as the AHS Initiative. These programs support future generations of Indigenous children as they become knowledgeable about and take pride in using their Indigenous languages and engage in their communities' cultural practices (Cherubini, Hodson, Manley-Casimir, & Muir, 2010; Styres, 2017).

Theoretical Perspectives of Our Inquiry

Our inquiry is based on a recognition of children as "competent, capable of complex thinking, curious, and rich in potential" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 6) and of the process of inquiry as a socially and culturally mediated meaning-making and knowledge construction practice (Fosnot, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). Also underpinning our inquiry is an understanding that play environments should provide children with "freedom and support to be creative, communicative, imaginative, participatory, and active" (Pramling Samuelsson & Pramling, 2014, p. 177). Children make sense of experience by drawing on their funds of knowledge and applying the familiar to new contexts created in their dramatic play (Hedges, Cullen & Jordan, 2011; Whitebread, 2010). A final theoretical assumption underpinning our inquiry is that play is a culturally and contextually situated practice, where "everything that children play at, or play with, is influenced by wider social, historical, and cultural factors" (Wood, 2013, p. 8). Notions of appropriate play objects and types of play activities, as well as the appropriate role of adults in children's play in classrooms, are culturally based. In AHS programs, these notions are influenced by the values, perspectives, and cultural beliefs of the AHS families, educators, and administrators, as well as by the goals, curriculum, and history of the provincial AHS program and the cultural views of the local Indigenous communities.

We chose dramatic play as the context for our inquiry because of its important contributions to children's learning and to their symbolic thinking and imagination (Bodrova & Leong, 2011). When children assign meanings to objects in their play (e.g., when the children used a jug as a teapot), they are engaging in abstract thinking, separating the meaning of the object from its form as part of the pretend narrative. We use Dunn's (2008) view of dramatic play as "the most improvisational and spontaneous of all the dramatic forms. Here the participant, either individually or in a group, freely manipulates the elements of drama, such as role, place, time, symbol, and tension, to create a dramatic world" (p. 164), drawing on background knowledge, experience, and imagination (Barrs, Barton, & Booth, 2012). Dramatic play provides a culturally relevant learning environment (Ladson-Billings, 1995) for children to imitate Indigenous cultural practices and make sense of Indigenous teachings that are part of the AHS curriculum.

Introducing the Co-authors

According to Styres (2017), "locating ourselves in relation to everything we do is one of the key foundational principles of Indigeneity. The only place from which any of us can write or speak with some degree of certainty is from the position of who we are in relation to what we know" (p. 7). Accordingly, we authors position ourselves culturally and geographically, as part of what Styres identifies as "a relational, respectful, and reciprocal process" (p. 7) in the author–reader relationship.

Three authors of this article are early childhood educators; all have their RECE designation and Indigenous family roots, and teach in a Northern Ontario AHS program. The fourth author is a non-Indigenous university professor and former primary teacher in rural Alberta. The four of us have been working together over the past three years on mini-inquiries that address goals set by the early childhood educators. We have been meeting approximately every two months in the AHS school to talk about children's Indigenous cultural learning as demonstrated in their dramatic play.

Inquiry Practices

The educators' inquiry projects began when they set up centres with materials used in Indigenous cultural practices. They videorecorded children's interactions during dramatic play activities at that centre using an iPod placed on a tripod. Each video recording was of children whose parents had given consent for the video recording. Our use of video recordings highlights the importance of documentation to "find meaning in what children do and what they experience" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 21) and of using the videos to explore how and what children learn. We are reporting on seven video recordings of 2–8 minutes in length, chosen as representative of children's play in seven different centres with materials of Indigenous cultural practices.

As part of our inquiry, we held a meeting with six other Indigenous educators from AHS and Northern Ontario First Nations communities to broaden and deepen our interpretation of the children's Indigenous cultural knowledge as enacted in their dramatic play. We based our interpretations on Battiste's (2008) definition of Indigenous knowledge as:

> the complex set of languages, teachings, and technologies developed and sustained by Indigenous civilizations. Often oral and symbolic, it is transmitted through performance and the structure of Indigenous languages and passed on to the next generation through oral tradition in modeling, ceremonies, problem-solving, and animation, rather than through the written word. Indigenous Knowledge is typically embedded in the cumulative experiences and teachings of Indigenous peoples rather than in a library or in journals of applied research. (p. 87)

In this three-hour meeting, we all viewed the seven videos recorded by the three AHS educators multiple times and discussed in groups of three the evidence of children's Indigenous cultural knowledge in their dramatic play. Each group then discussed its interpretations with the whole group. The whole-group discussions were audiorecorded. The authors of this article later listened to the audio recordings and used the recorded interpretation discussions to inform our writing of this article.

Two themes emerged from these interpretation discussions:

1) In their dramatic play with cultural materials, participating Indigenous children imitated Indigenous cultural practices carried out in the home, at sacred ceremonies, and on the land; and

2) Children showed that they understood Ojibway words but did not use them in their dramatic play.

We describe two examples showing how children demonstrated Indigenous cultural practices and one example of how they showed their understanding of Ojibway in their dramatic play. Each educator describes the cultural practices in her own voice.

Imitating Indigenous Cultural Practices

Examples of children imitating Indigenous cultural practices are from Kayla's and Eugema's classrooms and involve children playing with dolls that were placed in a *tikinagan*, which is a cradle board, or dressing up in a jingle dress to do a jingle dance.

Swaddling a baby in a tikinagan (cradle board)

In Kayla's classroom of 3–4 year-old children, the cultural play inquiry project was in the home centre. Each item in the home centre was strategically placed and all items had a specific cultural purpose. These items included *tikinagans*, Indigenous and non-Indigenous baby dolls, dress-up and doll clothes, play food, a telephone, a clock, blankets, rattles, and other toys geared towards infants (e.g., soft books and textured items), and kitchen items (e.g., cups, cutlery, table, plates, high chairs, change table). There were also pictures on display of babies in *tikinagans*, grandparents

holding a baby in a *tikinagan*, and blended families eating supper at a table. Ojibway words on the displays included: *Kokum* [Grandma] and *Mishomis* [Grandpa]. In this inviting environment with both familiar and unfamiliar items, the goal was for the children's play to be reflective of family cultural practices that were salient to them. *Tikinagans*, for example, were in many children's homes.

> **Kayla**: *Tikinagans*, cradle boards used to carry an infant, are part of my and my students' Indigenous culture (see Figure 1 for a picture of two types of *tikinagans*). A vital part of child-rearing in our Indigenous communities, *tikinagans* are very practical for mothers when traveling. They can even be propped up so babies can watch their surroundings. The *tikinagan* that I am familiar with has a hard back and is usually made from pine or cedar, with leather used to lace or bind the baby inside. Other Indigenous communities make *tikinagans* with soft backs. In some communities *tikinagans* are made with wooden hoops attached to the top. The hoop acts as a protector for the baby's head if the *tikinagan* falls over and provides shade when the baby is in the sun.
>
> In one video I recorded in my classroom, Fallan (all children's names are pseudonyms) took the *tikinagan* that was propped up in the kitchen, laid it flat on the floor, and began to undo the laces. When I asked her what she was doing, she said, "Taking the baby out." I then used the Ojibway word, saying, "Oh, you're taking the baby out of the *tikinagan*?" She showed that she had observed how to unlace and then swaddle the baby in the *tikinagan* so that it could not move. I talked with Fallan about the teachings I grew up with: that babies are put into *tikinagans* because they are not supposed to touch Mother Earth. I was also taught that *tikinagans* would benefit the infant with longer sleep, since the baby was swaddled tightly and could not move, like when it was in the mother's womb. I was also taught that when babies are in *tikinagans*, they become stronger because their backbone and legs are kept straight. This strengthens the infant's neck muscles and enhances other senses, such as vison and hearing, as well as their awareness of their surroundings. The home centre play setting provides an authentic context for the children and for me to use the Ojibway language. Children were able to use traditional objects while receiving the teachings.

Figure 1: Dolls in Tikinagans

In the AHS, we also use dramatic play contexts to share teachings about traditional clothing, as shown in the next description of children dancing in jingle dresses —a practice recorded in one of the seven videos that were discussed in our interpretation conversations.

Dancing a jingle dance at a powwow

In Eugema's classroom of 3–5-year-old children, the cultural play inquiry project centred on a dramatic play centre with a teepee, which provided the children with a feeling of home and getting ready for a powwow. Fake fur in the interior of the teepee made a soft place for the children to lie down amidst pieces of birch bark wood, wooden bowls, and spoons. Powwows are spiritual gatherings involving sacred music and dancing that bring people together to honour their culture.

One of the dances, the jingle dance, is danced by females wearing jingle dresses. It is believed that women, who carry and give birth to children, have a lot of power. The skirt of the jingle dress is a circle representing no beginning and no end. The skirt touches the ground so that Mother Earth will recognize the female wearing it. Jingle dresses are usually made from solid-colour fabric with many jingles sewn closely together, either onto the dress or on ribbons sewn on the sleeves, top, and bottom of the dress (see Figure 2). These jingles, traditionally made of seashells, make a "tink, tink" rain-like sound. The metal cones are called *ziibaaska'iganan* in Ojibway.

Figure 2: Jingle Dress

Eugema: In one video I recorded in my classroom, three girls, Sun, Moon, and Wind, were wearing the jingle dresses as powwow music was heard in the background. The girls pretended that they were getting ready for a powwow. Moon asked Wind to help her close her dress up in the back. Then Wind twirled and did a few dance steps. Sun then asked Wind for help to tie up the back of her dress and bounced to make her jingles "tink" as if rain were falling. The girls jumped around to hear the jingles. Wind showed that she has experience preparing for jingle dances, as she oversaw the preparations.

As the girls danced, I had an opportunity to share the teachings I have learned from stories about the jingle dance. In one story, about a medicine man and his ill daughter, the medicine man "had a dream about a dress with all these jingling cones hanging off the material. He spent days making the dress, put it on her, lifted her up to try to make her dance, and, when she finally was able to dance, she got better" (Sexsmith, 2003, p. 28). I explained that these are teachings I have learned, but it was important to respect every Indigenous culture's teachings, as other cultures' teachings may be different.

In the dramatic play with Indigenous cultural clothing, all children were respected for their knowledge of getting ready for a powwow and dancing to the music. Their curiosity and awareness of their Indigenous community's culture were nurtured as they had fun while learning through play.

In our AHS, we use dramatic play to teach Ojibway words and traditional practices on the land, such as hunting and the gathering of traditional foods, as well as practices in homes and at sacred ceremonies, as we show in the next classroom vignette from Tina's classroom.

Showing Understanding of Ojibway Words

We present an example of children showing their understanding of Ojibway words but not using the words in dramatic play in Tina's classroom of 2–3-year-old children where the cultural play centred on a *makwa* [bear] cave.

Tina: With the goal of children learning about animal shelters and traditional hunting practices, I set up a large cardboard box as a cave area that animals would use as their home. Children painted the cave (see Figure 3). Our discussion while we were together in the cave was about how wild forest animals use the land as their homes and about the hibernation of certain animals. I shared with children that the *makwa* was used for food by some Indigenous communities but others viewed the *makwa* as a spiritual animal and protector, as told in teachings and legends. A discussion of foods eaten by the *makwa* (e.g., fish and berries) led to the children's stories about going fishing and berry picking with their families.

Real-life items such as a *mtik*, which is a tree, as well as branches, and twigs, were set out as the ground of the cave. I set up an artificial *mtik* outside the cave, along with two *amik* [beaver] at its base. The *amik*

Figure 3: Makwa Cave

appeared to be chewing the trunk of the *mtik*. I talked with the children about how the *amik* uses its large teeth to break the wood and uses the wood to make its own home, a beaver dam. We also discussed how the beaver is a consistent source of food for our Indigenous communities.

We talked about how some Indigenous families, including those living in urban areas, remain involved in the traditions of hunting and are passing down these practices to the next generation. These families leave the city to travel back to their First Nations communities to hunt and gather food to feed themselves and share with their extended families. This conversation led us to talking about another source of food, the *wabooz* [rabbit]. It is trapped using a technique called *snaring* that is still practiced today. While children touched an actual rabbit skin, we talked about how to skin a rabbit and how the fur is used for clothing such as the insulation in mittens and moccasins. We also talked about the more prominent sources of wild game food:*waawaashkesh* [deer] and *mooz* [moose]. They are hunted in the fall season and prepared and preserved for eating through the winter months. While handling a set of antlers, children observed demonstrations of how the antlers can be used as tools for scraping hides and of how clothing and traditional drums can be made from moose and deer hides. Animals that are hunted and killed for food are never wasted, as the whole animal is used; meat is for consumption, while the other parts of the animal can be used for clothing and other purposes. To give thanks (*Meegwetch*) for the gift of food, an offering of tobacco is given. Visual aids, such as pictures of the animals along with the Ojibway words for the animals, were posted by the *makwa* cave.

In one video I recorded in my classroom, Tori set up the stuffed animals in the cave and said that the animals were sleeping, now that it was winter. I reinforced their learning of the Ojibway words for the animals through encouraging the children to join me in singing a song (see Figure 4) while the children pretended that the animals were hibernating and then waking up in the spring. I find that children learn new words when I introduce the words through songs and use them when participating in dramatic play. I believe that when young children hear the words over and over throughout the days and weeks, they will eventually use the words.

In another video, Bradley brought play food from the kitchen centre, feeding the toy *makwa* some *giigoon* [fish] while having a picnic in the cave. In a third video, Sarah built a *wabooz* home out of the branches and twigs in the cave. In these cases, I described what the children were doing using the Ojibway words for the animals. When I asked children about the animals, they showed their understanding of the Ojibway words by picking up the stuffed animal that was named. The children sang the song with me, but they did not use the words in their independent dramatic play.

Are you sleeping? Are you sleeping?
Kee nee baa naa? Kee nee baa naa?

Bear Bear, Bear Bear
Makwa Makwa, Makwa Makwa

Morning bells are ringing, Morning bells are ringing
A shaa, Kii Mad Way Sin, A shaa, Kii Mad Way Sin

Go to sleep, Go to sleep
Kee Nee Baa, Kee Nee Baa

Wake up now, Wake up now
O Nish Kan, O Nish Kan

Makwa can be replaced with other animals:

Waawaashkesh [Deer]

Mooz [Moose]

Waabooz [Rabbit]

Abinoojiiwak [Children]

Figure 4: *Are You Sleeping?/Frère Jacques* (with English and Ojibway words)

What We Have Learned from Our Inquiry

Our inquiry into Indigenous children's dramatic play with cultural materials, based on an analysis of video recordings of their play, shows that the children imitated Indigenous cultural practices in the home (e.g., securing and carrying a baby in a *tikinagan*), on the land (e.g., gathering cedar foliage and making cedar tea), and in sacred practices (e.g., putting on a jingle dress and dancing a jingle dance at a powwow). Their community's Indigenous knowledge, passed on through modeling by adults in their homes, through their communities' sacred ceremonies, and through approaches to problem-solving and ways of viewing the world that are embedded in families' and community members' experiences and teachings (Battiste, 2008), was enacted in children's dramatic play with Indigenous cultural

materials. The three AHS educators' modeling took the form of participating in the play, listening to "how children are finding and making meaning" (Rogers & Evans, 2008, p. 120), and sharing Indigenous teachings that extend children's understandings as they engaged in dramatic play.

The educators demonstrated practices, provided explanations, and shared stories in order to "respond to children's interests, make connections between children's goals and curriculum goals, and build on [children's] working theories and funds of knowledge" (Wood, 2013, p. 73). Consistent with traditional ways of passing on Indigenous knowledge (Battiste, 2008; Styres, 2011) and with Vygotskian theories of pedagogies of play (Bodrova & Leong, 2011), the three educators participated in play with Indigenous cultural objects to deepen and extend children's cultural learning. These real-life experiences help broaden and deepen children's funds of Indigenous knowledge (Hedges, Cullen, & Jordan, 2011; Whitebread, 2010) for their dramatic play with Indigenous cultural materials.

As Rogers and Evans (2008) have proposed, we found that videorecording the play interactions and then talking about the interactions with Indigenous colleagues provided valuable information about children's learning as well as starting points for planning ways to deepen that learning in future. Talking with Indigenous colleagues about the children's imitation of Indigenous cultural practices in their dramatic play has been valuable in "making children's learning and understanding of the world around them visible" to us (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 21). However, as is recommended by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2014), we believe it is important to use the video recordings in conversations with the children and their families to deepen children's Indigenous cultural knowledge and build relationships with children's families. Future inquiries will examine ways to construct understandings of the children's learning and Indigenous cultural knowledge collaboratively with the children and their families.

As Indigenous researchers and theorists have explained, learning Indigenous languages is of critical importance. Language and culture are inseparable as "each language reflects a unique world-view and culture complex, mirroring the manner in which a speech community has resolved its problems in dealing with the world and has formulated its thinking, its system of philosophy and understanding of the world around it" (Wurm, 2001, p. 13). Fostering children's Indigenous language learning is an important part of the AHS program. Children demonstrated that their receptive understanding of the Ojibway language was strong (e.g., they picked up objects identified by educators), but they did not express themselves in Ojibway in their dramatic play.

Given that dramatic play has been shown to support children's language competence (Rogers & Evans, 2008), our future inquiry projects will involve new ways to foster children's use of their Ojibway language in dramatic play with Indigenous cultural materials. We noticed that the AHS children used Ojibway words in the activities that were repeated daily, for example, smudging/cleansing, eating snacks and lunch, during rest time, and when going in and out of the van that transports them between their homes and the AHS site (the educators took turns supervising children while enroute). Drawing on these observations and on the interpretations of children's dramatic play in the seven videos, in future inquiries the three AHS educators will endeavour to participate more frequently in dramatic play with Indigenous cultural objects, using Ojibway words in context. We hope that repeated, contextualized use of the language will encourage children's use of the language in their dramatic play.

Integrating Indigenous Cultural Play in non-Indigenous Classrooms

The implications of what we have learned can stretch beyond AHS classrooms to preschool and primary classrooms throughout Ontario. Consistent with recommendations of the Ontario Ministry of Education (2014), we suggest that educators use pedagogical documentation, such as video recordings of children's play, to provide an enduring window into children's learning in three spheres: belonging (feeling connected to and valued by others), well-being (physical and mental health and wellness), and engagement (exploring, being involved and focused as problem solvers and creative thinkers). In our AHS classrooms, we added the sphere of enacting and valuing cultural knowledge (beliefs, values, perspectives, experiences, and language) to the three outlined by the Ontario Ministry of Education. Videos can be viewed and discussed with colleagues, families, and the children in terms of the children's construction of cultural knowledge of their communities and learning in the three spheres described by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2014).

With sensitivity, in an effort to avoid cultural appropriation, non-Indigenous educators who wish to incorporate Indigenous culture into their early years programs might provide Indigenous cultural materials for children to use in dramatic play. We recommend bringing in objects from the natural world and encouraging children to explore how the land provides for basic needs. Natural objects are of great importance to non-Indigenous children's coming to know about Indigenous cultures, as "land informs pedagogy through storied relationships that are etched into the essence of every rock, tree, seed, animal, pathway, and

waterway in relation to the Aboriginal people who have existed on the land since time immemorial" (Styres, 2011, p. 721). It is important to find out as much as possible regarding the Indigenous culture in each educator's area; beliefs and traditions are different in different communities. If non-Indigenous educators choose to meet with an elder or medicine person, we recommend that they offer tobacco to show respect.

Educators can also access resources teaching Indigenous knowledge on websites of:

1. local Indigenous communities (e.g., http://www.wikwemikongheritage.org/LanguageResources.html)
2. universities (e.g., http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/deepeningknowledge/UserFiles/File/Turtle_Island.pdf) or from
3. federal government bodies, such as Indigenous and Northern Affairs (e.g., https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1316530132377/1316530184659 has six themes that can be adapted for young children).

A book recommended for young children, *When We Were Alone* (Robertson, 2016), is a story of empowerment and strength in which a grandmother answers her granddaughter's questions and in the process tells about her years in a residential school.

To teach Indigenous languages, educators might invite children to sing songs to familiar melodies, such as the one about animals sleeping shared earlier in this paper, using the Indigenous languages of nearby Indigenous communities. Educators might also take up a teaching practice that the three AHS educators have found useful for teaching Ojibway. We work with children to create posters and books based on patterned books, such as Martin's (1967) *Brown Bear, Brown Bear*, using Ojibway words for the animals (see Figure 5)

Regardless of the classroom context, we believe that modeling cultural practices and contextualized use of target languages by educators, family members, and other members of the community enriches children's funds of knowledge. Additionally, dramatic play with cultural materials provides a space in early years settings for children to imitate and make sense of cultural practices of their own and other cultures.

Acknowledgements: We thank the parents, children, and colleagues at our Aboriginal Head Start for supporting our inquiries. We also thank the Indigenous educators (including Tina's brother as he gave feedback on a draft of this manuscript), who contributed to our understanding of the children's knowledge construction in their dramatic play. We are grateful to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for funding our collaborative action research through a Partnership Grant.

Kiiyaande Makwa, Kiiyaande Makwa, what do you see?

I see a Red Bird looking at me.

I see a Mskwaa Bneshiinh looking at me

This pattern is repeated with these words:

Yellow Duck – *Zaawaa Sheesheeb*

White Dog – *Waabskaa Niimosh*

Black Cat – *Mkadewaa Gaazhak*

Blue Horse – *Miinande Bezhgoogzhii*

Green Frog – *Zhaawshkwaa Makkii*

Figure 5: *Brown Bear, Brown Bear* (Bill Martin Jr.'s pattern book in English and Ojibway)

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The Leadership Journey in the Spirit of Indigenous Early Childhood Educators in Remote Northern First Nations Communities

Lori Huston

Abstract

This article describes the origins and emergence of an innovative, in-service professional development program designed to meet the needs of Indigenous educators working in First Nations communities in Northwestern Ontario. This article tells the story of the Wildfire Circle study and outlines the development and implementation of the Indigenous ECE Leadership Professional Development Program (IECELPDP) Anishininiiwi Awaashishiiw Kihkinohamaakewi Niikaanihtamaakew (AAKN) at Oshki-Pimache-O-Win—The Wenjack Education Institute.

Key Words

Indigenous educators, early childhood programs, leadership, Wildfire Circle, professional development

Note: *Indigenous* refers to all First Nations, Métis, or Inuit. Cindy Blackstock, Executive Director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada has asked, "Please do not use the term *Indigenous* if the issue only affects First Nations or Inuit or Métis. Be as specific as possible" Twitter (2017). The article will differentiate among the terms where possible to be respectful of this request.

Author Biography

Lori Huston RECE was raised in a remote northern community of Red Lake, ON. Lori's background includes extensive involvement in Indigenous ECE post-secondary education, program coordination in children services, research, program evaluation and policy development and facilitating groups. Advocating to ensure that children living in the north have positive influences and services which will benefit their lives have been the principle in all of Lori's efforts.

"Next Generation" by Kevin Belmore

The Leadership Journey in the Spirit of Indigenous Early Childhood Educators in Remote Northern First Nations Communities

Black Elk Circle Poem

Everything the power of the world does is done in a circle.

The sky is round, and I have heard that the earth is round like a ball and so are all the stars. The wind, in its greatest power, whirls.

Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours. The sun comes forth and goes down again in a circle. The moon does the same and both are round. Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing and always come back again to where they were.

The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves. Our teepees were round like the nests of birds, and these were always set in a circle, the nation's hoop, a nest of many nests, where the Great Spirit meant for us to hatch our children.

Black Elk (1863-1950) Medicine Man of the Oglala Lakota Sioux

This section of the Circle Poem by Black Elk speaks to the nature of the flow of life in our world. It reflects the work of Indigenous educators in early childhood programs, connecting their work to the lives of the children as one with their communities.

As the author, I bring more than 20 years of experience in the early childhood education (ECE) sector. The majority of my work has been with Indigenous children, families, and students across Canada as a non-Indigenous RECE. I have been involved in curriculum teaching and writing, community capacity building, and policy work. Since 2009, I have coordinated and developed training programs for students from remote northern First Nations communities as the post-secondary coordinator of the Indigenous Early Childhood Education Diploma program offered by Oshki-Pimache-O-Win - The Wenjack Education Institute (Oshki-Wenjack) in Thunder Bay, Ontario. This article draws on my experience and knowledge. It will include an overview of a recent, culturally responsive, relational research study that led to the development of an in-service professional development certificate designed to meet the needs of Indigenous educators in First Nations communities across Northwestern Ontario.

Origins of Indigenous ECE Leadership Professional Development Program

Valuing the Student-Coordinator Relationship

As program coordinator, I model Anishinabe cultural characteristics of good judgment, thoughtfulness, and discipline. My relationship with students is unique since we remain connected far past graduation through my community visits and social media platforms, emails, and phone calls. The 74 First Nations educators in the alumni worked in the sector on-reserve for many years before receiving their ECE diplomas. As program coordinator, I continue to encourage their colleagues to enroll with Oshki-Wenjack to obtain their ECE diplomas. The graduates, the majority of whom are mature students, often converse with me about professional opportunities. They have a keen interest in further training, and yet, they experience an immense disconnect and a sense of isolation as well. For more than 7 years, I have been committed to sharing information and awareness of training in the Thunder Bay area and beyond with the students. The more skills these educators obtain on their journey, the more they feel in control of their careers and family life and can give back to their communities in the early years' sector.

The College of ECE and the Challenges to Indigenous Educators

In 2008, the College of Early Childhood Educators opened its doors, and Ontario continues to be the only province with a regulatory body to govern ECEs in Canada. The College serves and protects the interests of the public through a *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice* that its members must follow. Only members of the College can use the protected titles Registered Early Childhood Educator (RECE) or Early Childhood Educator (ECE).

Indigenous ECE graduates have challenges with registration with the College. First, on-reserve employers do not always require them to obtain registered status, unlike the mainstream early learning sector, resulting in fewer on-reserve licensed childcare programs. The second challenge is cost: the initial application fee, followed by an annual membership fee. A recent discussion with a graduate about becoming registered reflected both challenges. The student expressed that it was not a priority to maintain an RECE status because of the fees, and it was not a requirement for her to continue to work in the on-reserve early learning sector.

The Ontario Ministry of Education provides education grants to support educators under the ECE Qualifications Upgrade program (www.ecegrants.on.ca). These grants assisted many of the Indigenous childhood educators in completing their studies and receiving diplomas (Table 1).

Table 1: Graduates of the Oshki-Wenjack ECE Diploma Program Who Received Grants

Cohort Year	Number of Graduates	Number of Students who received ECE Grants
2008–2010	12	9
2009–2011	9	2
2010–2012	11	2
2011–2013	6	3
2012–2014	0	0
2013–2015	16	16
2014–2016	6	4
2015–2017	14	10
Total	74	46

Note: *The program did not run a 2012 intake due to low enrollment.*
Source: *Oshki-Pimache-O-Win - The Wenjack Education Institute*

The Indigenous Educators' Leadership Journey

The Ministry of Education ECE grants also provide funding for ECE graduates to continue with post-secondary approved courses under a Leadership Certification program. This inspired me, as the coordinator, to connect with mainstream colleges to partner in providing courses that the Indigenous ECE (IECE) alumni had been requesting.

Unfortunately, it was not easy to find the fit for the training the students were seeking. IECE students wanted culturally relevant teachings, and, as on-reserve educators, this would include teaching in their languages, more knowledge on special needs training, and culturally specific teachings (e.g. medicine wheel teaching as a planning tool). In addition, challenges for IECE students in obtaining the leadership grants meant that, to date, none of the 74 IECE graduates has been able to benefit from those grants. The grants did, however, open up discussion about the professional learning needs of IECEs.

A New Paths for Education call for proposals in March 2017 by Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) included a call for research, measurement, evaluation, and knowledge transfer activities for the 2017–2018 fiscal year. The INAC call for proposals focused on professional development for Indigenous educators that opened the door to envision the development of professional training with a leadership focus. A final proposal to fund the development and delivery of the IECELPDP was submitted by Oshki-Wenjack and supported by an advisory committee assembled in March 2017.

The Wildfire Circle Study

The purpose of the Wildfire Circle Study was to identify the professional learning needs of educators working in early childhood programs and living on-reserve. Through the narratives of the educators based on their First Nations communities and individual reflection of professional practice, professional learning needs were assessed. The assessment, conducted by the Maamaawisiiwin Education Research Centre with Oshki-Wenjack, was the first of its kind and did not replicate any existing data. As stated by Kompf & Hodson (2000), the First Principles of Aboriginal Education "act as a path to understanding and anticipating the circumstances needed for successful learning experiences in Aboriginal communities" (p.185). In other words, students need to hold the vision for the change, and knowledge of new skills needs to be based on their cultural ways of knowing for learning to occur.

The study allowed for a qualitative, in-depth interviewing process with open-ended questions in a supportive cultural setting with a group of 30 IECE students. As Patton (2011) asserts, "In depth interviewing involves asking open-ended questions, listening to and recording the answers, and then following up with additional relevant questions" (p. 342). The qualitative interviewing provided the foundational information needed to build an in-service professional learning program based on leadership in IECE, centered in Indigenous knowledge.

Indigenous Research Principles

In Indigenous ways of knowing, the environment holds the spiritual reality, creating space for reflection. Indigenous and Non Indigenous researchers work within the privileged, humbling setting of people's stories—qualitative and quantitative—that are generously shared (Hodson, 2013). From an Indigenous research perspective, the focus is on the participants, who are much different from the researchers whose practice is shaped by the dominant forms of research. Researchers working in the Indigenous context must facilitate the protective and productive environments necessary for the participants. Within an Indigenous culturally responsive study, it is not the responsibility of the participants to shift their direction, but, rather, the researcher must respond and recalculate the trajectory of their journey (Hodson,, 2013, p. 14) The Talking Circle is the traditional practice of Indigenous people as they consult and share ideas and space. In the Talking Circle, the protocol is such that what is shared in the Circle stays in the Circle. The Elder who is present allows participants to share their innermost ideas; hearing the voices of the others, sharing connects participants to their own knowledge, which moves the discussion to a collective knowledge. Celia Haig-Brown, (2000) who worked with Indigenous students stated, "At times during the course, the students join[ed] together in Talking Circles, to talk about the pedagogical implications of what they were doing" (p. 89). This is a clear example of how Indigenous people connect collectively to their ideas and plan next steps of their work.

A traditional Indigenous Talking Circle was used for a group of IECE graduating students to identify their professional learning needs. This was an important step in the development of a one-of-a-kind in-service Indigenous ECE leadership program.

Background to the Study

To establish the study, I surveyed four articles on leadership, including Berger (2015), Haig-Brown (2000), Kompf and Hodson (2000), Krieg, Davis and Smith (2014). I looked at pedagogical narrations and leadership, community and education research, the development of an undergrad degree for Indigenous adult learners, and early childhood educators leading by mentoring. The literature review provided information on the study question, "What are the professional learning needs of Indigenous educators living and working on-reserve?" This literature review provided a better understanding of professional learning studies with ECEs and explored Indigenous ways of knowing in the context of professional learning. The background and literature review were constructive in moving forward with the study.

Participants

The 2015–17 Oshki-Wenjack IECE cohort of students in their graduating year was selected to participate in the Needs Assessment Talking Circle. The 30 students lived on-reserve in Northwestern Ontario, across the territories of Grand Council Treaty No. 3, Independent First Nations Alliance, Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Treaty No. 9 & 5, and Union of Ontario Indians, Anishinabek (Table 2).

Methods

The qualitative study was shaped by the format of Talking Circles used by Kompf and Hodson (2000); they named their sessions Wildfire I and Wildfire II. This culturally responsive relational research design allowed for authentic and meaningful inquiry with the intent of improving practices that are relevant for participants. It also helped to address gaps in the literature. The Circles created a common and often sacred research environment that was respectful of the traditions and cultural beliefs of the Indigenous participants.

The Circle was held on April 2, 2017 (Figure 1) in a private setting located at Oshki-Wenjack in Thunder Bay, Ontario. It featured semi-structured discussions that invited each participant to share their experiences and observations about the focus of the research study. This allowed participants to identify their needs and explore program vision, relationships, and knowledge with the support of an Elder. The IECE student sharing circle also allowed participants to reflect and plan for professional development opportunities beyond identified themes.

This IECE Wildfire Talking Circle facilitated:

- development of relationships between the research team and the participants that made up the IECE community where the research was situated;
- complete transparency, ongoing consultation, and meaningful engagement between the research team

Table 2: Provincial Territorial Organizations and Related First Nations Communities in Northwestern Ontario, 2016

First Nations	Number of Communities	Population	Size of Territory
Grand Council Treaty No. 3	28	25,000	55,000 sq. miles
Independent First Nations Alliance	5	5,285	7,000 acres
Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Treaty No. 9 & 5	49	45,000	210,000 sq. miles (landmass that represents 2/3rds of the province).
Union of Ontario Indians, Anishinabek	9	4,000	

Total First Nations Communities: 91.
Total First Nations Ontario Population (2016): 374, 395.
Total Northwestern Ontario Population: 79, 285 (approx. 22 percent of total).
Total First Nations Population 0 to 14 years of age: 15, 530 (approx. 20 percent of total).
Source: *Hodson, personal communication. (2018)*

and the participants from the community;

- an individual session dedicated to the circle of ECE participants within the community; and
- the inclusion of traditional practices such as prayer, ceremony, tobacco offerings, honoraria, and food offered to each in the Circle.

The researchers and Oshki-Wenjack leadership team were aware of the five common errors in human inquiry, which include (a) inaccurate observations; (b) overgeneralization; (c) selective observation; (d) illogical reasoning; and (e) early closure of inquiry (Babbie & Benaquisto, 2010, p. 8).

Figure 1: Part of the Talking Circle, April 2017

Participation in the Wildfire Talking Circle was voluntary for the 30 IECE students. The researchers conducted their work in keeping with basic characteristics of qualitative research (a) in the private classroom settings; (b) interpretations of the observations were based on students' meanings; (c) the data analysis was inductive with (d) emergent cultural safety design, (e) holistic account, as participants (f) interpreted what they observed, heard, and read connected to participant's background and history (Creswell, 2007).

The Wildfire Talking Circle session of IECE participants was digitally recorded and transcribed. The transcription underwent extensive analysis and was organized in a Medicine Wheel Teaching (Figure 2) related to Action, Vision, Relationship and Knowledge for the coordinator and research team. The data analysis was used as the foundation to develop the leadership program in the development of the INAC proposal.

Ethical Issues

Indigenous research methodologies can be seen to conflict with the dominant understanding of how research takes place. Traditional talking circles are not anonymous or confidential as participants, see, hear and have the opportunity to build on each other's ideas and that can be seen as contravening amenity and confidentiality. Talking circles begin with ceremony that create sacred space for participants, allowing for the commitment to "what is said in the circle stays in the circle" protocol (Hodson, personal communication, 2017). All participants are reminded of the talking circle protocol.

This method and protocol meets the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (2014): "Aboriginal codes of research practice go beyond the scope of ethical protections for individual participants" (p.113). Illustrated in the ethical framework in the Indigenous context are three principles: respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice, highlighting that research involving Aboriginal people must be done in the "spirit of respect," (TCPS2, 2014, p. 113).

The culturally relational and responsive method is evident in the existing relationship between the IECE students and Oshki-Wenjack and allowed for reciprocated trust and communication that identified the mutual research goals with understanding and a strong agreement by all parties. The inclusion of Indigenous knowledge and practices, and the presence of Oshki-Wenjack's campus Elder for the Talking Circle recognized the respectful relationships.

Participant safety

Participant safety includes the welfare of the participants according to the TCPS2, (2014) and "consists of the impacts on individuals of factors such as their physical, mental, and spiritual health, as well as their physical, economic, and social circumstances" (p.7). The impacts of not protecting the safety of the participants leads to inappropriate research strategies. By using the Talking Circle method, the researchers sought to ensure the safety of participants. Researchers working in Indigenous contexts and using a culturally responsive method literally embrace their subjectivity (Hodson, J., 2013). This allows for knowledge that already exists to come through the voices of the community and reflect the collective ideas of the group.

Data Collection, Analysis, and Findings

Questions asked during the Wildfire Talking Circle complemented the Medicine Wheel Teaching including:

1) What is the vision of the in-service professional development?
2) What relationships will be necessary to make the vision a reality?
3) What knowledges will have to be included?
4) What actions will be required to make the vision a reality?

After the Talking Circle session of IECE participants, the final transcript of the digital record underwent a rigorous analysis shaped by Patton's (1990) three-stage approach that includes:

1) content analysis to make the obvious, obvious;
2) interpretive analysis to make the hidden obvious; and
3) critical analysis to make the obvious and hidden dubious.

In the study, the analysis identified patterns were coded and categorized into key ideas. These ideas were then grouped into categorical clusters that included Vision, Relationships, Knowledge, and Action (Figure 2).

The learning themes that emerged from the research analysis set a clear vision with two dominant, programmatic subject areas, as well as the framework for implementation.

Area 1: The Need to Enhance Professional Relationships, including

- Relationships between educators and the children in their programs. For example, IECE students expressed the need learn stress reduction techniques for themselves and how to advocate for the children's right to play.
- Relationships with members of the community such as parents, Elders, community leaders, chief and band council members, principals and teachers, First Nations health professionals.
- Relationships with those in the early learning sector off-reserve, including the College of ECE and the Association of ECE Ontario (AECEO).

Area 2: The Need to Enhance Professional Knowledge, including

- First Nations language skills in order to be able to transfer teaching to the children;
- knowledge related to working with children with special needs;
- experience in writing and contributing to early learning funding proposals;
- understanding of the College of ECE regulations;
- knowledge of licensing requirements for childcare centres, with the goal of having more licensed childcare sites on-reserve;
- learning based on Indigenous methods; and
- understanding family education in order to support young families.

The implementation framework for the program was based on the participants' acknowledgment that while many of the needs in the lists above will be shared across the First Nations, each community will have issues that are unique or require a different emphasis depending on the local reality. Therefore, the framework of the IECELPDP must be flexible enough to accommodate local needs and culminate in a specific, achievable, and measurable community plan that can be implemented by the educators in that community.

The final report of the Wildfire Circle study was provided to the advisory committee in August 2017, which coincided with a positive response to the INAC proposal submitted in May 2017.

Indigenous ECE Leadership Professional Development Program (IECELPDP)

A successful program proposal to INAC was immediately followed by the advisory committee made up of Oshki-Wenjack's ECE coordinator, Elder Brenda Mason Shkoday Abinojiiwak Obimiwedoon, representatives from the Thunder Bay Head Start Program, and Maamaawisiiwin Education Research Centre. Together the advisory committee developed a program of professional development that enhances the IECE's community development and research capacities and offers a feast of new ideas from educational leaders. There is no other program like it anywhere in Ontario.

The program began with E-learning classes delivered online, with sessions scheduled between two instructors: the ECE coordinator and the director of Maamaawisiiwin Education Research Centre, who were always accompanied by Elder Brenda Mason.

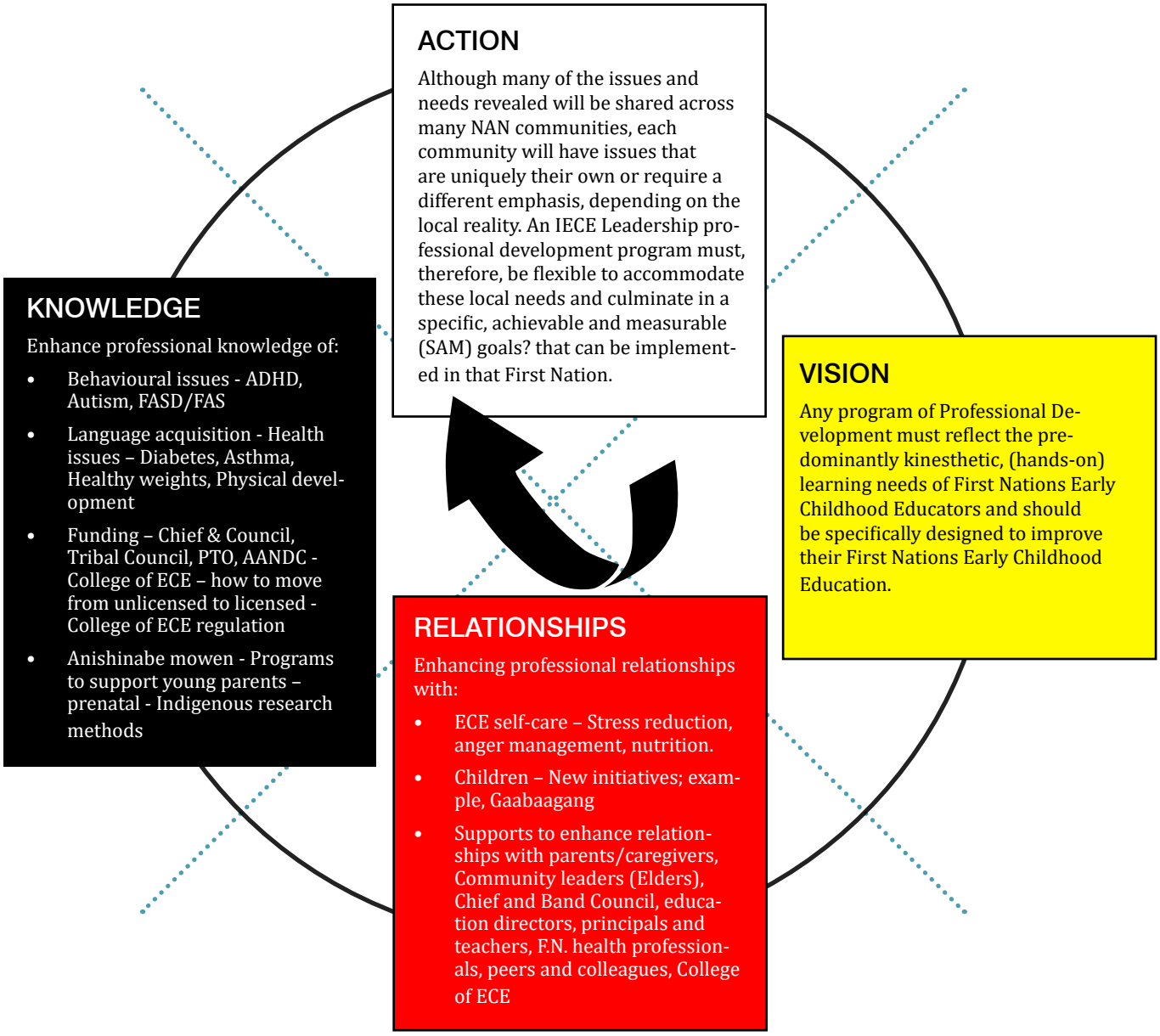

Figure 2: Results of Needs Assessment Wildfire Talking Circle held April 2, 2017 with Indigenous Early Childhood Educators, 2017 Cohort

The IECELPDP students were all recruited from the Oshki-Wenjack IECE alumni. Although some IECEs were part of the needs assessment study, others joined from previous cohorts and included students from the first IECE graduating class in 2010. The program was initially funded to cover 22 IECEs, but the response has been overwhelming, and Oshki-Wenjack expanded the program to 28 students, with a significant waiting list of others wanting to enroll. Some students signed on from remote First Nations, and Oshki-Wenjack discussed with the Elder ways to create a portfolio that was as inclusive of culture and language as those of the educators on-reserve.

Each educator in the group of First Nations students is working in the early learning sector on-reserve in sites that include schools, Aboriginal Head Start, and some licensed childcare centres. Many of the IECELPDP students occupy the supervisor position at these sites. The program's student population is bilingual; approximately 60% have

a first language of Oji-Cree, Cree, or Ojibway, with English as the second language

Professional Learning Model and Approach

The five-month IECELPDP is a unique delivery model that allows students to study at home in their communities while working and raising their families. The program started with E-learning sessions in November 2017 that ran until February 2018 (Figure 3). The E-learning component is a series of 10 E-lessons that are spread over 18 weeks; a course system management program (Moodle) was used to create a web-based course site to supplement the teaching. The E-learning portion of the program is referenced as the preparatory work for the on-campus, one-week session. Students received teaching and readings with assignments of reflection each week to prepare them for the one-week on-campus session. Figure 4 shows the preparatory portion schedule, which includes the student evaluation. Figure 5 shows the on-campus schedule. Both schedules provide the reader with an overview of the complete five-month ECELPDP model and approach.

Figure 3: E-learning Session: November 1, 2017 with Brenda Mason, Oshki-Wenjack Campus Elder and Lori Huston, IECE Program Coordinator

The preparatory portion of the program allows students to start the learning and reflection needed for the on-campus session. The on-campus session was a full week of learning with a variety of topics.

An email from a student enrolled in the IECE leadership program after the first week of the E-learning session read, "Thank you so much for providing this education opportunity! Looking forward to the discussions, meeting some new people, and providing insight into where Early Childhood Education in our communities will go." (Personal communication, 2017) The vision and excitement in the student's email reinforced the leadership committee's goal to facilitate actionable change in the communities and connect the First Nations communities to the provincial endeavors in the ECE sector. As well, it acknowledges that the IECELPDP can promote value and further interest in continuous education for the participants.

Research Services provided by Maamaawisiiwin Education Research Centre

In the first year, there will be a further study that includes qualitative design based on the Wildfire Talking Circle methods, with specific emphasis on IECE experiences to determine the effectiveness of the program. Participation will be completely voluntary, and participants may decline to answer questions and choose to withdraw at any time. All information collected related to the participants will be destroyed, and no penalty or loss of benefit will occur if participants withdraw.

In the second year, the research will include summative analysis to assess the impact of the IECELPDP at the community level. This element of the research is a separate proposal in spring 2018 that the leadership committee will submit when the opportunity arises. Publication of the final report will be through the Oshki-Wenjack website in summer 2018.

Potential Benefits of Indigenous ECE Leadership Professional Development

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.

Their communities lack services needed "Around one-third of First Nations People (29.2%) were 14 years of age or younger in 2016" (Statcan.gc.ca, 2018). A Senate committee heard from Kelly Crawford, Director Anishabek 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 is in the discussion of the federal legislation known as Bill C-61 (Francis, 2017).

The IECE students enrolled in the Leadership Professional Development Program will receive language teachings in puppetry to assist in teaching the language in childcare centres, gain culture and traditions that can be embedded in all curriculum, and end the week with a drum social. The spirit of all teachings will travel back to the communities to affect change. The role of the IECEs in their communities is significant and unique to each community.

As program coordinator, I truly believe that leadership starts with relationships. All the IECE students enrolled in the program based on the foundation of relationships developed over the years; the educational leaders involved in the program started with the same basis of relationships. The IECE students have the links in their communities to continue to move in their leadership journey. The students are committed to their on-going work to bring actionable

WEEK 1: NOVEMBER 1ST, 2017 **Centra Class Wednesday** 8pm – 10pm (EST) Thunder Bay	**Centra - Leadership - Lori Huston, RECE & Brenda Mason, Elder** Creating an Indigenous Continuous Professional Learning (CPL) Portfolio Self Assessment tool and Survey Reading: 2017 Code of Ethics & Standards of Practice and ECE College CPL Handbook
WEEK 2: NOVEMBER 8TH, 2017 **Centra Class Wednesday** 8pm – 10pm (EST) Thunder Bay	**Centra - online - Dr. J. Hodson & Brenda Mason, Elder** **Beginning with Us: Turning Our Eyes Inward** Reading: Memory Comes Before Knowledge, Eber Hampton.
WEEK 3: NOVEMBER 15TH, 2017 **Centra Class Wednesday** 8pm- 10pm (EST) Thunder Bay	**Centra - online - Dr. J. Hodson & Brenda Mason, Elder** **Indigenous Research Disasters: A Post Mortem** Reading: Aboriginal Epistemology, Willie Ermine.
WEEK 4: NOVEMBER 22ND, 2017 **Centra Class Wednesday** 8pm- 10pm (EST) Thunder Bay	**Centra - online - Dr. J. Hodson & Brenda Mason, Elder** **Indigenous Research Ethics** Reading: Digging in the Roots of Research Ethics, Lila Guterman. **Assignment:** Demonstrate understanding of Indigenous research ethics by completing the online Tri-Council Policy Statement 2 Tutorial Course on Research Ethics. (Available at http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/education/tutorial-didacticiel/).
WEEK 5: NOVEMBER 29TH, 2017 **Centra Class Wednesday** 8pm- 10pm (EST) Thunder Bay	**Centra - online - Dr. J. Hodson & Brenda Mason, Elder** **Looking to the Past** Reading: Taking Down the Walls: Communities & Educational Research in Canada's 21st Century, Celia Haig-Brown.
WEEK 6: JANUARY 10TH, 2018 **Centra Class Wednesday** 8pm – 10pm (EST) Thunder Bay	**Centra - Leadership - Lori Huston, RECE & Brenda Mason, Elder** Looking at (4) academic journal articles on leader development in ECE with a literature review. Review the TRC Calls to action Teaching Lesson: Defining the Indigenous RECE leader in themselves.
WEEK 7: JANUARY 24TH, 2018 **Centra Class Wednesday** 8pm – 10pm (EST) Thunder Bay	**Centra - online - Dr. J. Hodson & Brenda Mason, Elder** **Feeling Your Way Through Your Innovation** Reading: Medicine Wheel as a Planning Tool, John Hodson.
WEEK 8: JANUARY 31ST, 2018 **Centra Class Wednesday** 8pm – 10pm (EST) Thunder Bay	**Centra - online - Dr. J. Hodson & Brenda Mason, Elder** **Where Are We & Where Do We Go from Here?** Readings: Indigenous Social Innovation, John Hodson. The Journey Together Needs Assessment & Proposal, Government of Ontario.
WEEK 9: FEBRUARY 6TH, 2018 Thunder Bay	**Moodle - Leadership** individual learning Plan – Part 2 that supports making the connection between goals and learning activities for the on-campus session
WEEK 10: MARCH 7TH, 2018 **No Centra Class - Wrap up will be emailed and put on Moodle**	**Moodle - Leadership - Lori Huston, RECE** Detailed summary and conclusions of leadership program. (Wrap up) this will be outlined in an email to all participates.

Figure 4: IECELPDP E-learning Schedule

	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	Innovation 101 John Hudson	Healthy Together Family Support (FT)	Special Needs Training	KERC Language total response	KERC Language Puppetry
10:00 am 12:00 pm	Building Skills for Change Olivia Chow	Building Skills for Change Olivia Chow	Innovation 101 John Hudson	Healthy Together Family Support (FT)	Special Needs Training	KERC Language total 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 pm	Building Skills for Change Olivia Chow	Building Skills for Change Olivia Chow	Talking Circle Nadine & Brenda	Healthy Together Family Support (FT)	(U of T) Now Play project	Head Start Resource & Tool Kit	KERC Language Puppetry
3:30 pm 4:00 pm	Elder Closing Brenda Mason	AECEO Memberships Elder Closing	Elder Closing	Elder Closing Brenda Mason	Elder Closing Brenda Mason	Elder Closing Brenda Mason Drum Social & Feast	Elder Closing Brenda Mason

Figure 5: On-campus IECELPDP Schedule at Oshki-Wenjack
Anishininiiwi awaashishiiw kihkinohamaakewi niikaanihtamaakew
Sunday, February 11th to Saturday February 17th, 2018.

change to benefit the children and families in the Ontario First Nations communities. In addition, the IECELPDP has provided all participants with membership in the AECEO to allow for ongoing support; all participants in the training are now members, or in the process of registering, with the College of ECE.

Oshki-Wenjack is first out of the gate with developing an Indigenous in-service professional development for educators from early childhood programs living in the First Nations Communities.

My 20 years of ECE experiences have been with Indigenous children and educators. I have determined that Indigenous children and Indigenous educators need a different approach to learning and teaching. The study reported in this article demonstrates how such an approach can be developed and implemented with a deep commitment to Indigenous ways of learning and knowing.

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Acknowledgments

Thanks are due to Elder Brenda Mason, Dr. J. Hodson, Nadine Hedican, Marilyn Junnila, the Indigenous educators and the reviewers for their helpful input.

Slate of Nominations for the 2018-2019 AECEO Provincial Board of Directors

Board Profiles

Profiles of the Nominees for the 2018-2019 Provincial Board of Directors

PRESIDENT

Brooke Richardson M.A., Ph.D., RECE

Brooke Richardson is a part-time faculty member in the Early Childhood Studies program at Ryerson University. She completed her B.A. and M.A. in Early Childhood Studies and a Ph.D. in Policy Studies at Ryerson. Her research has focused on the childcare advocacy movement, the devaluation of care in neoliberal political climates as well as the representation of childcare in mainstream media. As an educator of prospective early childhood educators, Brooke is dedicated to engaging and inspiring her students to make the critical connections between the current state of childcare in Canada and public policy at all levels of government. Central to this goal is supporting prospective ECEs to advocate for the professional wages and working conditions they deserve. She and her students initiated the Ryerson Student Childcare Advocacy Association which provides a platform for prospective ECEs to voice their hopes and concerns about childcare policy changes in Toronto, Ontario and Canada. Brooke also is an early childhood music educator (certified in Suzuki, Orff, Kodaly and Dalcroze) and a mother of 4 young children. Brooke is motivated by her belief that high quality, affordable childcare, delivered by a well compensated professional workforce, is necessary to actualize women and children's basic rights.

TREASURER

Shannon Sveda MA, RECE

Shannon Sveda has a diploma in early childhood education from Sheridan College. She also completed Bachelor and Master of Arts degrees in early childhood studies at Ryerson University.

Shannon is passionate about supporting Early Childhood Educators in their pursuit of professional learning, with a special interest in their pursuit of a reflective and intentional practice. As such, her Master's research focused on blogging in a virtual learning community as a form of continuous professional learning.

Over the past decade Shannon has had the opportunity to work in a variety of early childhood education and care settings, including licensed child care, early intervention, and post-secondary education. Most recently Shannon has shifted her professional focus to engaging children and their families outdoors, through Nature Play experiences (suitedandbooted.ca). She is also involved in the ECE community as the alumni relations chair of the Ryerson Early Childhood Studies MA Alumni Association, and through social media as @CanadianECE.

SECRETARY

Alana Powell RECE, HBA, MA-ECS Candidate

Alana Powell is an RECE and holds an HBA in Political Science from the University of Toronto. She is currently completing the MA in Early Childhood Studies program at Ryerson University. Alana's commitment to advocating for ECEs and childcare in Ontario was reinforced by her experiences working in the field at a non-profit community-based childcare centre. She believes the ECE workforce's knowledge and experience is crucial in achieving informed policy change in Ontario. She is committed to building the collective voice of ECEs and looks forward to continuing to work with the ECE community across the province and supporting the important work of the AECEO.

MEMBERS-AT-LARGE

Laura Coulman RECE, MSC, Ph.D. Candidate

Laura Coulman has been a proud ECE since graduating from Ryerson's Early Childhood Education program in the early 1990s. She completed her MSc in Child Studies at the University of Guelph and is a PhD candidate examining disability and early childhood education legislation. She knows that the AECEO can play an important role in unlocking the potential of early childhood education as a truly integrated entity of education; an entity in which RECEs are highly valued practitioners who design, lead, and deliver the system that serves young children in Ontario. Laura believes that moving early childhood education programs beyond their current format of being overly-privatized and often inadequately planned; tenuously funded; and inequitably delivered, to a totally new and completely remodeled system for all is not utopian thinking. For Laura, the system re-design that is still needed should be made by early childhood educators – and, for her, it just makes sense that the AECEO, as the professional association of RECEs in Ontario, continues to lead the way in carving out this path.

Nicole Cummings RECE, B.A.SC.

Nicole Cummings is a RECE who graduated from Seneca College of Applied Arts & Technology. After years of working in a variety of child care positions, her love for learning lead her to Guelph-Humber for a B.A.Sc. in Child Studies where she recently graduated. As she embarks on a new journey of learning in the OISE's Masters of Child Studies program, she is confident that all of this learning will be beneficial to her role as an AECEO board member. As a workshop facilitator, she has been able to share information with parents on the importance of their role as their child's first advocate, and she encourages their responsibility to join our fight for Universal Child Care in Ontario. As a board member she is also dedicated to reaching as many ECE's with the many reasons why, 'ECE'S ARE EXCELLENT!' and why standing together to achieve professional pay will be the best way to get it!

Ruth Houston RECE, AECEO.C, BCD, MA

Ruth Houston is a long standing certified member of the AECEO and an active member of the Early Learning community in York Region. Issues of public advocacy pertaining to universal, accessible, not-for-profit and inclusive childcare, professionalization and compensation for RECEs are topics of great interest. Ruth has served on many committees within York Region including the Early Years Steering Committee, Enhanced Funding Standing Committee, School Age and Quality Assurance Subcommittees of the Child & Family Collaborative. She was the chair of the York Branch of the AECEO for many years and remains committed to the work of the AECEO. Ruth provides professional development and consulting services to early learning programs and has a solid understanding of the changes occurring in the early learning and care sector.

Amy O'Neil, B.A., RECE

Amy has been involved with children and families for over 25 years in both Montreal and Toronto and is a passionate advocate for children and those who care for them. Through lived experience, Amy's commitment to social and economic justice is both personal and political. A mother of four and a vocal advocate for childcare, Amy is often deputing on behalf of low income working parents on child care issues. She believes passionately in social justice and quality in early childhood settings and strongly supports decent work for RECE's.

After receiving her B.A. in Educational Studies with Honors specializing in Child Studies from Concordia University she began practice directly with young children and their families as an Early Childhood Educator in Montreal. She understands the dynamic of the early childhood environment and has extensive experience in community development and capacity building. Amy aspires to work with the AECEO in strategic planning and collaborative leadership. As a Manager of Child Care with St. Stephen's Community House she is at the forefront of leading the agency in its mission to inspire, inform and advocate for a quality, affordable and accessible child care system that supports all families in Ontario. She is a Board member of the Toronto Coalition for Better Child Care, has served as a Director on a child care Board of Directors, and works in varying capacities in the early learning sector in Toronto including sitting on committees with Toronto Children's Services and the TDSB. She is excited to share her commitment to child and family advocacy and her experience of successful, non-profit, front-line and management experience in child care with the AECEO.

Jenn Wallage, B.A.A., RECE, RC

Jenn Wallage has been an Early Childhood Educator since graduating from the ECE Diploma program at Conestoga College over 20 years ago. From Conestoga she went to Ryerson Polytechnic University, graduating with her Bachelor of Applied Arts in Early Childhood Education. While at Ryerson she earned her designation in Special Needs, as well as a minor in Public Administration. Throughout the various roles in the early childhood sector that Jenn has held, she has been a strong advocate for the profession of Early Childhood Education. She has worked in various capacities, including classroom educator, Ontario Early Years programs, Resource Consultant and is currently employed with a school board as a Designated Early Childhood Educator. Although, Jenn is currently holding a position outside of the Kindergarten classroom – as a Union Local President representing over 650 DECEs. Jenn is very involved at the Local and Provincial levels with her Union. This involvement is what led her to become involved with the AECEO, collaborating and advocating for the profession of Early Childhood Education. Jenn unconditionally feels that we, as RECEs, are all part of the same entity, regardless of what setting our career places us in. She would love to see the work of the AECEO continue to advocate for the profession, recognizing the unique concerns and issues in the various settings RECEs work. Jenn wholeheartedly believes that growing support from all areas would benefit the Early Childhood Education profession as we are all on the same side, no matter the setting our career as an RECE places us in.

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