

# Awakening and Coming to Know Indigenous Pedagogies in Early Learning

As Elder Brenda shared her teachings and wisdom with the Truth and Reconciliation guiding committee on *Awakening and Coming to Know Indigenous Pedagogies in Early Learning* she reminds us of the value and ways of knowing. As Elder Brenda shared, educators gain the knowledge that “coming to know” is a perspective of the non-Indigenous and “awakening the knowledge” is a perspective of the Indigenous educators. Indigenous educators will have an awakening and further connections to Indigenous pedagogies as they experience new learning and reclaim their histories and stories that were stolen by Canada’s colonial practices. The experience we have from receiving the teachings is how you will share your understanding of them and practice them further. Elder Brenda shares when we experience the teachings, you can then share the story to young children and others connected to your heart, but only from your experience. It is essential to take seriously the responsibility for mindfully and purposefully introducing the Indigenous teachings to others. Indigenous pedagogies are all connected to oral storytelling within the community. Indigenous educators and Elders always call on knowledge keepers in their communities to share their gifts and teachings with children and families. Educators, both non-Indigenous and Indigenous, would invite in Elders and knowledge keepers to share in early learning and child care environments. Elders and knowledge keepers have gifts that are unique to them that they received through visions and ceremony.

As ECEs, we strive to find a way to support and share diverse knowledges and pedagogies in all early learning and child care programs. We want to remind

all educators of the *Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework*. Every decision we make in our professional learning journey can invite us to think with new ideas or tell a story that informs our core values that we uphold and hold close to our hearts.

“The shared framework for what is a truly transformative path forward focused on fostering a network of supports for the unique aspirations and needs of Indigenous communities, families and their children. The Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework is, and will continue to be, a shared journey towards transformation — in the spirit of partnership, respect and reconciliation” (Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework, 2018, p. 6).

## ***Elder Brenda Mason shares a teaching that supports Indigenous children’s ways of learning:***

Many years ago, I heard different stories about how the children grew up before the settlers arrived in this part of the land. And the stories I believed in because my dad used to tell us stories in great detail, such as a story about when he got lost in the woods and what he did to find his way out. He described what he did. The steps he took gave me the knowledge of what to do if I should get lost in the woods. That was his way of educating and training me on what to do if I should get lost.

When I talked the other night about education and training, I recalled a story about how the children

were educated and trained. I heard this story several times while I worked with the Elders.

This story is about the boys. When the boys reached a certain age, they were prepared to go for their vision quest. The Elders prepared the boys with stories, teachings, and certain ceremonies. The boys went into the woods for about 4 days and nights alone. When they received their vision, they returned to the Elder. They shared their vision at their choice with the Elder, and then a ceremony was performed with teachings, stories, and guidance. Then the boys are sent home to their parents and allowed to continue playing, exploring, and growing. In their life process, the more indirect way they are educated and trained into their adulthood. A time comes when they realize they are living their purpose. As they grew up, an Elder recognized the boy's gift(s) and provided guidance, education, and training in direct and indirect ways.

So, we as adults need to continue to explore and grow with our purpose, and we can find different ways of doing this. With training, we have an opportunity to add, increase, enhance and grow. Then we can share this with the children in play, exploration, and creation by following their lead.



## Ontario Aboriginal Head Start Association

The Ontario Aboriginal Head Start Association is pleased to announce we have launched an innovative Indigenous Professional Learning Project.

The Ontario Aboriginal Head Start Association will provide high-quality, culturally relevant professional learning opportunities for First Nation, Métis and Inuit early years professionals in the broad spectrum of urban Indigenous communities and organizations

across Ontario. Learning opportunities will focus on how Indigenous worldview intersects with current early years practices emphasizing First Nation, Métis, and Inuit epistemologies, pedagogies and leadership.

Our intent through using innovative modalities is to offer professional learning opportunities through online sessions, virtual gatherings, pre-recorded modules and learning guides to empower urban early years professionals in incorporating local Indigenous knowledges and envisioning leadership strategies in early years environments.

### ***The Ontario Aboriginal Head Start Association Indigenous Professional Learning Project will offer:***

#### **Knowledge Exchange Gatherings**

Knowledge Exchange gatherings will highlight the knowledge of Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and early years professionals across the province. Each gathering will focus on ways to incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing and being in early years environments.

#### **Roles, Responsibilities, and Leadership in Indigenous Early Childhood Education**

This guide will highlight First Nation, Métis, and Inuit worldview regarding roles, responsibilities, and leadership in early years environments. This guide will showcase the intersections between the College of Early Childhood Educators *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice for Registered Early Childhood Educators in Ontario* (2017) and Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

First Nation, Métis, and Inuit perspectives will be shared via text, art, and videos.

## Walking with Indigenous Pedagogy

Walking with Indigenous Pedagogy is an interactive guide developed to encourage early years professionals to reflect on their current practice and connect the foundations of *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years* and local Indigenous (First Nation, Métis, and Inuit) pedagogies.

## Moving Forward...

We ask that you confront your previously held assumptions that are influenced by the dominant discourses of the Indigenous child and family. We ask that you reflect, explore, read, learn, and build relationships to gain new understandings when possible.

### Questions to consider...

- 1) How can we empower children to be active participants and co-constructors in learning?
- 2) What helps educators to explore Indigenous pedagogies in greater depth and integrate the understandings into your existing repertoire of knowledge?
- 3) What can we do to promote equity and justice within play-based learning, in our early learning space?
- 4) How are we as educators giving space for children to reenact their lived experiences in the child care environments?
- 5) How can we bridge home and school and bring all funds of knowledge into the child care environments?
- 6) How can educators access funds of knowledge and become more inclusive of family and community practices from Indigenous cultures?
- 7) Using concepts of funds of knowledge how do we see children including cultural practices into their play with other children?
- 8) How do you think that your personal experiences influence your perspectives and interactions as an educator?

The committee wants to give gratitude to all educators for the many innovative practices to meet the challenges in the present times. Indigenous educators are invited to join the Guiding Committee, if you are interested please reach out to [info@aeceo.ca](mailto:info@aeceo.ca) and please share with others who might be interested in joining.

Stay safe and be well.

Miigwech, Meegwetch, Merci, Thank you to our readers.

On behalf of the AECEO Guiding Committee and Truth & Reconciliation, Lori Huston led this submission providing insights and collaborations with Elder Brenda Mason, Shannon Murphy, and Lyndsay Macdonald.

### References

- Government of Canada (2018). Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework. Online, retrieved 08 September 2019. <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/indigenous-early-learning/2018-framework.html>
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). Truth and reconciliation commission of Canada: Calls to action. Winnipeg, MB
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