A Generative Curriculum Model of Child and Youth Care Training Through First Nations-University Partnerships

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Introduction

This article describes an initiative involving over 50 First Nations communities in Canada to strengthen their capacities to meet the developmental needs of children and families. Working through their respective tribal or band councils, these communities initiated partnerships with the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria in order to co-deliver university-accredited, career-laddered, community-based training that has enabled them to introduce and operate new programs for children and families. Emphasizing the retention and reinforcement of cultural values and traditional languages, these partnerships have demonstrated the use of a Generative Curriculum Model in which indigenous knowledge and practices figure centrally. Elders and other respected community members participate with students, instructors, and a university-based team to co-construct a curriculum in child and youth development and care leading to a university diploma in the professional discipline of Child and Youth Care and, where applicable, provincial certification in Early Childhood Education.

The First Nations community goals, professional orientation, pedagogical principles, and practical outcomes of this innovative training initiative are described in turn in this article. The unique combination of perspective and approach that distinguishes the profession of child and youth care is illustrated with reference to community participant's experiences of training in this field. The evolution of a Generative Curriculum Model for co-construction of training concepts and skills through a socially inclusive, bicultural process is highlighted. The article concludes with a brief look at findings from evaluation of these training initiatives. This article conveys a sense of the enhanced social cohesion, cultural revitalization, and demonstrated commitment to children and youth in the participating communities that community members have reported as a result of their initiation and involvement in the child and youth care training partnerships.

Background

There have been eight programs of child and youth care training delivered through partnerships with a team in the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria, involving the cooperation of fifty-five First Nations communities in Saskatchewan and British Columbia. The participating communities have all been located on reserves. They have ranged from 90 to 1700 people and have been located in rural areas, with one exception: Cowichan Tribes has been the largest community partner to date, with a population of 3456 people located in a small urban setting. Five of the eight partnerships have involved groupings of several neighboring communities represented by an administrative council or steering committee that initiated and coordinated the partnership with the University of Victoria. Four of these groupings combined people with different First Nations cultures and languages. Thus, there were partnering at the community level embedded within the broader community-institution partnerships.

Institutional partners have included the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria in every partnership, and local university-colleges and indigenous post-secondary institutions in three partnerships, including Malaspina University College, located on the reserve lands of the Cowichan Tribes, Nicola Valley Institute of Technology, and Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies.

Child and youth care training as an approach to community development

Most First Nations in Canada are actively moving towards a vision of economic development, positive community health, and social development that includes a substantial measure of control through their own agency and actions. The First Nations that have initiated partnerships to co-deliver child and youth care training have prioritized the goal of strengthening capacity among community members to mount and operate accessible, safe, and culturally consistent care for children and youth in their communities as part of larger human resource development agendas.

We realized that if we wanted to develop economically, we first had to develop our human resources, because development must come from the inside, not the outside (Veto Bachis, Programs and Policy Director, Meadow Lake Tribal Council).
Many First Nations in Canada have linked improvement of developmental conditions for children to the reconstruction of their cultural identity, revitalization of intergenerational transmission of culture and traditional language, and reproduction of culturally distinctive values and practices in programs for children and youth. Our recommendations emphasize the importance of protecting children through culturally appropriate services, by attending to maternal and child health, by providing appropriate early childhood education, and by making high quality child care available, all with the objective of complementing the families role in nurturing young children (Canadian Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Vol. 5, Ch. 1, s4.1.)

Like many indigenous people around the globe, the First Nations involved in the partnership programs were seeking to strengthen capacity among community members to plan, operate, and monitor programs for children and youth that were consistent with their cultural values and that enhanced positive cultural and community identity. The First Nations of the Meadow Lake Tribal Council believe that a childcare program developed, administered and operated by their own people is a vital component to their vision of sustainable growth and development. It impacts every sector of their long-term plans as they prepare to enter the twenty-first century. It will be children who inherit the struggle to retain and enhance the people's culture, language and history, who continue the quest for economic progress for a better quality of life, and who move forward with a strengthened resolve to plan their own destiny (Meadow Lake Tribal Council Vision Statement, 1989).

In many First Nations, generations of people do not know their own culture of origin or their traditional language, and their identities as members of a cultural community have been fragmented. Reams of poignant testimony have been collected in many different venues across Canada describing the suffering of First Nations parents, children and communities as a result of a century of enforced residential schooling (Barman, 1996; Barry, 1995; Kirkness, 1992; Ng, 2000; Timpson, 1993), child welfare practices (Fournier & Grey, 1997), Children s Aid Societies (Hudson & McKenzie, 1981; Johnston, 1983), the Indian Act (Assembly of First Nations, 1994), the complicity of the social work profession (Hardin, 1994), and other helping services deemed by government and non-government organizations, at the time, to be in the best interests of Canada's Aboriginal people (Assembly of First Nations, 1994).

Although the long era of enforced residential schooling for Aboriginal children in Canada is now over, its negative impacts on self-concept, parenting, social cohesion, and the inter-generational transmission of traditional language and culture remain (Barman, 1996; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1993). Many investigators have documented the links between these long-term psychosocial challenges and various expressions of psychological disturbance, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and suicidality (Birrer, Robinson, Sibbald, & Leber, 1993; Ing, 2000; Lederman, 1999). Representatives of the First Nations that have initiated training in early childhood education have anticipated, quite accurately, that involvement in the program would be part of a healing journey for the participating communities as a whole.

We never got any teachings when we were young, because we were raised in residential school. The Elders gave us their teaching, and their words helped us to become better parents. I learned from the Elders in this program how to raise my daughter and how to forgive (Sandra George, Program Graduate, Cowichan Tribes).

Goals for child and youth care initiatives: Representatives of First Nations communities that initiated training partnerships shared common goals for supporting community members to obtain relevant training in child and youth care as follows:

1. To provide out-of-home care for children that would enable parents to pursue education, training, and employment.
2. To create child and youth care programs on reserves that would provide job opportunities for community members.
3. To provide developmentally stimulating, culturally reinforcing programs of care for the youngest generation in order to secure the well-being of the community’s future parents, cultural leaders, and work force.
4. To include culture and traditional language in child care programs in order to sustain cultural knowledge, identity, and traditional language in the youngest generation.
Exploring a distinctive approach to nurturing First Nations' childhood development and learning is as much about finding ways to both celebrate and challenge the assumptions made about the First Nations' identity and culture. It is about transforming the way we understand and respect the cultural diversity of First Nations students. This approach seeks to build on the strengths and experiences of First Nations communities, recognizing the importance of indigenous knowledge systems and traditional ways of learning.

A case study of the Generative Curriculum Model, developed by Dr. Sharon W. Penney and colleagues, illustrates how this approach can be applied in educational settings. The Generative Curriculum Model is based on the premise that education should be designed to foster the cultural, spiritual, and intellectual growth of First Nations students.

The model emphasizes the importance of incorporating First Nations' cultural knowledge, values, and practices into the curriculum. It recognizes that education is not just about acquiring academic knowledge but also about understanding and appreciating the cultural heritage of First Nations communities.

Incorporating First Nations' cultural knowledge and experiences into the curriculum is essential for creating an inclusive and culturally responsive learning environment. This approach helps to address the educational needs of First Nations students by providing them with a sense of belonging and identity.

The Generative Curriculum Model is implemented through a variety of strategies, including community-based learning, traditional knowledge sharing, and collaborative teaching practices. These strategies help to build strong partnerships between First Nations communities and educators, ensuring that the curriculum is culturally relevant and responsive to the needs of First Nations students.

In conclusion, exploring a distinctive approach to nurturing First Nations' childhood development and learning is about finding ways to celebrate and challenge the assumptions made about First Nations' identity and culture. It is about transforming the way we understand and respect the cultural diversity of First Nations students. By incorporating First Nations' cultural knowledge and experiences into the curriculum, we can create an inclusive and culturally responsive learning environment that fosters the cultural, spiritual, and intellectual growth of First Nations students.
order to create a uniquely tailored ECE program within the broader context of the School of Child and Youth Care. This had the advantage that, over time, the program could expand to incorporate some training in caring for school-aged children and adolescence, while retaining an emphasis on caring for infants and preschool children.

Focus on Early Childhood Education All of the First Nations that have participated in partnership programs to date have similarly sought training that particularly prepares community members to address the needs of very young children (0 to 6 years). They have emphasized prevention and early intervention strategies to ensure optimal developmental outcomes before problems develop. Steps taken in these communities have been aimed at promoting healthy, safe, and socially supported pregnancies, parenting, nutrition, stimulation, and environments for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Most of the partnering communities have aimed for and successfully achieved the establishment of licensed childcare facilities, supervised and staffed by their own trained community members.

What are the distinctive features of child and youth care training and practice? Child and youth care training incorporates some of the assumptions, concepts, and skills found in allied human service fields, notably those that have a strong emphasis on prevention and early intervention activities. Rather than being primarily clinic-based, professional training in these fields all try to prepare students to work with people in their natural settings in the community (Ferguson, Pence, & Denholm, 1993; Rose, 1991). Key features that tend to distinguish training and practice in child and youth care from other closely related fields have been articulated by Anglin (1999), a leader in the development of child and youth care as a profession. Although practitioners within human service fields vary in their approaches and there is a risk of over-simplifying the differences between fields, there are some distinctive tendencies that characterize the field of child and youth care. These are listed and illustrated here with reference to commentaries of First Nations graduates of the community-based partnership programs in child and youth care.

1. Child and youth care is based primarily on a developmental perspective, focusing on the conditions and processes that are likely to lead to optimal developmental outcomes.

I share what I learn in this program with my daughter so that she can understand that her son has his own way of thinking and his own ways of trying to communicate - that children go through all kinds of stages when what they need is different. This is something I didn’t know when I raised her. Now she and I are learning how to...

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really play with my grandson so that he enjoys and learns and is challenged but not frustrated! Now we understand why he has a whole room full of toys he never plays with! (Anne Roberts, T1 at en Nation).

2. Child and youth care is holistic in scope, focusing, on understanding, appreciating, and supporting all aspects of a child’s experiences and growth.

Everything fell into place because of the training I had. I feel like the whole world opened up to me. And you can see that in what all the members of our class are doing now. One is working at women’s transition home, one is working with youth in the area of restorative justice, one is a family counsellor, one works in program administration at the Tribal Council, and here I am being director of this daycare (Margaret Lambert, Program Graduate, Flying Dust First Nation).

3. Child and youth care is goal or solution-oriented, directly focusing more on ways to build on existing strengths and resources than on ways to minimize risks and treat problems.

There is so much in the culture that is good and that leads to goodness, if only we pass this on to our children. We haven’t been doing enough of that, and this program opens up a new road for us to go down with our children, so that they will know whom they are and the strength of the culture they are born into that’s their birth right (Lawrence Trotter, Intergenerational Facilitator, Onion Lake First Nation).

4. Child and youth care training, practice, and research is grounded in direct interactions with children and their families, although advocacy and action at the level of administration, policy making, legal proceedings, and other indirect action may be engaged in to promote developmental supports for children and youth.

Being with children is the heart of this program and this profession, to me. Children are pure energy. It’s like they are new people, new spirits. If we can help them become the whole people that they are, and help them find their place in our world, then they’ll teach this to their children,

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5. Child and youth care is about the expression of personal caring in the development of relationships with children, their caregivers, and communities, and as such involves enhanced self-awareness and readiness for accountable interpersonal interactions.

I love to work with children. It is healing for me to be with them, and to be guided by my Elders in how to care for children. The Elders have taught me to be patient with children, and I'm a better parent and I'm better at caring for myself because of what they have taught me (Lorna Brouere, Program Graduate, Mount Currie First Nation).

The Generative Curriculum Model as a distinctive approach to child and youth care training

The Generative Curriculum Model is an approach to strengthening capacities to achieve community-identified goals, using a bicultural, constructive teaching and learning process. This educational approach complements the professional orientation of child and youth care. The model grew out of the first partnership program involving the Meadow Lake Tribal Council and Alan Pence at the University of Victoria (Pence & McCallum, 1994). It is as much a paradigm as a model, in that: (a) it is founded on a particular set of post-modernist, anti-colonialist assumptions (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999) and (b) it articulates a set of principles for guiding thought and action which, when enacted in concert, yield a distinctive valuation of ways of knowing and a distinctive set of relationships among knowers and known individuals. Details of the nature and delivery of training using the Generative Curriculum Model are described elsewhere (Pence, 1999; Pence & Ball, 1999). For the present purposes, the principles of the Generative Curriculum Model are described, along with commentaries by First Nations community partners who have lived the model.

1. Support community goals and initiative in a community-based setting

Being responsive to First Nations communities means more than letting community members voice their concerns or preferences, more than acknowledging diversity, and more than arranging a welcoming environment on mainstream campuses to accommodate native students who are able to leave their communities to attend them. The experiences of the partnership programs have underscored the need to open up the foundations of how human service training programs are conceived and delivered, and how communities can play leading roles in capacity-building initiatives. Institutional partners and community leaders themselves must be scrupulous about not being pre-emptive and not overwhelming the community with imported goods and services from outside their own context that are out of step with their own internal rhythm and pace.

It's important to be community-paced as well as community-based. And we learned this in this program. As administrators of the Tribal Council, we could not risk getting out too far in front of the communities. They had to come to the place of knowing that this is what they wanted and this is how they planned to get there. Only then could we initiate contact with the university and expect a partnership to succeed (Mack McCallum, Administrator, Meadow Lake Tribal Council).

2. Draw upon community and individual strengths

Many First Nations are well acquainted with deficit-oriented approaches to human services, such as child protection, speech and language pathology, addictions treatment, and family counselling. These interventions aim to fill gaps, treat pathology and addictions, correct criminally deviant behaviours, repair damaged individuals or families, restore functionality to dysfunctional social structures, or rectify perceived power inequities.

While recognizing a role for these strategies, the communities that have initiated child and youth care partnerships have been seeking training that celebrates positive cultural values, ideas, and practices. They have argued that their traditional cultures and many of their community members have inherent and latent strengths which are often overlooked or unappreciated when the collective gaze is directed primarily towards individual suffering, social disorder, and cultural loss.

We see on the news all these stories of disasters and problems, suicides and gas sniffing among our young, financial miscalculation, alcoholism and violence in our communities. You start to think: isn't there anything good about our communities? But we know that there is a lot of wisdom from experience and a lot of love in First

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3. Promote respect all ways (pluralcurricular inputs)

When the Meadow Lake Tribal Council initiated contact with the University of Victoria, they sought a program that would enable members of the nine constituent Cree and Dene communities to walk in both worlds - to work on or off-reserve, and in native or non-native settings. In the child and youth care training program, students complete five practicum courses, including some supervised training experiences in First Nations programs on reserves and some training in non-native programs.

As a result of the initiative and directives of the community partners, the Generative Curriculum Model evolved in the context of bringing together the worlds of university-accredited knowledge and indigenous knowledge about promoting positive developmental outcomes. Both the knowledge held in the community and knowledge held in the university inform the training program, bringing multiple perspectives into the elaboration of child and youth care models that fit the needs and goals of the First Nations communities. Consistent with the post-modernist stance of the training initiatives, an all ways respectful stance means that no one individual or group asserts authority over others with regards to having a more legitimate claim on the Truth. Instructors agree not to replicate the expert-driven framework of most mainstream education and training programs, and not to preordain exactly where the journey of generating curriculum will lead.

We can consider what mainstream theories say, and if we choose to believe them and use them in our work, that doesn't make us less Indian. And if we choose to assert the importance of our cultural traditions and ways of raising children, that doesn't make us wrong. This program recognizes and encourages this give and take, pick and choose, it doesn't cage us and expect us to act like Europeans – to act as if we're assimilated (Judy Maas, Grand Chief, Treaty 8 Tribal Association).

This all ways respectful principle of the Generative Curriculum Model has captured the bridging dimensions of social inclusion and social cohesion. In practice, the socio-political distance between partnering institutions and First Nations communities has been greatly reduced. Close working relationships between a member of the community-based program delivery team and the university-based program delivery team have formed an essential backbone of each partnership. Accountability in the partnerships is as much about the process of engagement as it is about the content and outcomes of the training curriculum. The curriculum develops
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culture and about the ideas presented in the university-based course materials. Many participants in the partnership programs have observed that the process of constructing the curriculum has had more impact and
value for the community and for the university-based team than the finished
curriculum product. As one community-based instructor remarked: It was a
lived curriculum. Nonetheless, in most partnering First Nations
communities, cultural knowledge that has been reconstructed and elaborated
through the participatory curriculum development process has been
preserved through journals, books, and audio and videotapes. These
materials have been kept within the communities, and have not been
circulated within the university or within other First Nations communities.

5. Focus on the child within a broad ecological perspective

This principle differs from the tendency in social work training and
practice to emphasize more macro-system interventions aimed at redressing
power imbalances and other social inequalities. The field of Child and Youth
Care grew out of a recognition that, while protecting and promoting the
well-being of children and youth requires fairness and equality at the level of
governance, policy, and administrative accountability, there is also a
need for individuals and groups to be skilled in working directly with
individual children and caregivers as they go about their daily lives.
Reflecting this professional focus, students in the training partnerships have
studied and developed community-appropriate ways of promoting optimal
developmental outcomes through caring relationships, programs, and
collaborative actions among those who are directly involved in children’s
daily lives such as family members, teachers, recreation leaders, and

counsellors.

As a result of the participatory approach at all stages of the
planning process, the partnership programs have been effective not only in
training individuals to work directly with children and their caregivers, but
in eliciting broad community participation in child and youth initiatives.
These partnerships have shown that when the community is allowed entry
into the education process and invited to play meaningful roles, the impacts
of the training do not end inside the classroom. Rather, community
members carry the training program with them into the broad ecology of
children’s lives.

6. Provide education and career ladders for students, such that credit
for this coursework will be fully applicable to future study and practice

First Nations are all too familiar with dead end training programs,
which are typically short term, skill-based programs that do not lead to

and builds over the life of the training program with all participants,
including students, instructors, Elders, community members, and the
university-based liaison team as contributors and learners.

I hope people at the university are learning as much from
us as we are learning from them. It’s important for
university lecturers and theorists to listen and learn what
they don’t know about what being Indian means — in this
case, what being Indian means for parents and children
growing up in our communities (Diana Bigfoot,
Education Director, Treaty 8 Tribal Association).

4. Engage in co-construction of a bicultural curriculum, in which
Elders and other community resource people figure prominently

The Generative Curriculum Model involves an open curriculum
that sits in the space between two cultures — the culture of the partnering
university and its Euro-Western based theory, research, and practice, and
the culture or cultures of the partnering First Nations communities. The
University of Victoria brings to the training program a sampling of concepts
and practices from a largely middle-class, white American context in which
mainstream theory and research have been elaborated. The First Nations
community contributes core content to the curriculum of every course,
largely through the teachings of Elders, who play an active role as part of
the teaching and learning community that embodies the program. Elders
speak to various topics pertaining to the development, care, problems, and
needs of children and youth, both historically and currently in their
community. A member of Mount Currie First Nation who also served as an
instructor in the child and youth care program they’re commented:

We don’t have all the answers. In a generative program,
we can enjoy learning about what research on child
development has shown and what methods seem to be
helpful in certain situations. And we can delve further into
our own history and traditions and see how these can help
us with our children (Felicity Nelson, Education
Administrator, Mount Currie First Nation).

In a generative approach, the co-construction of curriculum
through community participation is an iterative process. In no two-
partnership programs has the curriculum been the same. Each partnership
program has yielded a unique, community-specific curriculum that has been
created through interactions among community members about their own

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Nisnaswabe Social Work Journal
transferable academic credits or recognized credentials. At the request of the Window Lake Tribal Council and subsequent First Nations partners, the training program in child and youth care is career ladders. Students step off the program of study after one year, with a certificate in Early Childhood Education, or after two years, with a diploma in Child and Youth Care. In Canada, these credentials enable graduates to pursue employment in a range of human service fields including: child care, learning assistant-e, supportive care for special needs, respite, recreation, and health services coordination. If they choose, graduates can step on the career ladder again, continuing third and fourth-year studies, either through distance education or on-campus courses, leading to a degree in Child and Youth Care.

A distinctive record of success

An evaluation of the partnerships, involving interviews and questionnaires with 240 individuals directly involved in the programs, has provided clear evidence of several distinctive outcomes to date (Ball, 2000). Educational and vocational success Academic completion rates have been more than double the national average among Aboriginal students. Across the seven completed partnership programs to date, 77.3% of students have completed the full two years of university course work leading to a Diploma in Child and Youth Care from the University of Victoria. In contrast to the brain drain that many rural and on-reserve communities have experienced, 95% of program graduates have remained in their own communities to work after program completion. Among these, 65% have introduced new programs for children, youth or families; 13% have joined the staff of existing services; and 11% have continued on the education career ladder, achieving or working towards a university degree. Community-based services initiated or staffed by program graduates include:

- out-of-home, centre-based child care centres
- in-home family daycares
- Aboriginal Head Start
- infant development programs
- home-school liaison programs
- parent support programs
- individualized supported child care for special needs
- language enhancement programs
- youth services
- school-based teacher assistance/learning support
- after-school care programs
- children's programs in women's safe houses

Generative capacity

The term generative capacity building captures the way that participants have experienced the programs as a socially inclusive process that has led to reverberating ripple effects, including the creation of:

- new interpersonal relationships
- new ways of relating between cultural communities and mainstream institutions
- new ways of teaching and learning
- new knowledge
- new or hybrid models for supporting the well being of children and families.

Community mobilization

Community impetus and organization to improve conditions for children and families have been important dimensions of program effectiveness identified by participants. Similarly, program graduates view success not only in terms of their academic achievements, but also in terms of their emerging roles as community advocates and respected resources for family members and friends. Community administrators have reported that the approach of First Nations Partnership Programs supported self-determination in their communities and the quest for renewed capacity at the community level to provide quality child care and development programs that embody First Nations cultural traditions, values and practices.

Social inclusion

Social inclusion describes the links that were strengthened between individuals and groups, including groups external to the community. As an outcome, social inclusion refers to recognition and participation of community members and of university partners in each others venues and in the society at large. Evaluation participants saw creating professional networks and building upon mental learning relationships as an important part of capacity building. The impact of the training partnerships upon social inclusion has been vividly illustrated when program graduates have taken active roles in regional and provincial conferences on Early Childhood Education, Aboriginal Child Care, and Child and Youth Mental Health. Graduates have spoken out on issues of funding for childcare and training, licensing and monitoring of child and youth care facilities, child protection and risk assessment models and practices. Graduates have presented formally on a range of ideas for responding to cultural diversity in child and youth care programs and they have showcased their own innovative programs in order to illustrate the generative process at work.

The central message of participants is that the true indicators of the success of their innovative program efforts are the many ways that their
communities have reawed commitment to sustaining and transmitting cultural values, enhanced social cohesion, and increased capacity to understand and respond to the needs of children and youth. Consistent with the general trend in the child and youth care profession, one key has been to embed child and youth care training within the broad social ecologies of the participating communities. Another key is the Generative Curriculum Model, which opens up the foundations of what counts as valued knowledge and as best practice to make way for renewed and strengthened capacity among emerging service leaders to generate new and synergetic ways to meet their communities' goals for child and youth well-being.

I believe that if I had taken these 17 students and offered the program off reserve, we would have had a success rate of 20 or 25 per cent. So what is the difference? Is it because we offered it here? That's one reason. But I think it is mainly due to the generative curriculum. What that implies to me is more than just a book curriculum, much more than academia. I think it is a total involvement of the community in ways such as bringing in Elders, making the community part of this. The way is offered was unique (Jenny Whistone, Post-secondary Coordinator, Onion Lake First Nation).

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