

Indigenous Approaches to Early Childhood Care and Education: Introduction

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Unless a child learns about the forces which shape him [or her], the history of his [or her] people, their values, their language, he [or she] will never really know himself [or herself] or his [or her] potential as a human being. (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972, p. 9)

This special issue represents a unique contribution to the field of early childhood care and development and to Aboriginal education: The experiences of Indigenous communities from around the world that are working to address the development needs and potentials of their young children. The voices heard are those from Aotearoa/New Zealand, Australia, Canada, Hawaii, and the mainland United States. Although the University of Victoria's School of Child and Youth Care has a history of partnerships with Aboriginal communities that goes back to 1989 (Pence, Kuehne, Greenwood, & Opekokew, 1993; Pence & McCallum, 1994), the more recent impetus for this volume was the school's hosting of an International Perspectives on Indigenous Quality Early Childhood Care and Development Forum in February 2006. Most of the authors who have contributed to this volume participated in that forum (see *Contributors to this Issue* at the end of this edition for a list of forum participants) and agreed that the sharing spirit of the symposium should be reflected in a special issue of an Aboriginal journal.

The idea behind the Indigenous forum was to bring together a small group of early childhood professionals from Indigenous communities around the world to explore our understandings of quality care as it relates to the communities with which we work. We spent several days together sharing our experiences, hope, and understandings, and also mounted a one-day symposium of presentations that was open to the public. The overall aim of the forum was to move beyond the development of an "Indigenous statement of quality" to engage in dialogue that would

allow us to appreciate the diversity that exists across our communities and to examine what this diversity offers for an investigation of issues of quality child care. These conversations were carried out in a convivial, supportive, and positively challenging environment that opened new ways of looking at, understanding, and promoting useful concepts and practices in support of children in their unique community and cultural contexts.

The Indigenous forum was the first in a series that the Investigating Quality (IQ) Project (Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2007) undertook to host in 2006. The series was designed to broaden and deepen understandings of quality care in order for the province of British Columbia to be able to situate its policy, program, and training considerations in some of the most dynamic literatures currently available about the care and development of children. These diverse literatures are relatively little known in Canada and indeed more broadly in North America. North American understandings of care and quality have been dominated by one particular approach or paradigm that is based on a positivist understanding of an objective "truth" that exists outside individual or cultural subjectivity and is knowable through quantitative research approaches. Such instrument-based and numbers-focused research has great appeal for a managerial approach to social services, but denies the diversity inherent in the human experience. This belief in an "objective reality" (not surprisingly reflecting the beliefs and values of dominant forces in society and globally) was challenged and disrupted in most disciplines and professions in the last 40 years of the 20th century, but has only more recently become a significant force in early childhood care and development (Canella, 1997; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2006; Kessler & Swadener, 1992). The growth of this critical literature is helping to open the door to many voices that have long been suppressed or ignored by the positivist narrative. The Indigenous early childhood care and education experience is one such set of voices. Publication of this issue is an effort to hear these voices and to recognize the great contributions they make toward broadening and deepening our understanding of children, communities, cultures, and care.

Discussions of quality ECCE services are incomplete without reference to culture, context, and community. Those who participated in the February 2006 forum found a "family" who shared similar concerns and in many cases faced similar challenges. The recommended ways forward were diverse, but each offered hope and inspiration to the others. In the exploration of what constitutes child care that is good, culturally appropriate, beneficial, practical, and sustainable, Indigenous paradigms, understandings, and experiences can cross boundaries, offering possibilities to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities alike.

The research, stories, and experiences recounted in this special issue arise from varying contexts and histories. We pay attention to these his-

tories and what they offer us to gain a better appreciation and understanding of some of the political, economic, social, and cultural conditions that have contributed to the diversity of perspectives we encounter today and how they might inform our future.

This issue is organized in four thematic sections that will situate the reader in the most recent Aboriginal ECCE developments in diverse environments. The first segment offers four sociohistorical contexts that describe the landscapes of Canada, Australia, Aotearoa/New Zealand, and Hawaii. In their article "Aboriginal Children and Early Childhood Development and Education in Canada: Linking the Past and the Present to the Future," Margo Greenwood, Sarah de Leeuw, and Tina Ngaroimata Fraser write about the challenges for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children and their families in Canada with regard to meaningful and culturally relevant child development programs, policies, and services. Carmen Rodríguez de France and Karen Martin offer a perspective of the Australian milieu in their article "Australian Early Childhood Education and Care: The Fourth Discourse," and Rita Walker and Carmen Rodríguez de France write about the historical aspects of ECD in Aotearoa/New Zealand in "Foundations of ECD in Aotearoa/New Zealand." The last chapter in this section, "Nest of Voices: Early Child Care and Education in Hawaii," was co-written by Noelani Iokepa-Guerrero and Carmen Rodríguez de France. It is about the Hawaiian experience and the recent programs and policies to revitalize the Hawaiian language.

The section on epistemology and ontology presents experiences that are more personal in nature while also presenting useful paradigms. Margo Greenwood and Sarah de Leeuw offer "Teachings from the Land: Indigenous People, Our Health, Our Land, and Our Children." From a similar standpoint Nadine Rousselot writes about her upbringing and the teachings of her grandparents in an article entitled "A Multitude of Identities." Kathryn Priest co-authors an article with Sharijn King, Wendy Nungurrayi Brown, Irene Nangala, and Marilyn Nangala, four women from the Waltja Tjutanku Palyapayi Aboriginal Organization in Central Australia. Their topic explores Warrki Jarrinjaku Jintangkamanu Purananjaku "'Working Together Everyone and Listening': Aboriginal Child Rearing in Remote Central Australia."

The third section includes chapters on Indigenous ECCE programs, research, and training. Kelly Terbasket and Margo Greenwood describe the British Columbia First Nations Head Start program in terms of its policy development between 1998 and 2007. Lyn Fasoli and Veronica Johns present a perspective on "Children's Services in Remote Australian Indigenous Communities: Practices and Challenges." Deslie McClutchie Mita describes some of the challenges and successes of Māori language revitalization programs in her article "Māori Language Revitalization: A Vision for the Future." Concerning research, Michael Niles, Lisa Byers, and Elizabeth Krueger challenge the reader to rethink the effect of the

terms *best practice* and *evidence-based research* as they relate to Indigenous early childhood programs and interventions. Last, Lesley Rameka from Aotearoa/New Zealand examines assessment in relation to traditional modernist understandings in her article "Māori Approaches to Assessment."

The final section reflects aspects of training approaches in three contexts: the US, Aotearoa/New Zealand, and Canada. It begins with Claude Endfield's reflection on her ECCE journey, starting as a Head Start mother and becoming a trainer, college instructor, and program director, then encountering a paradigm at the February 2006 Indigenous forum that challenged what she "knew" from her years of experience. Elizabeth Pakai then describes the context for and development of an innovative, bicultural early childhood teacher education program based in Rotorua, Aotearoa/New Zealand. Alan Pence concludes the section with thoughts about the possibilities of university borderlands as a place for creative dialogue across institutional and Indigenous contexts. Pence describes the borderlands as having both structural and conceptual implications, a place where diverse views and understandings can more easily interact and new ideas can be generated.

The forum that led to this special issue was such a place: a place to meet, encounter, and challenge each other helpfully and hopefully. The field of ECCE and the diverse Indigenous communities with which these authors work need such opportunities for sharing and learning. We hope that this special issue leads to similar opportunities for others and additional Indigenous ECCE publications in the future.

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Erratum

The Technical Editor apologizes to Alison Taylor, Helle Møller, and Alannah Young for omitting their names from the contents page of the last issue.