

Intergenerational Teaching and Learning in Canadian First Nations Partnership Programs

By Jessica Ball, Alan Pence, Martina Pierre, and Valerie Kuehne

Introduction

The conventional image of the “ivory tower” of mainstream academia reaches back over the centuries, reinforcing the basic foundation of education as the conveying of “universal” truths and knowledge legitimated as the product of scientific inquiry. The same image also underlies a modernist approach to education that is fundamentally based on what learners *lack* rather than what they *bring* to the learning activity. However, with such an approach the ways of others cannot be respected but must be challenged by the one “true” way. In mainstream universities in Canada, as in nations around the world where European expansion and colonialism imposed a cultural majority on an indigenous minority population, Euro-western theories and research dominate the voice of academic credibility. The walls of the ivory tower have themselves become obstacles to hearing, seeing, and interacting with others’ truths (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999).

In sharp contrast, the revitalization of traditional roles of teaching and learning that will be described in this chapter—within the context of a pioneering partnership approach to post-secondary training of child and youth care practitioners in First Nations communities across western

Canada—builds on a post-modernist foundation that respects and values a multiplicity of voices. This chapter will illustrate how the walls of academia were breached by an innovative, process-oriented approach to education in which the design, delivery, and evaluation of childcare training was jointly and successfully co-constructed by First Nations communities and the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria. The impetus for a series of collaborative partnerships undertaken through the 1990s will be presented in the context of the historical oppression of First Nations peoples in Canada. This will be followed by discussion of key components of the unique Generative Curriculum Model that now serves as a framework for community-based education among First Nations peoples. This program approach demonstrates the capacity to renew and strengthen local commitment and to provide for the developmental needs of young children and families in ways that incorporate their own cultural traditions, values, and practices. Particular attention will be paid to the role of First Nations Elders, whose active participation as co-instructors was instrumental in building bridges across generations, leading in turn to restored cultural pride, cultural knowledge, and cultural identity.

Beyond illustrating the richness of an intergenerational program model, another aim of this chapter is to share some insights about how to go beyond the superficial practices of those mainstream institutions that provide an ineffectual “add on” to Euro-western curricula as evidence of their sensitivity to minority cultures. Even within the realm of partnerships, problems have arisen for Canada’s indigenous populations as the more dominant, mainstream partners ultimately require, implicitly or explicitly, the less dominant aboriginal partner to accommodate to majority cultural values. While some First Nations students achieve success in mainstream education programs, most lament their experiences, largely because the dominant discourse of valued theory and practices contradicts, invalidates, or undermines their way of life. Obstacles to learning typically encountered by minority students in adult education programs include: marginalization, invisibility, inferior status, negative expectations communicated by instructors, and a lack of cultural sensitivity among instructors and dominant culture students (Sparks, 1998).

There are, however, welcome signs of change. Early childhood education programs in parts of Canada are beginning to pay closer attention to the importance of preparing students to work with culturally and linguistically diverse children and families. A recent study on how Ontario community colleges are addressing the issue reports on teaching strategies for diversity awareness and action (Corson, 1998): Corson proposes three interconnected concepts of students’ learning needs: self-discovery, cross-cultural understanding, and critical thinking skills. These concepts incorporate many of the principles and practices that have been put in

place over the past decade through the series of partnerships that will be outlined in this chapter.

The process-oriented educational program that provides the framework for this chapter represents a radical shift from the longstanding "best" practices approach in early childhood education. It is based upon a partnership approach aimed at establishing meaningful, mutual, and ongoing intergenerational teaching and learning in First Nations communities. The process itself is complex, time-consuming, and richly rewarding. The ways in which community-specific cultural traditions and values enter the curriculum through intergenerational teaching and learning will be described, and the far-reaching, positive outcomes that are possible when Elders, instructors, and students work together in co-constructing curriculum, alongside a partnering university-based team, will be identified. As will be shown, the model outlined in this chapter has many possible applications across cultural communities and human service sectors.

First Nations: A Search for Culturally Appropriate Education

First Nations are among Canadian aboriginal peoples, who also include Inuit, Aleut, and Metis. There are approximately 500,000 status (registered) First Nations people living on reserve lands in Canada. In addition, there are an established 750,000 status and non-status First Nations and Metis people living off reserves, in both urban and rural communities. Groups of First Nations are often organized for administrative purposes into band councils or tribal councils representing several communities that are usually clustered together geographically. Constituent communities may or may not share the same cultural and migration history, language, and customs.

Traditionally Elders, who may play an honorary advisory role in community affairs, are relied on to pass down cultural traditions. They are often, though not always, senior citizens or elderly. Each community has its own criteria for recognizing and involving a community member as an Elder. In a large number of First Nations communities, as in many societies around the globe, Elders have lost their status, roles, and traditional functions in community life. This has occurred for a wide variety of reasons, many of which are general across societies and geographies.

Among First Nations in Canada, a particular kind of cultural holocaust has occurred over the past century. Those First Nations communities that survived the first wave of colonists have experienced the destruction of their family life through government policies requiring that children as young as five years old be sent to residential schools away from their communities. Most residential schools forbade the continuation of any manifestation of the child's culture of origin and, very often, denied family

ties, including those of siblings living at the same school (Smillie, 1996). Tragically, such fragmentation greatly exacerbated the deterioration of Elders' roles and of intergenerational relationships within families and communities. Although the long era of enforced residential schools for First Nations children is now over, formidable gaps in the transmission of culture and extended familial bonds remain. Many First Nations adults do not know their own traditional culture and language of origin and have attenuated identities as First Nations people (York, 1990).

Not only do aboriginal students still not find their traditions and values respected in most early childhood education curricula, they often encounter negative stereotypes about First Nations people in texts and resources that continue to be presented by educators as authoritative research materials. Increasingly, however, national and regional aboriginal organizations in Canada are negotiating with governments and lobbying to establish economic and administrative control over fundamental services that impact on the health of their communities, including early childhood education and childcare. First Nations people are increasingly vocal about mainstream education programs that are neither transferable nor desirable within their cultural communities (Pence, Kuehne, Greenwood-Church, & Opekokew, 1993).

Culturally appropriate family services are crucial for the preservation of aboriginal traditions and identity, both of which have been under siege for generations in Canada through a combination of deliberate oppression and neglect by all levels of government. As Greenwood notes in an extensive review of aboriginal childcare in Canada, culturally appropriate childcare is regarded by First Nations communities as a necessary support to accessing employment and education opportunities. The virtual absence of these services is seen as a significant barrier to achieving social security, self-sufficiency and economic development goals (Greenwood, 1999).

First Nations Partnership Programs: An Overview

In the decade between 1989 and 1999, seven First Nations community groups partnered with a Canadian university to co-construct, deliver, and evaluate a program of community-based, bicultural course work leading to a Diploma in Child and Youth Care. The distinguishing characteristic of the evolving academic and professional field of Child and Youth Care in Canada is its developmental-contextual perspective. Students study and learn to serve children and families in ways that capitalize on their assets and that support rather than challenge their well being. The program that was developed is a uniquely collaborative approach to post-secondary education for minority culture students and is unprecedented in Canada and, to our knowledge, elsewhere.

The program was initiated in 1989 by the Meadow Lake Tribal Council, representing nine Cree and Dene communities in the province of Saskatchewan. The Council invited Alan Pence, of the University of Victoria, to collaborate on the development of a multicultural curriculum that would prepare Cree and Dene community members to deliver effective childcare programs in and beyond their communities, and in both aboriginal and non-aboriginal settings (Pence & McCallum, 1994; Pence, 1999).

After a review of existing mainstream programs of training, the Executive Director of the Meadow Lake Tribal Council, Ray Ahenakew, asked: "What of us—our Cree and Dene cultures—is in these [mainstream] programs? How are the particular needs, circumstances, and goals of our remote Cree and Dene communities going to be addressed in these programs?" The primary aim of the Meadow Lake Tribal Council was to develop and deliver a training program that would build upon existing cultural strengths. Their practical intent was to prepare community members to create child and family services that resonated with the cultural values, traditional knowledge, contemporary practices and objectives of their constituent First Nations communities. As Ahenakew emphasized: "We must rediscover our traditional values of caring, sharing, and living in harmony—and bring them into our daily lives and practices."

The training program that led to the creation of the First Nations Partnership Programs, and that became the catalyst for the Generative Curriculum Model (Pence & Ball, 1999; Pence et al., 1994), evolved from the addressing of these concerns. It began with an acknowledgement of the poor record of education and social programs imposed upon aboriginal peoples in North America by external agencies lacking in core aboriginal representation and with a vision that core elements of the curriculum and the program delivery would come from within the Cree and Dene communities to which the students belonged and, for the most part, where they intended to work.

In those communities, and in all subsequent partnerships between the University of Victoria and First Nations communities, Elders were identified as the people who best know the social, historical, and cultural contexts and goals for the children with whom childcare practitioners eventually work. Similarly, the role of Elders as the guardians of the culture had been highlighted in numerous reports by aboriginal organizations, including the first national inquiry in Canada to explore the needs and the meeting of those needs by existing childcare services of off-reserve status and non-status First Nations people. In the words of the Native Council of Canada, childcare "can be a vehicle through which cultures can be retained and transmitted from generation to generation" (Greenwood, 1999). Elders emerged as the natural choice for co-constructing and co-teaching the First Nations Partnership Programs curriculum. An Elder who participated regularly in the Mount Currie First Nation partnership noted:

Our weekly meetings with students help us all to remember and pass along our culture [from] before the White Man came and remind us of how we raised our children, how we want them to grow, and who they will become as First Nations people.

Since the initial partnership with the Meadow Lake Tribal Council, there have been six further partnership programs, all located in rural areas of western Canada (British Columbia and Saskatchewan), including: Cowichan Tribes, Mount Currie First Nation, Nzen'man' Child and Family Services, Onion Lake First Nation, Tl'azt'en Nation, and Treaty 8 Tribal Association. The populations of our First Nations community partners have ranged from 800 to 3,000 individuals living on or near the reserve lands where the main community is situated. The seventh training program was completed in mid-1999, and partnerships are being considered with two more First Nations communities.

Previous reports on the First Nations Partnership Programs have explicated the principles that have guided program development and delivery across seven geographically dispersed and culturally distinct Canadian First Nations communities (Ball & Pence, 1999a; Pence & Ball, 1999b; Pence, Kuehne, Greenwood-Church, & Opekokew, 1993). Briefly, these guiding principles are:

1. Community initiative and involvement in all aspects of program delivery.
2. Bicultural respect.
3. Co-construction of curriculum (Euro-western tradition and community-specific tradition).
4. Community development through partnership.
5. Children as the focus within an ecological context.
6. University accredited Child and Youth Care education ladder.
7. Broad scope of human service career applications.

The following section will illustrate how these principles were put into practice.

The Generative Curriculum Model

Community contributions

First Nations communities engaged with the university-based team in mutual learning, sharing of skills, and collaborative construction of concepts and curricula. These were delivered in the students' own communities, using a flexible framework, called the Generative Curriculum Model, to support an intergenerational teaching and learning process. The first of the guiding principles ("community initiatives") translates into commu-

nity-directed action: the First Nations partner in the training program plays the central role in all aspects of program planning, delivery, and evaluation. The community partner recruits students, instructors and other resource people, especially Elders, who contribute significant portions of the curriculum content of each course, as well as some of the methods of teaching and learning that themselves are embodiments of their aboriginal culture. Topics most frequently addressed by Elders include: constructions of childhood and child development; children's roles in their families, peer groups, schools, and larger community; and the socialization and care of children and youth. In the words of a student in the First Nations Partnership Programs initiative with Mount Currie First Nation:

This program is unique in giving me the chance to learn from my Elders what I need to know about who I am and my culture's ways of being with children. I couldn't learn this from any textbook, and I couldn't reach out to the children in my community ... without knowing what the Elders can teach me through this program.

University contributions

The guiding principles are further interwoven through the Generative Curriculum Model in its "all ways" respectful teaching and learning about different cultural perspectives. The curriculum content is bicultural: in addition to learning from Elders, students are introduced to research-based theory and practices of child and youth care and development. They are exposed to some traditional Euro-western teaching strategies, and they are asked to engage in the kinds of learning activities and evaluation procedures found on typical Canadian university campuses. Thus, both the messages and the media from each partner enter the training process. A student in our partnership program with Mount Currie First Nation put it succinctly:

Being in this program is like having the best of both worlds. We love to learn about what researchers have found out about child development and such from our textbooks, and we love to learn more about our own culture and how we can use it to help the children of our community.

The 18 courses that make up the training program are structured using an "open architecture," with room for the voices of students, Elders, and others in the community to participate fully in the active, constructivist teaching and learning process. The knowledge and ideas about child and youth care and development that students come away with are generated, as it were, in the space between the two (or more) cultural groups. One of the three instructors in the partnership with Mount Currie First Nation, who was also a community member, noted:

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.

As might be expected, given the name itself, the Generative Curriculum Model is characterized by a high level of participation and a large degree of indeterminacy. Precise details of the organizational structure, **content**, and goals of the child and youth care training program are **deliberately left open-ended** at the beginning of each partnership in order to make **room** for community participation in creating the course framework and **generating** curriculum content. In this way, each program is a unique co-creation of the particular partners. At the same time, all of the partnerships **have been** guided by the principles outlined earlier, with the most central being **community-driven program delivery** and collaborative intergenerational construction of curriculum.

Program highlights

The First Nations Partnership Programs and the model on **which they** are based have been very successful in several key areas and **have gained** national and international recognition. There are several reasons for **this**. First, program completion rates across the seven communities **have ranged** from 60 to 100 percent, far exceeding typical completion rates of 0 to 40 percent among First Nations students in other post-secondary **programs** across Canada. Second, over 95 percent of partnership program **graduates** have remained in their own communities to work in human **service** areas. This runs counter to the "brain drain" experienced by **many rural** First Nations communities when students are forced to leave **home** to undertake mainstream post-secondary education. Third, initiatives **on the** part of program graduates to promote the health and development of children and youth in their communities have been widely **accepted** and actively supported by the resident children, parents, and **Elders**. This contrasts with the community resistance that is frequently experienced when First Nations students return home and attempt to implement **mainstream** training programs learned in isolation from their communities. **Fourth, evalu-**ations of the programs have yielded evidence of far-reaching **positive** impacts on cultural pride, community cohesion, parenting **effectiveness**, and the development of a supportive community environment for **children** and youth (Ball & Pence, 1999a,b; Pence & Ball, 1999). Fifth, many **Elders** involved in the partnership programs have been reinstated to their **traditional** place as transmitters of culture, language, and dignity (Pence, 1998).

A core element of the Generative Curriculum Model is its **ability to use** intensive intergenerational experiences to reintegrate into the **community**

those who have been isolated from it: the student who has gone away to pursue education or training and the Elder whose valued role has been forgotten.

A comprehensive research investigation was conducted in 1998-2000, partly to determine the effective components of the First Nations Partnership Programs that led to these unprecedented positive outcomes. Program evaluation identified the importance of the roles played by Elders and the mediating role played by an Intergenerational Facilitator.

Conditions Enabling Successful Intergenerational Processes

Community-driven program delivery

Successful intergenerational teaching and learning depends upon the initiative of the First Nations community in choosing to partner with the university and to participate in delivering the program in its own setting. The student cohorts enrolled in each training program ranged from 10 to 22 community members. Students were not required to leave their families or their roles in their community in order to take the program because it was delivered entirely in the community. Instructors were recruited by the communities and lived in or near the community where the program was delivered. An Intergenerational Facilitator, recruited from within the community, was responsible for coordinating regular meetings between Elders and students and facilitating effective dialogue, including discussions between Elders and course instructors on co-teaching.

The logistics of Elder involvement reflected variations among programs in terms of location and the diversity of constituent cultural communities. In some programs, such as those with the Meadow Lake Tribal Council, Cowichan Tribes, and Treaty 8 Tribal Association, students came from several different First Nations in the region. Elders from all of the communities to which the students belonged were recruited to participate in the program. This meant that some Elders traveled a considerable distance to attend the classes, and many different cultural traditions and languages were represented. In other partnerships, such as those with Mount Currie First Nation and Tl'azt'en Nation, the participating Elders all lived in the largest, centralized community and spoke the same traditional language.

In our experience, Elder involvement cannot be mandated when a program is initiated from outside the community. In the First Nations Partnership Programs, participation by dozens of Elders was the result of their gradual orientation to the nature of this community-initiated program and the rationale for their involvement. Community members made the invitations following culturally specific protocol. Individuals with whom the Elders had a prior relationship of trust made practical arrangements. The

Elders' sharing and dialogue with students and instructors were predicated upon mutual trust, obligation, and an acknowledgement of their common future as First Nations people.

Effective intergenerational teaching and learning is engendered when the program structure and content is sufficiently open and flexible to welcome both the content and form of Elders' participation. The nature of their contributions can neither be precisely prescribed nor predicted. The ways in which their contributions will be received also cannot be pre-ordained. As a native scholar who addressed the issue from an Elders' perspective has commented: "Elders have teaching challenges to deal with.... The legends and stories [of the Elders] have to be retold, reshaped, and refitted to meet contemporary seekers' changed and changing needs" (Couture, 1996, p. 52).

When Elder participation is construed as merely an intriguing addendum to the main body of curricula, little of value is likely to transpire. A growing number of post-secondary programs in Canada are jumping on the band wagon of cultural sensitivity, inviting one or two aboriginal Elders to give a "guest presentation" in a university setting or to perform a ceremonial function or two. This kind of limited and de-contextualized activity is decorative at best and can be destructively patronizing. It bears no resemblance to the ongoing, mutually transformative process that can and does occur when Elders are reinstated — through genuine interest and mutual engagement — in their traditional roles as men and women with the wisdom and experience to nurture younger generations and to pass on their valued knowledge, memories, spirituality, and skills (Ball & Pence, 1999a, b; Pence, 1999).

Students, for their part, needed time to absorb the Elders' offerings and to grow into their own roles as learners and as facilitators in the process of teaching, learning, and nurturing the relationships between the oldest and youngest generations. An Intergenerational Facilitator explained:

The circle has been broken for so long, our ancestral traditions have been put aside for so long, the students need time, especially in the beginning. Time to recover who they are. Time to see that they are being asked and being given an opportunity to inherit all the accumulated wisdom of all the generations of people in our Nation who have gone before them. Time to grow into being the leaders in our community that they will become.

The intergenerational facilitator

Learning from Elders, even in a First Nations context where this is a common tradition, does not just happen automatically. Our experiences have shown that even when Elders are ready and willing to participate in and out of class meetings with students, there is no guarantee that some-

thing of mutual benefit and satisfaction will ensue. A bridge was needed to facilitate mutual engagement and to assist with the development of effective communication over time.

This bridging function was performed effectively by an Intergenerational Facilitator in each of the partnerships. These individuals held positions of trust and respect within their communities. In four of the partnerships, this role was filled by Elders or "Elders in training." The Intergenerational Facilitators were clearly vital from the outset, but what was not fully anticipated was the role that each of these Intergenerational Facilitators would play in helping to overcome misgivings by some course instructors and some students about the unfamiliar practice of placing the experiential wisdom of Elders alongside scripted curriculum materials offered from outside the community.

Within each cohort in the seven partnership programs, students were distributed along a bipolar dimension with regards to their initial receptivity to Elders' contributions. Typically, some students expressed fairly strong attachment to particular Elders and identification with their culture and community. Other students expressed fairly strong ambivalence about their communities and doubts about whether Elders' teachings could have any value or relevance to themselves, their families, or their future careers in child and youth care. Many of these students explained that they had enrolled in the program in order to gain the mainstream perspectives that they expected to find in university accredited courses. In two partnering communities, a majority of students stated that, initially, they saw the training program as a way to become independent, as their way out of their community and culture of origin.

At the conclusion of each partnership program, 95 percent of the students remained in their communities. Most are now committed to helping revitalize the cultural health of their home communities and improving the conditions of children in them. However, without the bridging functions performed by the Intergenerational Facilitator, it is likely that some of the students' initial feelings of alienation from the First Nations context and the generative nature of the curriculum would have persisted.

All of the First Nations community organizations that entered into a partnership for delivering the training program did so, in part, because they hoped that the involvement of Elders would create opportunities to retrieve and record their cultural histories and traditions and to bridge the gap between generations. In each program, the Intergenerational Facilitator was a member of the First Nations community to which all or most of the students belonged. The roles and responsibilities of this position encompassed many different aspects of intergenerational teaching and learning, including:

1. Seeking the participation of many Elders, including Elders from each of the communities to which students belonged.
2. Following cultural protocol for inviting the Elders and providing gifts to thank them for their participation.
3. Making practical arrangements for Elders' participation (e.g., transportation, meals, lodging).
4. Encouraging students to be receptive to Elders' invitations to meet outside the classroom. Some Elders preferred having students visit them at home to discuss course work.
5. Showing students how to act respectfully towards Elders in culturally congruent ways.
6. Helping with translation from a traditional First Nations language to English and vice-versa, as needed.
7. Helping students with the development of questions for Elders that pertained to course topics.
8. Generally promoting good communication and a good feeling between the students, instructors, and Elders.
9. Being available for students to react to the content or form of an Elder's contributions — to refute, debate, and discuss their teachings. As discussed, some students had somewhat negative or mixed reactions to some Elders' statements, at least initially.
10. Helping students to tolerate ambiguities in what Elders said. When Elders teach through stories, the lesson is often implicit or indirect and the learning is latent. Students have reported that months after a session with an Elder they suddenly understood the point.
11. Helping students to accept apparent contradictions between ideas presented in the university-based part of the curriculum and ideas presented by the Elders.
12. Modeling and reinforcing for students their own process of becoming bridges between the oldest and youngest generations, in accordance with traditional cultural roles, whereby Elders are mentors and guides and children are recipients of their wisdom and nurturance.

Outcomes

Reconnecting generations

As a result of the regular participation of Elders throughout the program and the supportive role of the Intergenerational Facilitator, students not only learned more about the traditions and values of their culture, but also forged relationships with older members of their community, often for the first time. A student in the partnership program with TI'azt'en Nation, in north-central British Columbia, remarked:

Having the Elders coming to the program on a regular basis is **really** a good idea because we are learning their knowledge, and we are **also** getting to know them. I always wanted to learn from an Elder, **but** I was too shy and they weren't really ever around. Now I can walk with the Elders, and we can continue the talking from our class about the old ways and how these can still be used to help us with our children today.

The Meadow Lake community member who played the role of Intergenerational Facilitator commented on enhanced intergenerational rapport and communication in terms of systemic community change:

The students, recognizing the special wisdom of the Elders, began to consult them on personal as well as course-related matters. Today we have Elders involved in most community programs. In the past we seldom involved Elders. The childcare training program is where it all started.

Personal and cultural healing

Instructors have underscored the tremendous personal and cultural healing that students, instructors, Elders, and others involved in the program experienced as a result of mobilizing the whole community in explorations of childhood and in determining how best to support the development of children in their own community. Former students have reported increased cultural identity, self-esteem, parenting effectiveness, and confidence as community leaders as a result of the program. As the Intergenerational Facilitator in our partnership program with Cowichan Tribes said simply: "When the students get the elders' teachings, they are **touching** the ground and finding their roots."

It is generally agreed that a stable and strong identity and positive self esteem are important foundations for effectively socializing children and youth. But how do these qualities come about if one is divorced from the strengths of traditional care-giving in one's own cultural community? In our partnerships, we saw how the involvement of Elders brought all students, even the most disenchanted, into a circle of belonging to a nurturing community of other people who shared many of their sorrows and joys and who had the strength to support them through their personal healing, growth, and career development. In this regard, we have found that traditional constructs of "cultural sensitivity" and "cultural appropriateness" are **wholly** inadequate to capture the depth and significance of the experiences of participants in a training program grounded in intergenerational relationships — of respect, teaching, learning, sharing, and support — that are embodiments of the students' own cultures. One of our partners in the Mount Currie First Nation asserted: "We need our elders

[in order] to regain our roots — our sense of ourselves and our beginnings — so that we can help our children set their feet on the path to a healthy future.”

Enhanced parent-child relationships

Many students reported that they had learned from the Elders new ways of being with their own children and other children in their care. In the words of the Intergenerational Facilitator in our partnership with Cowichan Tribes:

Elders' teachings have made the students more conscious. It has really improved parenting skills. Elders ask: 'Did you hear me? I know you're listening but did you really hear? Are you practicing what you heard?' And the students go home and practice what the elders told them about how to encourage their children and how to be patient with them.

Echoing this, a student in the program at Mount Currie declared:

Patience. That's the most important lesson I learned from the elders. They taught us other things too, about our language and some of the ways of surviving back then, and crafts we can do with children now — that kind of thing. But patience is what they showed us, and I learned from them how to be patient with my kids.

Similarly, a student in our program with Meadow Lake Tribal Council said:

The Elders taught me to listen to children. I always used to take the controlling seat...and now I allow my children to talk about their choices, and I listen to them and let them make some of their own decisions. And I think that's good. It teaches them some independence and some responsibility.

The ripple effect of Elders' involvement is further illustrated by an example drawn from the partnership with Mount Currie First Nation. Many parents in the community want their children to undergo traditional puberty training, which they believe engenders self-discipline, goal setting, cleanliness, and spirituality. Many of these parents, however, cannot look to their own adolescence for guidance. Because of their residential school experience, they did not undergo this traditional training. Many, in fact, were forced to renounce their cultural heritage, thus losing their connections to Elders and to the Elders' roles as teachers. Some leaders of the Mount Currie First Nation saw the partnership program as a chance to bring the Elders back into their natural teaching roles, in accordance with their Lil'wat culture. They hoped to increase knowledge in the com-

munity about rites of passage, such as puberty, as well as to learn from the Elders about other aspects of child rearing.

A revered Elder, Marie Leo, accepted an invitation from the Intergenerational Facilitator to meet with students in the partnership program to discuss traditional Lil'wat child rearing practices, including puberty rites. These discussions were both videotaped and recorded in students' notes as part of their course work. During the program, Leo gave the following account of her experience:

I really enjoy it, going over there and answering questions that the students give us. It's really needed for the young people to remember our ways, how we raised our children and how we disciplined them. And we talk about it in our language so that we can get it right. I hope the students learn from us that it is not our way to scream at a child, 'cause a screaming mother has a screaming child later. A child needs to hear gentle ways, and needs to be talked to, even laughed with, when they're acting up. They need a lot of understanding. There is a lot of support for these young students to learn, and not just learn our ways, but learn all kinds of ways from everyone, like [those of] my old friend who is East Indian, and my old Chinese friend, and others of us who are old in this community. Even if these people didn't necessarily grow up here, we all have something to teach these young students. Even though we're not teachers, we're like Argyle socks — we're all diamond and intertwined.

Culturally grounded practitioner training

As discussed earlier, the majority of students who participated in First Nations Partnership Programs completed the program, and all but a few graduates have remained in their own communities to work in human services, mostly in childcare and development programs. Clearly, there is immeasurable value to First Nations communities when trained childcare practitioners remain in the community to work, initiate new programs, serve as role models, and generally share their knowledge and skills. Program graduates have been hired for a range of occupations, including: staff and supervisory roles in daycares, Aboriginal Head Start programs, preschools, and kindergartens; teachers' assistants; learning support workers; home-school liaison workers; youth activities coordinators; and college and continuing education advisors for other First Nations students.

Because students in the partnership programs learned through dialogue and practice within their own community, rather than in isolation, what they contribute as leaders in human service development and in their own families resonates with the cultural outlook and approaches of their community. Former students have emphasized the value of being able to discuss with their Elders a range of traditional and contemporary ideas

about what children need to develop optimally and how best to foster children's well-being in their own community. Dialogue with Elders has provided, and continues to provide, opportunities to assess alternative approaches for their appropriateness to the culturally specific goals for children that parents and Elders in the community want and are most likely to support. A frequent theme in the accounts of former students about their program experience is that they gained knowledge and skills during their training that did not represent ideas they associated with education received at a distance, at mainstream institutions. Most of those latter ideas the Elders and other community members described as "foreign," "impractical," "irrelevant," "totally white," or "culturally contradicting."

As a community-based administrator for the partnership with Treaty 8 Tribal Association in northeast British Columbia remarked:

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.

Conclusion

The training programs described in this chapter contain powerful intergenerational interventions through ongoing and direct Elder involvement in student learning, as developed by a community member in the role of an Intergenerational Facilitator. Riley and Riley (1994) have described opportunities for community members to participate in grappling with issues that face them in their everyday lives as "opportunity structures" and argue that more of these structures must be created for older adults to contribute meaningfully to their societies. The First Nations Partnership Programs provide such structures at the foundation of training; as a result, the participating Elders in partnering communities truly can be "primary contributors to the constantly continuing process of building community stability and development" (Kretzman & McKnight, 1993, p. 51).

Program participants have spoken eloquently about the many ways in which the focus on intergenerational teaching and learning has contributed to the revitalization of traditional roles, helping to restore and reconstruct their cultural identity, cultural knowledge, and cultural pride. Many community members have described how the involvement of Elders in the training programs has helped the community as a whole return to its cultural and spiritual beginnings, becoming more culturally directed in creating child and youth care services that further the goals of healthy devel-

opment and cultural continuity across generations. Their clear and strong words add support to the growing chorus of voices now advocating for intergenerational approaches to enrich the personal and social fabric of all societies (Calhoun, Kingson, & Newman, 1997; Kuehne, 1998-99). A student in the Mount Currie First Nation program asserted:

We can't learn everything from our books. We also have to learn from our Elders as to how to raise our children, and then they will know how to raise their children, and it just goes on from there."

In the end, as one community-based administrator said: "The elders have the hope for our people. When we listen to what they want to pass on to us, they pass on their hope to us."

References

- Ball, J., & Pence, A.R. (1999a). Beyond developmentally appropriate practice: Developing community and culturally appropriate practice. *Young Children*, March, 46-50.
- Ball, J., & Pence, A. (1999b). Promoting healthy environments for children and youth through participatory, bicultural, community-based training partnerships. *Notos: Intercultural and Second Language Council Journal*, 1 (1), 26-33.
- Calhoun, G., Kingson, E., & Newman, S. (1997). Intergenerational approaches to public policy: Trends and challenges, (pp. 161-173). In S. Newman, C. Ward, T. Smith, J. Wilson and J. McCrea (Eds.) *Intergenerational programs: Past, present, and future*. Washington, D.C.: Taylor & Francis.
- Corson, P. (1998). Preparing early childhood educators for diversity. *Interaction*, 12 (2), 30-31.
- Couture, J.E. (1996). The role of native elders: Emergent issues (pp. 41-56). In D.A. Long and O.P. Dickason (Eds.), *Visions of the heart: Canadian aboriginal issues*. Toronto: Harcourt Brace.
- Dahlberg, G., Moss, P., & Pence, A. (1999). *Beyond quality in early childhood education and care: Postmodern perspectives*. London: Falmer Press.
- Greenwood, M. (1999). Aboriginal childcare in review (Part One). *Interaction*, 13 (2), 17-20.
- Kretzman, J. & McKnight, J. (1993). *Building communities from the inside out: A path toward finding and mobilizing community assets*. Chicago, IL: ACTA Publications.
- Kuehne, V.S. (1998-99). Building intergenerational communities through research and evaluation. *Generations*, 22 (1), 82-87.
- Pence, A.R. (1998). On knowing the place: Reflections on understanding quality care. *Canadian Journal for Research in Early Childhood Education*.
- Pence, A.R. (1999). "It takes a village...", and new roads to get there (pp. 322-336). In D. Keating and C. Hertzman (Eds.), *Developmental Health as the Wealth of Nations*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Pence, A.R., & Ball, J. (1999). Two sides of an eagle's feather: Co-Constructing ECCD training curricula in university partnerships with Canadian First Nations communities (pp. 36 - 47). In H. Penn (Ed.), *Theory, policy and practice in*

- early childhood services*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.
- Pence, A.R., Kuehne, V., Greenwood-Church, M., & Opekokew, M.R. (1993). Generative Curriculum: A model of university and First Nations co-operative post-secondary education. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 13 (4), 339-349.
- Pence, A.R., & McCallum (1994). Developing cross-cultural partnerships: Implications for childcare quality research and practice (pp. 108-122). In P. Moss and A. Pence (Eds.), *Valuing Quality in Early Childhood Services: New approaches to defining quality*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Riley, J., & Riley, M. (1994). Beyond productive aging. *Aging International*, 21 (2), 15-19.
- Smillie, B.G. (1996). The missionary vision of the heart (pp. 21-40). In D.A. Long and O.P. Dickason (Eds.), *Visions of the heart: Canadian aboriginal issues*. Toronto: Harcourt Brace.
- Sparks, B. (1998). The politics of culture and the struggle to get an education. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 48 (4), 245-259.
- York, G. (1990). *The dispossessed: Life and death in native Canada*. Toronto: Little, Brown.

Notes

- 1 Funding for research on the Generative Curriculum Model on which this chapter was based was provided by Childcare Visions, Human Resources Development Canada, the Lawson Foundation, and the Vancouver Foundation.