

■ A 'Generative Curriculum Model' for Supporting Child Care and Development Programs in First Nations Communities

■ Un « modèle de programme génératif » pour mettre en place des programmes de soins de développement de l'enfance dans les collectivités des Premières Nations

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Abstract

First Nations in Canada are prioritizing quality early childhood care and education as a way to ensure safe, stimulating environments that will promote optimal development of their children, encourage pride and competence in traditional culture and language, and lead to a strong foundation for psychosocial and economic prosperity in their communities. Culturally relevant, accessible programs to train community members to create and operate services for children and families are urgently needed. Starting with a pilot program between the Meadow Lake Tribal Council and the University of Victoria in 1989, eight First Nations communities have now partnered in delivering an innovative, university accredited diploma program in early childhood education and youth care using a unique 'Generative Curriculum Model.' High rates of program completion among the students, as well as high levels of community involvement throughout the training, have been realized in each participating First Nation. These successes are now being translated into the creation of a full range of culturally relevant, community appropriate services in First Nations communities that support children's development and the involvement of parents in effective, culturally consistent child-rearing.

Abrégé

Les Premières Nations au Canada accordent la priorité à des soins et à l'éducation de qualité de la petite enfance comme moyen d'assurer des milieux sécuritaires et stimulants qui favoriseront le développement optimal de leurs enfants, qui favoriseront la fierté et l'apprentissage de leur culture et de leur langue traditionnelles, et qui leur permettront d'établir une base solide pour atteindre la prospérité psychologique et économique dans leur collectivité. Il est urgent d'instaurer des programmes accessibles et pertinents sur le plan culturel visant à former des membres de la collectivité à mettre en place et à diriger des services pour les enfants et les familles. À partir d'un programme pilote entre le conseil tribal de Meadow Lake et l'Université de Victoria en 1989, huit collectivités des Premières Nations ont formé un partenariat pour offrir un programme novateur menant à un diplôme universitaire en éducation de la petite enfance et en soins des jeunes. Ce programme se fonde sur un modèle génératif unique. Dans chaque collectivité des Premières Nations qui prend part à ce programme, on connaît un taux élevé d'étudiants qui terminent le programme et on note que la collectivité participe tout au long de la formation. Ces réussites se traduisent maintenant par la création d'une gamme complète de services dans les collectivités des Premières Nations qui sont adaptés sur le plan culturel et communautaire, qui favorisent le développement des enfants et qui incitent les parents à éduquer leurs enfants de manière efficace et respectueuse de leur culture.

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Key words: Generative Curriculum, early childhood education, development, culture, First Nations, Aboriginal, prevention, diversity

Professional development in the area of cultural and linguistic diversity emerged in the 1990s as a touchstone for the delivery of services for Canadian children and families whose self-identity originates outside the dominant Euro-Western mainstream. A growing number of researchers and practitioners are cognizant of the sometimes unexpected impact of cultural differences and, to a lesser extent, are exploring ways to redress imbalances in perceived knowledge, including clinical interpretation of language use and behaviours. In North America and elsewhere, those who work with cultural minority populations in health, education and social services are particularly challenged by the need to replace pedagogical teaching and service delivery with an ecological model of human development, which respects the profound influence of culture on child development.

How do we involve parents and other caregivers in providing the kinds of cognitive stimulation and sensitive speech-language interaction that lay the foundation for the optimal development of infants and toddlers? How can caregivers be supported in learning and using simple techniques that will increase their cultural sensitivity and effectiveness as communication partners with children of varying abilities? These challenges confront us in our work with every cultural and socio-economic group, but they are intensified by the subjugation of Canada's aboriginal peoples to colonial culture and governance, as expressed partly in the imposition of educational and social programs which require indigenous groups to accommodate themselves, implicitly or explicitly, to the dominant culture, and to act as if assimilated.

Frustration with many mainstream early childhood education and training programs, which are divorced from the cultural values, beliefs and traditions of the children and families being served, gave impetus to an innovative collaboration between Meadow Lake Tribal Council, of Saskatchewan, and the University of Victoria, beginning in 1989. Since that time, a total of seven First Nations bands or tribal councils have entered into working partnerships with us at the university's First Nations Partnership Programs office. These partnerships have been distributed across vast cultural differences and distances up to 2,500 kilometres. The work of each partnership has been to co-construct and deliver early childhood development training to community members, using a living curriculum framework which we have

called the 'Generative Curriculum Model' (Pence & McCallum, 1994; Ball & Pence, 1999).

This model focuses on building an open curriculum to bridge the culture of the First Nations children and families being served and the Euro-western culture embodied in theory, research and practical approaches to early childhood education. First Nations communities and a university-based team engage in mutual learning, sharing of skills, and collaborative construction of concepts and curricula that are delivered in the students' own communities. A participatory, bicultural approach is used to introduce and strengthen culturally desirable child care perspectives and practices. Courses in the training program that are constructed using the Generative Curriculum Model are grouped into four basic content themes: Early Childhood Care and Education/Child and Youth Care, Communications, Child and Youth Development, and Practica. First Nations community representatives take the initiative in several areas including: recruiting and proposing to the university the community members who they think are suitable candidates for the training program, recruiting and hiring qualified instructors, either from inside or outside the community, securing and administering funds to support the program, providing classroom and instructional facilities, and arranging for practicum placements. Most partner communities to date have established a steering committee that has overseen program delivery and kept the community-at-large informed about how the training was progressing and how community members could be involved. The scope and sequence of course delivery is designed to be flexible, so that the program can meet the particular needs identified by First Nations communities.

In the eight partnerships to date, most students participating in the program had completed Grade 12 or their Graduate Equivalency Diploma, although many had been out of school for a considerable time. For this reason, preparatory studies were provided by each of the partner communities for two to six months before the university courses began. This pre-training enabled students to upgrade their skills, such as English, and to become familiar with each other and with an academic routine. Following the preparation period, students began full-time studies, which usually included four university-accredited courses and a concurrent practicum placement during each 13-week term (five or six terms over the two-year program).

A comprehensive evaluation of seven of the partnership programs conducted from 1998-2000 yielded abundant testimony from program participants about the transforming effects of this capacity building initiative

on individuals and on the communities as a whole. By supporting the skills and processes required for effective, community-involving delivery of accredited professional development, the Generative Curriculum Model has demonstrated positive impacts on community involvement, confidence, and trained capacity to promote children's optimal development. Indicators of the success of this approach include a completion rate that is twice the national average of 40% and below for post-secondary programs for First Nations students (Armstrong, Kennedy, & Oberle, 1990). Of 110 students who enrolled in the program, a total of 85 students completed the full two year program. This represents between 60 to 100% of students completing the program in each of the seven partnership programs. Among program graduates, 95% have remained in their own communities. To date, 65% of graduates have been instrumental in initiating new programs for children and youth in their communities. Another 13% have taken staff positions in existing programs, while 11% have continued with course work towards a degree in child and youth care or education. Program involvements of graduates have included: Aboriginal Head Start, daycares, youth services, programs focusing on language enhancement, infant development, school readiness, home-school liaison, and parenting effectiveness. Other changes that participants attributed to the program have included a resurgence of intergenerational dialogue as the direct result of involvement by Elders, whose knowledge of the history and traditions of their people has enriched the educational experience of students, instructors, and administrators and, ultimately, the children.

From the outset, partnerships with First Nations communities were shaped by our shared belief that quality child care and development programs must assert the legitimacy of indigenous cultures and languages, in order to contribute positively to the well-being of children and their families. Hence, program partners also share serious misgivings about assuming, a priori, the usefulness for aboriginal peoples of much of the theory, research, and so-called 'best practices' of professional training, child care, and education. As Harry, Torguson, Katkavich, and Guerrero (1993) have argued, beliefs may be conditioned so thoroughly by our own cultural experiences that we tend to accord them an unjustifiable universal validity. In general, education in the modernist tradition is fundamentally *not* about what learners bring to the enterprise; rather, it is based on what learners *lack*. Hence, community-involving skills are largely absent from mainstream, modernist, human services in education, which reinforce an implicit philosophy of 'doing to' rather than 'doing with' (Dahlberg, Moss, &

Pence, 1999). Within the First Nations Partnership Programs, we have been cognizant of the dangers inherent in modernist assumptions in mainstream programming and their claims to universal knowledge legitimated as the product of scientific enquiry, especially with respect to the universal applicability of criteria for defining 'quality' in child care and development services.

The exploratory Generative Curriculum Model piloted across western Canada since 1989 is dependent on the initiative of First Nations communities in partnering with the university-based team, fundraising, recruiting students and instructors, and involving Elders and other community members. The program is delivered entirely in the First Nations community by community members, with liaison and support as needed by the university-based team. Starting with a constructivist, community-driven approach to bicultural training, the partnerships aim to further community and culturally appropriate practices in child care and development. Ultimately, the common goal of representatives of First Nations organizations who have initiated partnerships has been to build community capacity to provide on-reserve services in ways that resonate with the cultural values, traditional knowledge, contemporary practices and objectives of their First Nations constituents. This culturally grounded approach is a radical departure from the approach chosen by some communities, and often advocated by program marketing agents, whereby pre-packaged programs for children's development (e.g., in speech-language, behavioural control, social skills and parental involvement) are imported to a consumer population from outside their ecology.

Refocusing Early Child Care and Development

In 1989, the Meadow Lake Tribal Council (MLTC), representing nine Cree and Dene First Nations communities in north-central Canada, approached Alan Pence, a professor specializing in early childhood education in the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria. They initiated a dialogue that led to the creation of First Nations Partnership Programs. At that initial meeting, Ray Ahenakew, the MLTC Executive Director, articulated a desire for collaborative curriculum development that would see the training of early childhood educators from First Nations communities grounded in their own cultures and traditions (Pence & McCallum, 1994).

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.... The First Nations of the Meadow Lake Tribal Council believe that a child care 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. (Meadow Lake Tribal Council Vision Statement, 1989)

The Council envisioned a unique, community-based, university-accredited program that would prepare community members to 'walk in both worlds' as early childhood educators, accessing both indigenous and mainstream constructions of optimal child development. The 'both/and' position taken by the First Nations partners, and their appreciation that the way forward might not match either the 'best practices' offered by most universities and colleges in North America or the 'traditional practices' of their forbearers, is an expression of post-modernism as it applies to tertiary education and to child care (Ball & Pence, 2000).

First Nations people are increasingly vocal about the many aspects of mainstream programs that they see as neither transferable nor desirable within their cultural value systems and experiences (Pence, Kuehne, Greenwood-Church, & Opekokew, 1993). The Aboriginal Committee Report on Family and Children's Services Legislation Review in British Columbia (1992) noted that many First Nations are prioritizing training and services in early childhood care and development as a way of protecting and enhancing the physical and psychosocial health and cultural identities of children and families, and as prerequisites for economic development. Four years earlier, the province's Royal Commission on Education (1988) recommended that bands and councils, school authorities, and government agencies take steps specifically to improve the language capabilities of aboriginal children in pre-school and in the early years of elementary school, in order to ensure their optimal development and success in later endeavours.

The need for child care programs, and trained community members to staff them, is particularly urgent in First Nations communities on federal reserve lands, where access to off-reserve child care is severely limited by geographic distances, social and cultural barriers, and eligibility regulations. The Assembly of First Nations (1989), representing aboriginal peoples across Canada, has also urged that caregivers be trained to deal with the burgeoning population of aboriginal children needing comprehensive care in a culturally appropriate

manner (Recommendation 39). Christine Leo, an administrator in Mount Currie First Nation and one of our partners, underscored the importance of community development 'from the inside out':

We need our own community members to be leaders in the changes to come here. And when we get our daycare up and running, we need them to be staffing that service. We can't rely on outsiders to come in here. They won't know how to approach our families, what some of the things are that parents are facing. They won't know our Elders and what the Elders want to have happen here. And that's why we need this training program. So that we can do it ourselves, and we can do it our own way.

Postmodernist Assumptions

The Generative Curriculum Model was not conceived within the crucible of scholarly post-modernist discourse. However, it has evolved from a 'post-modernist' valuing of multiple voices and insistence upon situating alternative constructions of experiences with reference to the historical, cultural, political and personal contexts in which these constructions were generated. As noted by Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (1999), a modernist perspective strives to find universal and objectively 'true' best practices, criteria of quality, developmental norms and methods of measurement, whereas a postmodern perspective embraces the realization that there are many different, inherently subjective and productive understandings of childhood, early childhood institutions, and of 'good' work with children in early childhood institutions — singular and contingent, not universal and decontextual. Unlike the modernist perspective, which views knowledge as a 'concrete' building block, the Generative Curriculum Model has a very different orientation, one that is consistent with postmodernist thought and arises from the view that useful knowledge exists only in interaction, or in praxis. Such knowledge is mutable rather than immutable; it takes its form from the environment in which it was created. More like water than block or stone, it is endlessly transforming.

We accepted as a starting point that non-native educators based at universities and colleges are simply not positioned to be solely responsible for making valid and useful decisions about how to extend the reach, relevance or appropriateness of early childhood education training and program development in aboriginal communities. In order to extend the reach of early childhood education across cultural boundaries, territorial

borders and historical divides, we must position ourselves to be open, flexible and responsive to community-initiated partnerships. In short, we need to move over and make room for First Nations people to play active roles in all aspects of program planning, curriculum development, course delivery, curricular and extracurricular support for students, and ongoing program monitoring and assessment. In order to respond meaningfully to the goals and practices that define cultural communities, and support the children and families within them, we must first acknowledge the cultural specificity of mainstream teaching and learning. Then we must forge new understandings of what we are doing when we train community members to take the lead in mounting programs that stimulate children's development and involve parents.

At the time Meadow Lake Tribal Council made the University of Victoria its partner of choice, the university did not have an aboriginal curriculum for early childhood education. The Tribal Council made it clear that they would be in the driver's seat in this initiative, and the university would be a desired and necessary passenger. On reviewing available early childhood education programs, our First Nations partners asked: "What of us - our Cree and Dene cultures - is in these programs? How are the particular needs and circumstances of our remote communities going to be addressed in these programs?" These questions initiated a dialogue that refocused both the language of partnership and the language of learning. After eight pilot partnerships with First Nations tribal representatives, we have become convinced that the popular demand for 'culturally sensitive' child development and parent involvement programs cannot be met through established early childhood education theories and professionalization practices. Rather, the success of the Generative Curriculum Model is predicated on stepping outside typical institutional relationships and identifying a common ground of caring, respect, flexibility, and an orientation towards action. From this, co-construction of curricula and collaboration in program delivery can flow.

Clearly, after being subjected to every kind of colonial assault (McMillan, 1995), what is 'best' has not been good for many First Nations peoples. Our pilot partnerships have shown that the dialogue about what constitutes effective and culturally desirable approaches to child care, and related work with children, families and communities, necessitates broadly inclusive discourse between and among individuals, community groups and institutions. This discourse should not be limited to academia and credential-granting bodies that reinforce the division between 'expert and other.'

Grounding ECCD Training in Culture and Community

It has been well documented that early development of language skills enhances conceptual development. All complex activities are coded in the language centres of the brain to allow for expedient rule-governed activity. Therefore, early development of language is critical to later thinking skills (Ogston, 1999). There is strong evidence of the benefits of high quality out-of-home child care and education for cognitive functioning in general and for language development in particular (Greenspan & Benderly, 1997; National Institute for Child Health and Development, 1997). Research has shown that, regardless of socio-economic status, children attending 'higher-quality' daycare centres had higher scores on measures of language development than children not attending daycare (McCartney, 1984; McCartney, Scarr, Phillips, & Grajeck, 1985; Phillips, McCartney, & Scarr, 1987). Schliecker, White, and Jacobs (1991) concluded that day care enhanced language development of toddlers from low socio-economic status families. They found that infants in high quality centres tended to have higher scores on measures of language development than infants reared at home in low-income families.

A plethora of studies have shown that promotion of children's language development can be impacted by the quality of services offered in early childhood programs (e.g., Campbell & Ramey, 1994; Pfannenstiel, Lambson & Yarnell, 1996). However, researchers and practitioners who have encountered limits to their knowledge, skills, and understandings in cross-cultural experiences are joining forces to encourage a more dialogical, open-ended approach to training and program development (Bernhard, 1995; Cheng, 1991; Cole, 1989; Correa, 1989; Goffin, 1996; Harry et al., 1993; Westernoff, 1992). An early ecological model that helps to explain the influence of culture on child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) suggested that human development occurs as a result of interactions and transactions within the environment. Peters and Kontos (1987) adapted Bronfenbrenner's model by portraying it as three concentric circles with permeable boundaries. The inner circle, the microsystem, contains the settings in which the child is directly involved, such as the home, child care, neighbourhood, church and community groups. The second circle, the exosystem, includes the settings in which people who interact with the child are directly involved, and which directly influence or are influenced by the settings in the microsystem. The third circle, the macrosystem, includes all political, social and economic expectations and understandings within the culture at large (Clark, Este, & Shimoni, 1999).

Similarly, our experience with First Nations partners in early childhood training led us to take up the question of what constitutes 'quality' in service delivery across diverse cultural groups (Moss & Pence, 1994; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999). As leaders in early childhood care and education have argued, the objectives and methods of child care embody and reproduce or change the culture in which children and caregivers live and work (Bernhard; 1995; Kessler & Swadener, 1992; Lubek, 1996; Penn, 1997; Woodhead, 1999). Hence, there may be significantly different, equally useful and valued ways of encouraging and responding to children across diverse communities and cultural groups. Many researchers have concluded that optimal development of language and other skills in early childhood requires programming that is appropriate and relevant for the culture in which it is being conducted, taking into consideration what the members of the culture are trying to accomplish in rearing their young (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 1997).

As articulated by Pence and Moss (1994), our approach in the First Nations Partnership Programs is that the definition of 'quality' must be arrived at through an inclusionary process that incorporates and advances cherished aspects of indigenous cultures, languages, traditions, and goals for children. Our initial partnership with Meadow Lake Tribal Council established the importance of building a generative framework which encourages each constituent community involved in the training program to contribute to the curriculum, bringing in its unique set of priorities and practices. Community administrators of the first pilot project were adamant: "As Tribal Council staff, we could not make the error of walking into any of the communities to show them the correct and only way of doing things."

Evolution of the Generative Curriculum Model

In the initial stage of each of the eight partnerships, no one could anticipate exactly what the generated curriculum would include. Few practitioner training models in the human services invite students, much less communities, to engage in an activity of co-construction wherein the outcome is not predetermined. Yet, reflecting on the evolution of the Generative Curriculum Model, what was perhaps most critical to its success was an acceptance of the powerful potential of not knowing — not knowing where the partnership journey would lead, not knowing which aspects of mainstream theory and research on child development and language enhancement would fit, and which would need to be reconstructed by community participants; and not knowing what would have to transpire to create 'quality care' in

the ecological context of First Nations communities. The training experiences that shape the care giving practices of early childhood educators and other out-of-home caregivers exert a major influence upon which culture, and what aspects of culture, are reproduced through subsequent applications of the training curricula in the design and delivery of programs and services for children and their families. Far from being culturally neutral, training curricula for early childhood educators are cultural constructions grounded in the world views, beliefs, and norms of those who conceptualize and teach the curricula (Kessler & Swadener, 1992; Woodhead, Faulkner, & Littleton, 1998).

There are some constraints within which the partnerships operate, for example the need for the program to have academic credibility and to meet provincially legislated licensing and accreditation criteria. As well, funders had expressed the hope that the program, once its effectiveness was shown, would be portable to other First Nations communities and perhaps to other cultural communities. Meeting this expectation without reverting back to the mainstream road, where the journey would likely end with a pre-emptive, prescriptive, 'pan-aboriginal' curriculum, guided our quest to make the Generative Curriculum Model highly process-oriented, using an open architecture that invites and values input from indigenous communities.

The core curricula generated by our partnerships currently consists of 20 university-level courses that are equivalent to those offered in mainstream university programs, and that lead to a two-year university diploma. Courses cover topic areas and skills that are common to most early childhood education training programs, such as child development, program development and delivery for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, involving parents, and communication strategies and professional ethics. Additionally, students travel to nearby communities to complete five practica in licensed child care settings. Course materials provided by the university liaison team introduce students to theoretical approaches and methodology that address a wide spectrum of skills and activities related to child and youth care, for example, program and environmental design. The curriculum provides an overview of the principles that guide the scientific study of human behaviour, of major research themes in the areas of typical and atypical child development, and of legislation and policy regarding support and placement of children with special needs. Throughout the training program, Elders and students generate insights into course materials from the perspective of their own culture. For example, a class discussion on children with special needs might begin with a reflection on the words

of an Elder, who had earlier presented through storytelling the cultural belief that children, whatever their special needs, belonged at home. This perspective opened the door to a discussion of why facilities were developed for children with special needs.

The Generative Curriculum Model framework is designed so that courses are delivered in and by communities, where they are uniquely enriched by the cultural teachings and experiential wisdom of Elders and other community-based resource people. Each course includes regularly scheduled classes and a structure of activities and assignments. Activities include weekly sessions in which students meet with Elders and other guardians of First Nations culture and experience to explore questions related to child and youth care and development. Scripted courses and supplementary materials developed at the university are not 'final' when offered to the communities; rather, they are just beginning their 'generative life.' Throughout the program, the university-based project team is available to provide consultation-liaison support to community-based instructors and administrators. Because the Generative Curriculum Model is a process that is deeply contextual, valuing emergent understandings through the process of community involvement, program delivery has not looked exactly the same in each partnership. Common elements, however, are many and are delivered across similar timetables.

Co-Constructing Culturally 'Fitting' Practices

Reflecting on how this model differs from a didactic pedagogy, an instructor in the Meadow Lake partnership offered this perspective:

I had never taught generatively before, and I felt like I was sitting backwards in my desk. I would present the materials found in textbooks that represent North American majority culture. These ideas and approaches would be assessed by the students and Elders for their appropriateness and fit with Cree and Dene perspectives.

A student in the program at Mount Currie First Nation described her experience succinctly:

Being in this program is like having the best of both worlds. We love to learn about what researchers have found 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.

In contrast to assumptions about the deficiencies of communities and/or parents, which inform many expert-driven approaches to professional training and service delivery, the partnership programs assume that all families have strengths, and that much of the most valid and useful knowledge about the rearing of children can be found in the community itself — across generations, in networks, and in ethnic and cultural traditions (Cochran, 1988). Like Rogoff's (1994) description of a community of learners, all become learners, all become teachers. Students are routinely asked to question the 'goodness of fit' of various conceptualizations of early childhood education introduced throughout the program. Rather than relying on 'best practices' and outside criteria for determining 'quality' child care, students work collaboratively — alongside their instructors, community participants and the university-based team — and practise training techniques in the context of their own community's particular goals for child care and development. The generative framework encourages ingenuity, diversity and community initiative, such that the program 'fits' the community's circumstances, resources, level of commitment, and readiness.

A synthesis of knowledge and action is achieved through: (a) five practica in community-based agencies; (b) the physical proximity of children and families, whose embodiment of the culture of the community keeps student and instructors ever mindful of their constituency; and (c) continuous input from community members and dialogue with Elders. Over the two-year training program, students are challenged by the tensions between theory, community objectives, and cultural considerations, and by their daily interactions with children in practice settings. In significant ways, the reach of the Generative Curriculum Model extends far beyond the limited goal of 'culturally sensitive' programming. Its open architecture and guiding principles create an open space, in both the process and content of ECCD training that becomes filled by the voices of First Nations peoples. As a Meadow Lake Elder observed, the bicultural and community-specific features of this model are as "two sides of an eagle feather," noting that "both are needed to fly."

Elder Participation

Linguists agree that language shapes the way people perceive the world as well as how they describe it. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) testifies that fluent speakers of First Nations traditional languages, particularly Elders, are certain that without their languages, their cultures will be lost, because it is impossible to translate the deeper meanings of words and concepts into the languages of other cultures. This

concern was frequently emphasized by members of the First Nations with whom we have partnered, especially by older people whose status as Elders reflects their venerated role as carriers of cultural beliefs and traditions. Their Elder status often includes a recognition of their fluency in the traditional language of the community, which may be little known or used by younger generations, other than perhaps in ceremonial prayers and songs. The eight partnership programs underlined the need for a designated 'intergenerational facilitator' within the community where the training program was designed and delivered. This individual organized the participation of many Elders and other respected community members throughout the program. The intergenerational facilitator also translated as needed. The regular participation of Elders in the classroom helped to reinforce and extend students' positive identifications with their cultural heritage, their traditional languages, and their roles as caregivers (Pence & McCallum, 1994; Ball & Pence, 1999). As an Elder involved in the program at Mount Currie noted:

"Our weekly meetings with students helps us all to remember and pass along the knowledge of our culture and our language before the White Man came, and reminds us of the ways of our culture in raising our children and how we want them to grow and who they will become."

Elders and other respected community members became participatory conduits between the classroom experience and the community experience. As 'co-instructors' they addressed specific questions and topics related to child care and development. Not only did Elders generate community-initiated curriculum by sharing stories from their past and their views on contemporary practices and values, they became themselves part of a transformational process that impacts on students and the community as a whole.

As a result of Elders' regular participation in training programs, new intergenerational relationships were forged inside the community. Students were able to discuss with Elders the implications of historical and cultural factors affecting First Nations children and families today and to reflect on what one student aptly described as the Elders' "wisdom from the accumulation of their lifetime experience and knowledge." Elder participation is all the more indispensable since detailed information about the history and family practices in many aboriginal communities is not available in written form. Cultural activities led by the Elders during the training program often included traditional ceremonies and the collection of items and documents of cultural importance — not as adjuncts to Euro-western educa-

tion but as intrinsic components of the community-specific cultural knowledge that is needed for early childhood educators to work effectively to enhance the well-being of children and families.

Our ongoing evaluation of the dynamics and the impacts of the Generative Curriculum Model highlights the centrality of Elder participation in generating rich curricula content; helping students to realize educational success; fostering among students a strengthened self-identification with their cultures of origin and their communities' goals for children; and facilitating a positive reaffirmation of the role of Elders in the community. We have found that many of the materials that outsiders to First Nations communities might regard as 'classics' or 'best sellers' for stimulating language development can be experienced as alienating or irrelevant to rural aboriginal communities. Typically, the video and literature resources that are popular in urban, middle class, largely Anglo-Canadian settings do not reflect the experiences of children or their caregivers in rural, non-white communities. Traditional native education relies upon ways of interacting, and ways of using language, which are not conspicuous in early childhood education (Leavitt, 1993). Aboriginal oral history and storytelling, for example, often express cultural traditions that conceive of time as a sequence rather than duration.

While simultaneously promoting speech and language development, community-generated materials and activities can promote individual and collective goals for cultural reconstruction and transmission. Students in the partnership program with Tl'azt'en Nation created new materials and activity plans for children by incorporating the teachings of Elders, producing 'culture kits' to be used in their new daycare and Aboriginal Head Start program. These included moccasins made by the students, as well as traditional crafts (basket weaving, doll making) and foods. Children's books about community lifestyle, culture, and family values were created by students during the partnership program with Onion Lake First Nation. Cooperative activities among students and Elders in the Treaty 8 Tribal Association led to the construction of deerskin drums and teepees as well as exploration of ways to modify these traditional activities to make them part of a developmentally stimulating program of activities for preschoolers. In the partnership program with Mount Currie First Nation, sharing circles, which have spiritual meanings and social significance in some First Nations cultures, were frequently used as a format for group discussions. In this program, one student worked with her husband and an Elder to create a traditional talking stick, which is used to structure conversational flow and

turn taking without interruption and to draw respect to the speaker.

Learning 'All Ways'

One of the strengths of the Generative Curriculum Model is that learning occurs 'all ways' through a diversity of voices and cultural perspectives. University-based partners are positioned to learn as much as community-based partners about effective program development and delivery. Students in the program become more fully aware of their own cultural identity, their own views and how these relate to the views of others, both inside and outside their communities.

Three formative evaluations of both the curriculum aspect of the project and the community services component of the project have been conducted (Cook, 1993; Jette, 1993; Riggan & Kemble, 1994), each recording positive impacts of the partnership initiative upon community life as a whole. The high level of involvement by First Nations community members is linked to heightened awareness across the entire community of the challenges inherent in optimal development for children and families, as well as increased motivation to meet the need for quality child care and youth programs. Training programs have produced a legacy of more talk and more action in partner communities, creating what one administrator has called a 'ripple effect' directed at myriad ways of improving the environment for children and families. Leaders in the constituent Cree and Dene communities around Meadow Lake reported a resurgence in the role of Elders in all aspects of community undertakings as a result of their pivotal and effective roles in the training program, and a corresponding revitalization of cultural pride and traditional value systems in the modern world (Jette, 1993).

Evidence of both anticipated and unanticipated impacts on individuals and community social structures reveals the collaborative development and delivery of early childhood education curricula to be simultaneously an educational program and a community development initiative. Latent and manifest strengths of First Nations communities were reinforced and utilized in conceptualizing and delivering early childhood training, thereby enhancing the daily environment experienced by children and leading directly, in some circumstances, to the introduction of supportive developmental programs and services. A graduate of the Treaty 8 Tribal Association partnership program, for example, established a culturally sensitive school-readiness program for preschool children on the Saulteau reserve. Nancy Anderson, as the early childhood educator of the "Cree-ative Wonders" preschool, regularly modifies nursery rhymes,

plays and songs into Cree, the spoken language of the Saulteau people. A comprehensive program evaluation nearing completion will provide further details of the outcomes and the potential of this community-based, generative curriculum approach to training in early childhood education. Nonetheless, our inaugural decade of partnerships strongly suggests that the Generative Curriculum Model and its community-involving process orientation create a framework that can respond effectively to community-initiated goals for culturally appropriate child care and development.

Conclusion

By describing this unique training model, as it has evolved through partnerships with First Nations communities, we are not advocating wholesale adoption of a new 'best practice' for indigenous peoples. Rather, we hope to encourage the elaboration and extension of alternatives to the exclusionary, modernist agenda of early child care and development. When we really do grasp the full significance of responding to community needs and being sensitive to culture, we can no longer engage in 'business as usual' in the delivery of mainstream early childhood education programs. Being responsive to indigenous cultures and communities means more than simply acknowledging diversity and providing channels for community members to voice their concerns. It means rebuilding through partnerships the very foundations of how training programs are conceived and how optimal developmental outcomes are defined. It means engaging in dialogic construction of relevant curricula, sharing the floor in delivering courses, and transforming training from a pre-packaged, didactic process to an open-ended, participatory process. As Vern Bachiu, programs and policy director for the Meadow Lake Tribal Council, said simply: "What we are trying to do is turn the world upside down."

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to acknowledge the eight First Nations who have partnered in delivering the program described here, and three sponsors of documentation and evaluation research from 1998-2000: Human Resources Development Canada (Child Care Visions), The Lawson Foundation, and The Vancouver Foundation.

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