Globally, Indigenous and ethnic-minority populations and the children of immigrants are less likely to participate in early childhood care and education (ECCE) than is the average child in their country. These disparities persist despite increased recognition of the benefits of ECCE for all children and its equalizing impact for those who are disadvantaged. This chapter explores how early childhood initiatives provided to Indigenous young children can enhance opportunities for early learning and foster a sense of identity and belonging, while equalizing readiness for formal schooling. The chapter suggests ways that key actors can work more systematically to ensure access to quality ECCE for Indigenous children, and highlights the need to bring Indigenous parents and community representatives into decision-making about the goals for ECCE and preferred avenues for achieving them.

An estimated 370 million Indigenous people live in the world. Indigenous populations tend to have a young demographic, due to high birth rates combined with comparatively short life expectancies. Indigenous young children are arguably the most socially excluded population in the world today, and their quality of life very often provides suboptimal conditions for health, development, and early learning. In addition to conditions such as historical trauma and ongoing colonial incursions that sometimes involve sudden, forced relocations from homelands, many Indigenous children experience a combination of the most significant risk factors for educational attainment, namely: minority status, poverty, rural location, minority language, and having a disability or being raised by a parent with a disability.

Although specific information on Indigenous children's participation in schooling and preschool is almost completely lacking, unequal opportunities for Indigenous children are widely acknowledged. According to John Henriksen, the Chairperson-Rapporteur of the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, “The full enjoyment of the right to education as recognized in international human
rights law is far from reality for most Indigenous peoples. Deprivation of access to quality education is a major factor contributing towards their social marginalization, poverty and dispossession. Similarly, UNESCO reports that “Indigenous communities are frequently denied access to education. . . . Among the main needs to be met in order for Indigenous children to have access to good quality education are appropriate and accessible schooling opportunities, adequate resources in schools and the cultural relevance of the education offered.” Increasing the number of Indigenous people who complete secondary school is a low-hanging fruit for government investment, with far-reaching economic and social benefits for a country as a whole.

Many development strategies, such as the Millennium Development Goals and UNESCO’s Education for All initiative, center on expanding access to schooling as a priority for promoting equity for Indigenous children and other marginalized groups. However, enrollment in school does not imply school readiness, guarantee attendance, or ensure the kind of active engagement needed for learning. Although Indigenous youngsters may enroll in primary school, they appear to be more likely to have high rates of absenteeism, early learning challenges, failure, and premature school leaving.

Several issues besides access to schooling must therefore be addressed to reduce educational inequities among Indigenous children. First, life conditions for Indigenous children must be improved through structural reforms and infrastructure developments that reduce poverty, food insecurity, lack of all-weather transportation access to programs and services, exposure to racism, and other social exclusions. Second, many Indigenous children lack access to adequate nutrition and conditions for health, as well as timely identification and intervention for emerging health problems or developmental delays. As a result, many Indigenous children experience a higher prevalence of a range of health problems that affect school attendance, engagement in school, and learning outcomes. For example, in Canada, Indigenous children suffer significantly higher rates of early hearing loss, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, early-onset diabetes, respiratory disorders, and accidental injury. Third, only a minority of Indigenous children have access to any early childhood development program, and few of their parents experienced early childhood as a period of stimulating language development and acquiring a drive for learning. Fourth, when Indigenous children attend school, expectations for parents’ involvement tend to be low, and the language of instruction, teaching methods, and curriculum content may be linguistically and culturally incongruent and hold little interest.

Among these, early childhood care and education plays a central role. Quality ECCE programs have been shown to be a “powerful equalizer” in nurturing children’s social adjustment and the communication skills needed for schooling, promoting excitement about learning, and engendering a sense of themselves as capable learners. Studies of the developing brain, the human genome, and the impact of early childhood experiences on later learning, behavior, and health have
converged to create a compelling argument for investing in programs to provide optimal conditions for children's growth and development before formal schooling. Consequently, policy-makers around the world increasingly recognize the importance of improving the quality of ECCE in addition to improving access.

Early experiences of feeling prepared for the demands of school and academic success are pivotal in engendering children's high self-esteem, engagement in schooling, and bonding with the school environment. In contrast, experiences of being unable to handle learning challenges are associated with low self-esteem, poor academic performance, and early school leaving. Research on transitions to school also show that children who feel socially accepted and a sense of belonging when they encounter their classmates, teachers, and curriculum content at school are more likely to become engaged. Indigenous children entering school with little or no understanding of the language of instruction, however, face monumental challenges for their engagement and for parents' involvement in supporting their children's successful transition to school.

This chapter emphasizes the potential for targeted investments in culturally based, family-involving ECCE to increase Indigenous children's readiness for sustained and successful engagement in education. Research findings and promising ECCE practices are highlighted. As an example, the Canadian government's long-term investment in the Aboriginal Head Start program is described as a successful demonstration of the kind of flexible, community-driven, holistic approach that enjoys high demand and involvement from Indigenous parents and appears to increase Indigenous children's educational engagement in the first years of schooling. The need to strengthen Indigenous community capacities to design, deliver, evaluate, and expand quality ECCE is identified as a first step in creating the infrastructure for community-based ECCE. Recommended steps emphasize interministerial coordination and collaborative partnerships between governments and Indigenous organizations to enable Indigenous families and communities to improve conditions for their children's health, nutrition, and development, and to implement culturally based approaches to early learning and school readiness.

**Initiatives That Promote Equity for Indigenous Children**

**THE SCOPE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS**

Initiatives to support young children's health, development, and learning include (but are not limited to) prenatal nutrition and education programs focused on mothers; home visiting programs that help mothers, fathers, and other family caregivers to stimulate children's cognitive development; early learning programs based in community settings; preschool and kindergarten programs collocated with schools; and community-wide programs for environmental safety and family
recreation. Considerable evidence obtained in high-income countries supports the potential cognitive benefits of out-of-home (often called center-based) early childhood programs for children 3 years of age and older if these programs are of high quality and congruent with children's language and culture. Although little research has focused specifically on Indigenous children, studies show that families who are impoverished, face high stress, and/or lack access to safe, reliable, nurturing care for infants and young children are most likely to benefit from such programs. In the majority of the world, although a wide variety of ECCE initiatives have been described in program literature, little research has evaluated the effectiveness of programs for meeting various needs in various circumstances. Research is especially lacking on home-based programs that focus on parents as children's first teachers, in contrast to the amount of research focused on the child in out-of-home program contexts.

MULTILEVEL INTERVENTIONS

Although most investments in early childhood development in high-income countries go toward center-based programs, a synthesis of research on early childhood development concludes that "nurturant qualities of the environments where children grow, live, and learn—parents, caregivers, family, and community—will have the most significant impact on their development." Research linking early experiences with neurobiological development suggests that environmental conditions in the early years literally "sculpt" the developing brain. Poverty, with its attendant risk factors of poor nutrition, high stress, and high stigma, has a particularly strong impact on early development. A plethora of studies shows that up to 50% of the variance in early childhood outcomes is significantly associated with socioeconomic status. Education deficits of Indigenous children can thus be understood to reflect the cumulative effects of pervasive poverty and social exclusion.

Ensuring access to quality ECCE experiences—whether home- or community-based—as well as to early intervention services as needed, can contribute in important ways to the overall experience of a nurturant environment. However, the early environment also includes a broad range of inputs, from food quality and security, to government policies determining birth registration and availability of transportation to access services and resources, to macrolevel societal values affecting experiences such as racism, social exclusion of children with disabilities, and so on. Strategies at any of these levels can affect the quality of the learning environment for infants and young children, as well as their long-term educational attainment, quality of life, health, and life expectancy. One thing is abundantly clear: Interventions at only one or two of these levels—early learning programs without provisions for health and nutrition or family income generation, for example—will not likely yield measurable gains in educational equity for young Indigenous children. This reality calls for focused, persistent efforts
among sector leaders within countries to collaborate to create multisectoral solutions.

THE CULTURAL NATURE OF QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION PROVISION

Culture is embodied in the ways children are raised and the proximal ecological system in which they grow and develop. It follows that no singular approach to ECCE initiatives will fit all parents and children. Although it is generally acknowledged that goals and approaches to early childhood development are grounded in culture, there is a great deal more rhetoric about responding to cultural diversity than there is evidence of time taken to consider cultural values and the goals of children’s primary caregivers, and to incorporate cultural activities and local language preferences into early learning.

A conspicuous example of the contradictions between rhetoric about cultural congruence and community development and what is actually supported by donor agencies and national governments is the transfer of so-called best practices from high-income to low-income countries. This practice is frequently seen in the promotion and implementation of brand-name programs and the steady march toward standardization and homogenization of ECCE training, early learning progress measurement, and program evaluation, often based on persuasive program promotion by originators of the early learning tool, toy, or technique. It is common to hear that, where no locally developed tools or programs appear to exist, there is no need to “reinvent the wheel” when a Euro-Western tool or program model can be adopted or adapted. Yet, few peer-reviewed research reports substantiate claims of “best” in controlled comparative studies or standardized school readiness measurement tools transported from one setting to another. A similar paucity of evidence-based program models developed by and for local communities should provide impetus for efforts to implement and evaluate locally driven program models, rather than be seen as a vacuum to be filled with imported programs.

Exporting Euro-Western early learning programs to Indigenous communities can interrupt the transmission of locally valued cultural knowledge and practices and undermine the diversity of voices, knowledge sources, ways of life, and supports for raising children in local conditions. Why does this matter? First, these assets constitute the very resources that community development programs aim to preserve and capitalize on to support children’s learning and development. Programs built on these local assets are likely to garner high participation from parents, grandparents, and local leaders, and are most likely to fit and be sustainable in local conditions. Second, imported standards and programs that reproduce prescribed Euro-Western parenting behaviors and child development outcomes often erode the cultural, linguistic, and social heterogeneity of societies around the world. Third, when measurement tools and programs are marketed
as best practice and terms like "the science of early childhood development" (as if there is only one) are invoked to justify this proliferation, it can undermine efforts by Indigenous community leaders and scholars to establish the legitimacy of local perspectives on important curriculum content and appropriate pedagogical approaches.

Universal access to learning opportunities does not imply universal models, which is often assumed when funders plan to take a program to scale. Similarly, equitable opportunities does not mean that all programs must offer the same curriculum content, language of instruction, and format to all children according to a standardized model. Further, universal access does not guarantee universal provision: Some parents will enroll their children in a program and ensure their attendance, whereas others will not. Universal provision therefore requires actively working with parents to establish what kinds of programs interest them and what locations, hours, content, and demands on them will work for their families.

**Locally Determined Early Learning Settings and Goals**

Although some countries and states are encouraging the downward expansion of public schools to encompass more programs for preschoolers, centralizing programs for young children in public schools is not necessarily the most promising approach to improve access for many Indigenous children. Government-operated schools have yet to prove that they can grasp and effectively address the historically, socially, and economically conditioned needs and goals of Indigenous families and ensure their cultural safety and dignity. Programs operated by public school districts tend to reproduce dominant cultural understandings of what children and parents need and should be doing to promote children’s school readiness and success. The corresponding emphasis on measuring school readiness using standardized tools created in North America has generated alarm among some Indigenous peoples who are concerned that pressures for preschoolers to develop numeracy and communication skills in the dominant language will overshadow the holistic learning goals at the heart of many Indigenous-based approaches to raising young children. These approaches often include Indigenous language acquisition, teaching and learning through intergenerational relationships, participation in family and community activities that often yield functional life skills, a literacy of the land, and spiritual development. Unlike school-based programs, early learning programs that are community based and community driven have the potential to serve the dual purpose of improving conditions for Indigenous children’s health, development, and learning, while also contributing to Indigenous peoples’ capacity for self-determination and the maintenance or revitalization of their cultural knowledges and languages.

The first step in implementing quality ECCE programs that are culturally meaningful, accessible, and well-subscribed is to include Indigenous parents in
deliberations about promising approaches. In most countries, Indigenous populations wield less economic and political power than other populations and are consequently less able to influence policies and institutions that affect them. They are likely to be more affected by the interests of (non-Indigenous) dominant cultural groups, and there is often an expectation or demand for them to acculturate to mainstream society. In an educational context, this often means that pressure is placed on parents to yield their home language, cultural values, and ways of life in favor of those of the dominant group for their child's early learning, and to accept mainstream forms of teaching and learning and relinquish decision-making about choices of knowledge and skills for children to master before they start school. This power differential means that those in privileged positions in civic organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and policy sectors need to support Indigenous people in advocating for their right, codified in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to set and pursue their own goals and approaches in promoting their children's early education.

MEANINGFUL PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Engaging parents and other caregivers more actively in supporting their children's early learning, and working with linguistically and culturally diverse children are two areas identified as lagging in education sectors. It is generally accepted that engaging parents begins with showing respect, listening, and communicating about their central roles in their children's early education and transition to schooling, and about their beliefs, goals, needs, and ideas for supporting their child's early learning. Parent involvement must be a funded aspect of ECCE initiatives and of the broader agenda for schooling. ECCE practitioners and decision-makers must work to raise parents' awareness of the importance of ECCE, encourage their participation in program planning, and create flexible opportunities for parent involvement through, for example, assisting with language translation or enhancing the curriculum with local songs, games, and stories.

Research consistently shows that the primary caregivers' nurturing and teaching style has the strongest influence on children's motivation and learning. Parents' interest in their children's education and their involvement with their children in learning activities, from talking about school experiences, to assisting with homework, to participating in after-school activities such as culture and athletic clubs, can have a tremendous positive impact on children's academic success and retention in school. Programs must also include education and activities for parents to learn about promoting their child's nutrition, health, development, and early learning in ways that are culturally congruent and feasible.

Involving parents and other community members has worked effectively in many instances to produce locally relevant resource materials and teaching strategies, as well as to garner parents' enthusiasm and support. In Canada, for example, Inuit Elders and ECCE practitioners worked together to create books in the
local language (Inuit), illustrated by community members with familiar objects and home and community scenes, telling stories that the community wanted to pass on to their children.\textsuperscript{36} In the remote Kyrgyz Mountain areas of Kyrgyzstan, a project called Reading for Children provides opportunities for family members to introduce young children to illustrated books and stories in their own languages. The project worked with Kyrgyz writers and illustrators to create books in local languages.\textsuperscript{37} Community members were trained as facilitators of parent–child reading, and they delivered workshops for parents of 3- to 10-year-old children. In Papua New Guinea, the national government has been able to implement home-language-based multilingual early education in hundreds of local languages partly by involving communities in the development of materials.\textsuperscript{38} These examples also illustrate the need to consider the language(s) used in ECCE initiatives.

**LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION**

Most Indigenous parents have to face the fact that if their child attends formal schooling, he or she will be taught in a language other than their Indigenous language. For many Indigenous children, this means starting school in an unfamiliar language. Children who speak a vernacular of the majority language may have been socialized at home to use language in particular ways that make them seem resistant or almost phobic about participating in typical whole-classroom discourse.\textsuperscript{39}

Learning in a language not one’s own presents a double challenge. One must learn a new language and new knowledge contained in that language. Furthermore, young children can perceive that languages are valued differently.\textsuperscript{40} When a linguistic and cultural discontinuity exists between home and preschool or primary school, Indigenous and other minority-language children may perceive that their language and culture are not valued—a perception that lowers their self-confidence and self-esteem and interferes with their learning.\textsuperscript{41} These challenges exacerbate the risks to Indigenous children’s attendance, engagement in learning tasks, and retention in the first years of school, and may create insurmountable obstacles to garnering parents’ interest and involvement in their child’s education.

Studies show that home-language-based instruction can increase a child’s self-esteem and cultural pride and promote a smooth transition between home and school, thus fostering an emotional stability that translates to cognitive stability.\textsuperscript{42} Benson, a leading scholar in the field of bi- and multilingual education, contends that, worldwide, children’s home language has been established as the most efficient language for early literacy and content area instruction.\textsuperscript{43} Dutcher, drawing on extensive involvement in early education in majority world contexts, also concludes that young children develop literacy and cognitive skills and master
content material most easily when they are taught in a familiar language. Several robust studies show that cognitive and academic language skills, once developed, and subject knowledge, once acquired, transfer readily from one language to another. These findings are consistent with anecdotal reports of the benefits of home-language-based instruction in ECCE programs in Mali, Papua New Guinea, and Peru, as reported by UNESCO.

Language is not only a tool for communication and knowledge but also a fundamental attribute of cultural identity and empowerment, both for individuals and groups. It is said that the home language symbolizes a deep, abiding, even cord-like connection between speakers and their cultural identity. Indigenous scholars in Canada, the United States, and Aotearoa New Zealand make frequent reference to connections between language, community, place, and time. Although most parents want their children to get a good education, they also hope they will love and respect their heritage language and culture and their home community. As one parent in a home-language-based education program in the North Solomons Province of Papua New Guinea said: "It is important to teach our children to read and write, but it is more important to teach them to be proud of themselves and of us." At the very least, early education should not separate the child culturally or linguistically from his or her family or culture of origin. This may mean delivering ECCE and primary school materials in an Indigenous language only, in an Indigenous language plus a language that is more broadly used, or in one or more non-Indigenous languages.

In many countries, language rights, including schooling in home languages, are among the first claims that Indigenous peoples and other minorities voice in situations of political change and evolution. Over the past half-century, Indigenous peoples have worked to reclaim their languages and to promote language transmission to young children through a variety of strategies including curriculum development; teacher training; and the development of print, multimedia, and online resources. Indigenous people have explored a range of delivery models, including several examples of Indigenous language immersion in early childhood programs.

A host of UN declarations and conventions affirm the rights of minorities, including Indigenous peoples, to learn and/or to have instruction in their "mother tongue." Key documents include the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. According to UNESCO, "It is increasingly obvious that the language of instruction at the beginning of one’s education at such a crucial moment for future learning should be the mother tongue."

Regardless of Indigenous claims and international agreements, however, decisions about which languages will serve as the medium of instruction, and the treatment of children’s home languages in the education system frequently exemplify the exercise of power, the manufacture of marginalization and minoritization, and the unfulfilled promise of children’s rights. The political and
socioeconomic marginalization of Indigenous peoples goes hand in hand with their linguistic marginalization from their earliest experiences of education, and the former can be seen as a consequence of the latter.

Language-in-education policies are often motivated by an explicit or hidden curriculum of assimilation. Political, social, and technical considerations often collide in policy-makers' decisions on language medium, schooling, and curriculum. Considerations include, but go beyond, questions of resources, teacher training, and subjects to be studied. Other crucial factors include the political will of local, regional, and national governments; the relationships between countries and their former colonizers; the understanding and patience of international donors; and parents' hopes and anxieties about which languages their children will need to secure employment and participate with dignity in their social, legal, and economic worlds. Although the broader political ramifications of language-in-education policies and practices are beyond the scope of this chapter, Blommaert, Golding and Harris, and Rampton62 provide excellent analyses of these issues.

The dominant language or dominant cultural model of ECCE is not always imposed on families. In some contexts, parents express a clear preference for their children to receive early education in the dominant language or language of schooling, rather than in their home language(s). Parents often have good reasons for this choice, and tensions must be addressed between respecting parents' preferences and providing education for them to understand the long-term contribution of their child's academic proficiency in their home language to their learning and social outcomes.

Additional tensions and trade-offs are related to home-language schooling. In many situations, a single program serves families with different home languages, and difficult decisions must be made about which language(s) to support in an ECCE program. Resolving these dilemmas requires careful mapping of community assets, needs, and goals that would support alternative pathways to providing quality ECCE, and mutual learning on the parts of funders/decision-makers and community members about the potential outcomes for children of alternative approaches. One set of principles will not yield the most advantageous and practical approach in all settings.

**BILINGUAL PROGRAMS**

Many Indigenous children grow up with a language used in the home and one or more other languages used more widely in the community or in public media. Home-language-based bilingual and multilingual ECCE and primary school programs may be effective for these children. UNESCO recommends that, whenever possible, a child's home language should be the primary language of instruction, and that children should be offered additional instruction in one or more additional languages that have socioeconomic advantage, such as the language of local commerce or an international language. The relationship between the
socioeconomic marginalization of Indigenous peoples goes hand in hand with their linguistic marginalization from their earliest experiences of education, and the former can be seen as a consequence of the latter.

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language(s) used for instruction in school and children's ultimate academic achievement is complex and beyond the scope of the current discussion. However, it is important to note the convergence of findings from investigators on this topic indicating the critical importance of providing continuity in the primary language of the home through ECCE programs and throughout primary school, until children are proficient readers of academic subject matter. During this time, children should not be compelled to transition from learning in their primary language to learning in a secondary language. Reports on home-language-based programs, in which children may learn another language only as a subject of study, conclude that children who learn in their primary language for the first 6 to 8 years of formal schooling have better academic performance and self-esteem than do those who receive instruction exclusively in the official language or those who transition too early from the home language to the official language.

Although home-language-based bilingual ECCE programs have been established in many minority language communities around the world, they are far from common and research on them is scarce. In general, bilingual programs need to provide children with opportunities to interact with fluent speakers of the languages. For Indigenous children whose ancestral language is not spoken either in the home or in the community, the situation is complicated. There is insufficient evidence to support heritage-language-only immersion programs unless fluent speakers are available to deliver the program. However, given the ground-swell of demand among Indigenous parents for heritage-language immersion ECCE programs, including Hawaiian and Navajo in the United States, Mi'kmaq in Canada, and Maori in Aotearoa New Zealand, there is a need for pilot projects with methodologically sound outcome research.

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN PROGRAMS

In many contexts, the current upsurge of resistance to colonialism among Indigenous peoples can encourage community engagement in early learning initiatives that afford priority to home languages and local cultural knowledge. Indigenous parents' demand for culturally based, home-language-based ECCE was the impetus for both the Aha Pūnana Leo program in Hawaii and the Kaugel First Language First education program in the Western Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea. In both instances, grassroots demand was met by political will on the part of local governments. The Kaugel program was created in response to the Kaugel people's concern that their children, who spoke only their Kaugel language, were doing poorly in the English-only education system. They established a program in which children learn to read and write in their own language before they enter primary school. After children become proficient in reading and writing in Kaugel, they continue their education in the English school system.

Hawaiian immersion preschools with a high level of parent involvement have yielded impressive academic results. In the 1960s and 1970s, as part of a broader
reform of civil rights, a Hawaiian renaissance took root. In 1978, Hawaiian and English were designated co-official languages in the new state constitution, which also mandated the promotion of Hawaiian language, culture, and history. Parents and language activists established Aha Pūnana Leo community-operated preschools delivered entirely in Hawaiian. Parents successfully lobbied the state government for Hawaiian-medium tracks in primary and secondary schools, which in turn generated a need for ongoing recruitment and development of native-language teachers and materials. Hawaiian-based education now serves approximately 2,000 students. Hawaiian-based bilingual high schools boast 100% graduation and college attendance among students, who are mostly Indigenous. A similarly successful program of Maori language nurseries, preschools, and schools was established through a grassroots Indigenous language revitalization movement in Aotearoa New Zealand in the 1980s.

Such well-established programs are promising practices that could be explored with other Indigenous populations when there is parent demand and enough fluent speakers to support program delivery. These programs were only able to get started through the participation of parents and other community members who were passionate about seeing the programs succeed, both in order to preserve their Indigenous cultures and languages and to turn around the high failure rate among their children in schools where they were being educated in a language they did not know. These programs have grown exponentially over two decades and continue to be governed in part by parents and local community leaders.

INDIGENOUS CAPACITY BUILDING

Teacher characteristics are a key ingredient in student engagement and performance. Although research has not conclusively identified characteristics of good teachers, a call is consistently heard among Indigenous peoples for more Indigenous teachers and other professionals to work with children and families. Moreover, a national policy allowing and supporting home-language-based early childhood programs must invest in training Indigenous candidates who are fluent in the home language of the target population and have some knowledge of their culture. A need exists for ECCE training opportunities that provide scope for communities' particular cultures, languages, goals, and needs to be considered by trainees through the training program. Further, training needs to be readily accessible through innovative approaches that integrate on-the-job training and mentoring, independent study, peer learning circles, and blended course delivery, including virtual classrooms and tele-education. A targeted, coordinated approach that fosters partnerships between Indigenous organizations and postsecondary institutions could expand the number of qualified Indigenous ECCE practitioners.

One model with documented success in strengthening Indigenous capacity for ECCE and for leadership in policy and program decision-making that affects Indigenous education is the First Nations Partnership Program offered for
20 years by the University of Victoria in Canada.75 The program was instigated by
the Meadow Lake Tribal Council (MLTC) in the province of Saskatchewan in 1989.
Aiming to provide ECCE training for Cree and Dene community members, MLTC
could not find an existing program with room for culturally specific knowledge to
come into the students' course work, and no universities or colleges were pre-
pared to deliver postsecondary courses in the community or involve community
members, including Elders, in the teaching and learning process. The MLTC
applied successfully for federal funds through Human Resources Development
Canada and entered into a partnership with the University of Victoria's School of
Child and Youth Care to create a career-laddered program of course work. The
courses developed a "generative curriculum" approach that incorporated, in equal
measure, university- and community-generated content. Twenty co-scripted
courses were delivered in the partnering First Nation communities, enabling
Elders to teach alongside locally recruited, university-appointed instructors.
Participation by community members in all aspects of the training program con-
tributed significantly to program success. Community-based delivery also enabled
students to undertake practica in local settings and allowed community members
and service staff in local agencies to observe and be involved in the students'
learning journeys.

Evaluation of the program after seven partnerships found that it was the most
successful postsecondary education program in Canada in terms of Indigenous
students' completion of a 1-year certificate and 2-year diploma program. Over a
total of ten 2-year partnerships, the program supported completion of Early
Childhood Education (ECE) credentials by 151 Indigenous graduates. Ninety-five
percent of these graduates remained in their communities; 65% introduced new
programs for children, youth, and families; 21.5% joined the staff of existing pro-
grams; and 11.5% continued on the education ladder toward a university degree.76
A career-laddered approach provided access to accredited postsecondary educa-
tion, enabling students first to obtain preparatory training to ensure their success
in postsecondary courses; second, to complete an ECE certificate; third, to upgrade
certification with additional course work in special needs and infant and toddler
care, which are separate levels of certification in some jurisdictions; fourth, to
complete a diploma in ECE or a related field such as child and youth care; and
finally, to apply to postsecondary institutions to continue with third- and fourth-
year bachelor-level studies in ECCE or a related field.

Following the program's pilot delivery, the MLTC passed their co-ownership of
the program to Saskatchewan Indian Institutes of Technology, which currently
carries on the traditions of community-based, cohort-driven delivery of the
career-laddered program through partnerships that incorporate Indigenous as
well as Euro-Western-based curricula. Recognized by UNESCO as an exemplary
approach to training that incorporates Indigenous knowledge, the program has
been adapted in other culturally specific education programs around the world,
not only in ECE but in other professional fields as well.77
Key Gaps in Evidence on Effective Supports for Indigenous Children's Early Learning

DISAGGREGATED DATA ON INDIGENOUS CHILDREN'S ENGAGEMENT

Despite promising developments in community-based ECCE provision in different regions, much remains to be learned. Indigenous and other minority children are often the hardest to reach due to their socially marginalized status and, often, their rural or remote locations. There is therefore a need for disaggregated data to track the extent to which ECCE initiatives—which may be delivering gains with the majority population of youngsters—are actually reaching this population. There is also a need for research to develop understandings of what kinds of ECCE strategies generate the most demand by Indigenous parents for their boys and for their girls, and which strategies are most effective in promoting girls' and boys' educational participation and early learning in different kinds of circumstances.

MEASURING PROGRAM UPTAKE AND EFFECTIVENESS

Educational researchers’ overwhelming focus has been on teaching children over 7 years of age. Experimentation and evaluation are a key missing aspect of policymaking and program development in most countries and in the ECCE field as a whole. ECCE is distinct from primary education in its emphases on supporting the care and development of the whole child in the context of his or her family and on doing, speaking, and listening more than on reading, writing, and numeracy. The current lack of performance measurement—even as basic as tracking Indigenous children’s subsequent grade-level completion—focused on Indigenous children makes it impossible to know which policies, program delivery approaches, program elements, and staff characteristics are working or where reforms are most needed.

LANGUAGE OF PROGRAM DELIVERY

Only a handful of research studies describe long-term outcomes of home-language-based ECCE programs; most studies are limited to early outcomes of innovations during and at the end of primary school. Although decades of research in psychology and linguistics have focused on how children learn their first language, almost no research highlights the conditions that support young children to learn more than one language in the early years. Many scholars point to the need for more research to identify the most effective approaches to supporting second language acquisition and delivering bilingual curriculum in early childhood programs. Few guidelines exist to support parents in raising their children to be bi- or multilingual, or to continue to develop their home language
while participating in early childhood programs or primary school delivered in a different language. Given the priority many Indigenous communities place on sustaining or strengthening Indigenous language transmission to the youngest generation, these are critical areas for research and program innovation.

EARLY LEARNING MEASUREMENT CHALLENGES

Early learning programs and measurement tools created by national governments or international bodies can enable regional and cross-national comparisons. When a common curriculum exists, there is the potential for children to develop a common set of skills that are thought to prepare them for success in primary school. However, a growing number of investigators express concern that developmental norms and expectations for early learning and school readiness may not be appropriate for all Indigenous and other minority children. Standardized developmental assessment and program evaluation tools are associated with standardized program goals and approaches, many of which are based on research with North American and European children. Transporting these externally developed monitoring and evaluation technologies and standardized curricula to Indigenous communities seems to directly contradict the common rhetoric about supporting cultural diversity, linguistic rights, and locally meaningful learning targets. As the foregoing discussion has emphasized, uniformity in early learning programs and performance measurement can complicate the challenges inherent in creating ECCE programs that are meaningful to parents and children and that will ultimately secure their long-term engagement in education.

There is much at stake in these tradeoffs. One study in Canada found that many Indigenous parents and some non-Indigenous ECCE practitioners were concerned that standardized tools for measuring speech and language development and school readiness contributed to misinterpreting speech and language differences, such as Indigenous English dialects or vernaculars, as evidence of deficits. Low scores on tests that are assumed to be universally valid likely contribute to the alarmingly high rates of diagnosis of Indigenous children as cognitively or linguistically delayed or impaired. New information-gathering strategies to monitor and measure program effectiveness are needed to build the business case for long-term investments in locally designed ECCE that produces educational equity for Indigenous children.

LEARNING DISABILITIES AND EARLY INTERVENTION

Data on special needs affecting the early learning outcomes of Indigenous children are generally not available. However, it is generally perceived that, due to many suboptimal conditions for their health and development, Indigenous children are at far greater risk of starting school with one or more undetected disability. When Indigenous children do attend school, an alarmingly high number are
excluded from the mainstream curriculum due to apparent learning impairments. Developmental delays and handicaps may be detected by community practitioners, such as community health workers, through direct observation, conversations with parents about their children’s developmental milestones, or simple developmental checklists. However, a lack of early intervention services is a common barrier to secondary prevention, especially for children in rural and remote areas. Information gaps about prevalence rates, access, uptake, and effectiveness of early intervention services need to be considered in plans to equalize readiness for formal schooling.

The Aboriginal Head Start Program in Canada

In Canada, Indigenous peoples, known as “Aboriginal,” make up 4% of the population. The Aboriginal population is much younger than the average, with a median age in 2006 of 26.5 years, compared to 39.5 years for all Canadians. The 2006 Census enumerated 131,000 Aboriginal children under the age of 6, with about 40,000 living on reserve lands and 91,000 living off-reserve. The Aboriginal population will maintain its high growth rate and remain significantly younger relative to the non-Aboriginal population for at least the next 20 years.

With Aboriginal children making up an increasing proportion of all children in Canada, there is growing recognition of persisting failures of the formal education system to drive Indigenous peoples’ recovery from the devastations of past colonial policies that excluded them from mainstream education. Aboriginal leaders and organizations argue that poor-quality education, lack of cultural relevance, and inappropriate assessment tools frequently result in serious negative consequences for Aboriginal children. Problems include over- and under-recognition of children with developmental challenges; early intervention services introduced too late; undermining Indigenous language and cultural goals for development through an overvaluing of standard urban English and of monolingualism; cultural alienation; low levels of school readiness; and high rates of early school failure and premature school leaving.

Indicators of developmental challenges and negative educational outcomes experienced by many Aboriginal children, combined with their high rates of health problems, are so alarming that in 2004, the Council of Ministers of Education stated:

There is recognition in all educational jurisdictions that the achievement rates of Aboriginal children, including the completion of secondary school, must be improved. Studies have shown that some of the factors contributing to this low level of academic achievement are that Aboriginals in Canada have the lowest income and thus the highest rates of poverty, the highest rate of drop-outs from formal education, and the lowest health indicators of any group.
Furthermore, given that attainment of a high school diploma or higher has been shown to improve labor market outcomes for Aboriginal people, clear incentives exist for the Canadian government to make Aboriginal education a priority. This should be enough to make poverty reduction, family supports, and intersectoral approaches to ECCE for Aboriginal children a priority for federal, provincial, and territorial governments, given the demonstrated influence of these factors on education outcomes. However, unlike most high-income countries, Canada lacks a national strategy to ensure access to quality programs to promote optimal early development and learning either for all children or for children in an identified risk category. Although the current “catch-as-catch-can” collection of ECCE programs increases many children’s vulnerability, the situation is vastly bleaker for Aboriginal children, less than 18% of whom have access to any early childhood care or development program.

Amid these shortfalls, one exception is long-term federal investment, beginning in 1995, in Aboriginal Head Start (AHS). This initiative was a federal response to calls by Aboriginal community representatives, leaders, and practitioners for an adequately resourced, sustained, and culturally based national strategy to improve supports for Aboriginal young children’s health, development, and early learning.

In 1990, the Native Council of Canada undertook the first national effort to define Indigenous child care and the meaning of cultural appropriateness with respect to the delivery of early childhood care and development services. The Council’s report, entitled The Circle of Care, conceptualized a direct link between culturally relevant child care services that are controlled by First Nations, the preservation of First Nations culture, and improved developmental outcomes for children. They called for these supports to be delivered within the contexts of children’s families and cultural communities through community-driven programs operated by qualified Aboriginal practitioners. A report by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recommended that federal, provincial, and territorial governments cooperate to support an integrated early childhood funding strategy that (a) extends early childhood education to all Aboriginal children regardless of residence; (b) encourages programs that foster the physical, social, intellectual, and spiritual development of children, thus reducing distinctions between child care, prevention, and education; (c) maximizes Aboriginal control over service design and administration; (d) offers one-stop accessible funding; and (e) promotes parental involvement and choice in early childhood education options. In 1995, federal funding was committed by Health Canada to implement AHS in First Nations on reserves, and in 1998, federal funding was committed through the Public Health Agency of Canada to implement AHS for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children living in urban and northern communities.

When funding was committed, a fundamental principle was for Aboriginal people to direct, design, and deliver services in their communities—an unprecedented recognition by the federal government of the inherent right of Aboriginal
peoples to make decisions respecting their children. A corresponding key feature of AHS is that an Aboriginal host agency or community leadership council that successfully applies to host the program receives funding to deliver it, in consultation with mandatory parent advisory committees. Thus, the nature of each program varies from one community to another, including criteria for children to enroll. Most children with special needs are eligible to participate in AHS, depending upon staff qualifications and facilities that can accommodate their needs. Many programs require parents to volunteer time or make a monetary contribution. Most programs operate on a part-time basis 3 or 4 days a week. The majority of staff is Aboriginal.

Approximately 140 AHS programs serving about 4,500 Aboriginal children in urban centers and northern communities are operated by the Public Health Agency of Canada. Aboriginal Head Start programs serving about 9,100 Aboriginal children living on reserves are operated by Health Canada. It is currently estimated that 8% of Aboriginal preschool children between ages 3 and 5 attend AHS. In 2001, a survey of Aboriginal parents living in urban and northern centers showed that the proportion of Aboriginal children living in nonreserve areas who were attending early childhood programs specifically designed for them had increased fourfold over an 8-year period, reflecting in large measure the federal investment in AHS. Sixteen percent of Aboriginal children entering first grade had participated in Aboriginal-specific programs during their preschool years, compared to only 4% of children who turned 14 the same year.

AHS in Canada differs from the Head Start approach pioneered in the United States. Although both programs prepare children for successful transition from home to school learning environments, the emphasis in Canada is on culturally fitting, community-specific elaborations of six program components shown in Figure 13.1: culture and language, education and school readiness, health promotion, nutrition, social support, and parent/family involvement.

Local control of AHS programs allows for innovation to find the best curricula and staff for each community and child. Staff trained in early childhood education work with Elders, Indigenous language specialists, cultural teachers, and parents to enhance child development, cultural pride, and school readiness. Although some programs primarily use an Indigenous language, most operate in English or French with some exposure to one or more Indigenous language. This situation reflects the severe attenuation of most Indigenous languages in Canada such that, with the exception of the Inuktitut, Cree, and Ojibway languages, few host communities could support a significant commitment to an Indigenous language medium.

Although management evaluations of AHS are conducted annually, effectiveness evaluations have been fraught with difficulties, partly due to a lack of widely accepted tools to measure Aboriginal children's development in ways that are amenable to standardized scoring and composite analysis. Efforts to collect qualitative data across several program sites have also encountered problems with
consistency. No studies include control comparisons with randomization of children to programs. Despite these difficulties, a few studies yield positive evidence of benefits to children's cultural knowledge, confidence, physical health, language and literacy skills, social skills, and kindergarten readiness, as well as benefits to parents. Furthermore, a nationwide survey of Aboriginal parents found that participation in at least 1 year of AHS reduced the risk that a child would repeat a grade in elementary school. A recent critical assessment of health services for Canadian children conducted by the federal Ministry of Health called for an expansion of AHS to achieve 25% coverage of Aboriginal children.

Although more work is needed to establish the effectiveness of AHS, the program has a number of promising features that are highly congruent with principles advocated by many Indigenous organizations beyond Canada:

- Aboriginal Head Start provides safe, supervised, stimulating environments for young children. This is especially important for children whose home environments may be crowded, chaotic, or contaminated. Many programs provide nutrition supplementation, cognitive stimulation, socialization with Aboriginal peers, adult role models and Elders, and exposure to Indigenous language and spirituality.
- Aboriginal Head Start supports families during the early stages of family formation, when parents—many of them very young and with few resources—need social support and practical assistance.
- Aboriginal Head Start has been a timely and effective vehicle to enable communities to deliver ECCE programs in culturally fitting ways to children who need them most.
• Aboriginal Head Start is increasing the numbers of Aboriginal people across
the country who are skilled in delivering programs and playing various sup-
portive roles for Aboriginal children and families. Each site employs commu-
nity members who receive pre- and in-service training through a number of
training workshops convened annually by regional and national AHS offices.
• Aboriginal Head Start programs provide resources within marginalized com-
munities that may otherwise lack the hard and soft infrastructure to ensure
early learning, nutrition, health, and intervention services for children. Some
AHS programs have been described as reducing the high rates of removal of
children from their families and communities to government care, and others
have played a role in reuniting parents and children. This is a uniquely promis-
ing aspect of AHS: One of the challenges for ensuring Aboriginal children’s
access to needed supports and services is that they often do not make it as far
as the entry point in mainstream service delivery systems set up to meet the
needs of families who have ready access to transportation and know how ser-
vice systems work and how to advocate to get their child’s needs met. A study
conducted in three Aboriginal communities in Canada documented how AHS
and other community-based ECCE programs can function as “hooks” to involve
young children and their parents in early learning and then evolve to become
community hubs providing streamlined access to other kinds of developmental
and family programs and services, as illustrated in Figure 13.2.104 When a family
enrolls their young child in a program, such as an infant development program or
preschool, they become known to community-based staff who can increase family
members’ awareness of a range of other program options and connect them to
other services offered in the community center or beyond. In the example illus-
trated in Figure 13.2, the community reached out to parents of newborns, offering
them a parent–child music and play program, followed by a laddered sequence
of programs appropriate for their child as they grew older. Health information,
education about nutrition, speech and language stimulation programs, and
opportunities to participate in cultural events were offered concurrently. When
specific needs arose, families could access early intervention services, patient
navigator services to assist them in dealings with government health care
services, and advocacy and accompaniment supports for dealings with the child
welfare system, family court, the formal school system, and so on.

Recommended Actions and Lessons to Be Drawn
from Model Programs

Steps that policy-makers can take to improve equity of opportunities for young
Indigenous children to succeed in education include the following:

• Raise awareness among policy-makers in every sector about the importance
of supporting young Indigenous children’s meaningful and successful
participation in education as a right codified by international agreements and a wise investment, with a goal of generating political will among various parties to become engaged in developing solutions.

- Work to remove bureaucratic barriers to intersectoral collaboration needed to reduce poverty and improve quality of life for Indigenous children and to provide health, nutrition, education, and social components of a comprehensive ECCE strategy.

- Educate the public about the challenges Indigenous children face in gaining equitable access to life opportunities, with the goal of generating a broad base of civic support for initiatives and social inclusion for Indigenous children and families.

- Make quality ECCE programs that fit the needs of Indigenous families available to all Indigenous children from birth through a transitional year in primary school.
• Create opportunities, through linkages between postsecondary institutions and Indigenous community organizations, for culturally relevant, career-laddered, accessible education for Indigenous people to become qualified ECCE practitioners and decision leaders.

• Provide opportunities for Indigenous parents to participate—in their communities, with NGOs, and with policy-makers—in decision-making about priorities for investments to improve educational equity for their children and about how investments in ECCE will be materialized.

• Commission holistic, controlled, longitudinal evaluations of ECCE programs by early development researchers.

The research and programs reviewed in this chapter show how family-focused, culturally responsive policies, funding, and evaluation frameworks can encourage community initiative and involvement in young Indigenous children’s learning. Funding allocations and program quality indicators need not be tied to preschools that follow a prescribed curriculum. One size does not fit all has been a recurrent learning point across health, education, community development, and other sectors over the past decade. Equity for Indigenous children requires a shift beyond a Eurocentric developmental paradigm to embrace culturally embedded approaches informed by communities. This chapter highlights some successful movements away from the standardized application of universalist principles toward a dialogical approach that encompasses parents’ values, goals, and resources as well as locally meaningful teaching and learning strategies and content. Aboriginal Head Start illustrates a centrally funded program that is designed and managed in a decentralized way. Rather than being a prescriptive, cookie-cutter model of the kind often associated with brand-name programs, the several hundred AHS programs are as highly varied as the cultural communities that operate them.

The illusion that best practices exist that could be dropped into any setting is gradually giving way to a search for what can be learned from promising practices in particular settings. Dialogue with communities of parents can illuminate how to combine knowledge and tools from research on early learning with local knowledge and approaches to address culturally defined goals for young children’s early learning and development. Several examples document participatory approaches to Indigenous ECCE program development. Monitoring and evaluation of community-driven programs can draw upon the enormous capacity that has developed in health, social sciences, and education in the past decade for collaborative approaches to research (variously called community-based research, community-engaged scholarship, and community-university partnerships).

A critical policy focus in the education sector must include investments in meaningful early learning opportunities for Indigenous children from infancy and throughout the early years through home- or community-based ECCE programs. Quality early childhood care and development programs should not focus
narrowly on cognitive skill development, but perhaps most importantly on building self-esteem and a sense of social, cultural, and linguistic belonging, which are precursors to developing an identity as a capable learner with a rightful place in a school community. Although the need for equitable and stable funding for flexible early learning initiatives is a key factor, it is not the only requirement. Collaboration across sectors is also needed to create lasting policy and program solutions that improve the conditions for learning and life for Indigenous children.

Conclusion

Indigenous populations in many countries are in crisis. Improving the social and economic well-being of Indigenous children while protecting the world's repository of languages and cultural knowledges is not only a moral imperative, it is a sound investment that will pay significant dividends in the coming decades. Investing in disadvantaged children is one of the important public policy opportunities that has no equity-efficiency tradeoff. Increasing the educational attainment level of Indigenous children will benefit not only Indigenous children, families, and communities, but also government and businesses, and, by extension, the entire population.

Lack of political will is the biggest obstacle to planning and acting on a comprehensive agenda of policy reforms and program investments targeting educational equity for young Indigenous children. The problem of educational inequities for Indigenous children is a circular one: Without political will to create and implement policies prioritizing equity and dignity for Indigenous children, the human resource capacity, curriculum and learning resources, and popular demand for these programs will be lacking. To increase demand and enhance Indigenous self-determination in regards to educational equity, it is important to support greater Indigenous representation in key political positions and/or to provide enhanced structures and venues for Indigenous peoples to voice and exercise their political will about educational equity, including the need for more access to quality, appropriate ECCE. The key step is to formulate an enabling national policy and a funded action program supporting a range of community-driven ECCE initiatives.

Many education programs around the world struggle to embody core principles of building on local assets and responding to cultural diversity, such as customization of curricula to meet community-specific needs and goals and integration of typically fragmented infrastructure for nutrition, health, education, and social welfare. Reflecting on the lack of local relevance or meaning in what Indigenous children are asked to learn in many kindergartens and primary schools in Canada, an Indigenous community leader asked: “Has anything changed since the government first designed their education systems to take the Indian out of the child?”

There is no doubt about the added complexities of creating policies that permit flexibility of program design and locally defined goals and indicators for children's
early learning. However, providing community-driven, culturally relevant programs—and monitoring program quality and outcomes—upholds the rights of Indigenous and other minority parents and children, and is probably the most effective way to secure young children’s engagement in education. Equity of educational provision must include consideration of the language(s) in which ECCE programs and primary schooling are delivered.

Having a national goal of providing universal access to quality ECCE is not antithetical to allowing local choice and control of program staffing, scheduling, curriculum content, pedagogy, and dimensions for program evaluation. Evidence from a few majority world countries shows the positive effects of government funding, local autonomy, and community involvement in education at the primary and secondary school levels. The example of AHS programs in Canada demonstrates that it is feasible for a government to invest in an ECCE program that not only allows but depends upon local autonomy in the design and delivery of programs that are holistic, family centered, and informed by each local community’s internally identified needs and vision for equalizing young children’s chances for educational success and quality of life.

NOTES


2. The acronyms ECCD, BCCE, and BC are used by various funding, service, and training agencies to refer to research, policy, and practice addressing the health, development, and education of children from conception to 8 years of age. Early childhood care and development (ECCD) is preferred by the author and her Indigenous community partners since it emphasizes the care environment and the broad scope of child development, which subsumes early learning and education. This book has adopted the term early childhood care and education (ECCE), which places special emphasis on education. The term ECE is typically used in reference to the professional credential required in Canada and some other countries for staff delivering programs to young children.


33. The term *home language* may refer to several different situations. Definitions often include the following elements: the language(s) that one has learned first; the language(s) one identifies with or is identified as a native speaker of by others; the language(s) one knows best; and the language(s) one uses most. *Home language* may also be referred to as the *primary language*, *first language*, or *mother tongue*.


57. Home language instruction generally refers to the use of the learners' home language (sometimes referred to as mother tongue) as the medium of instruction.
59. The language of instruction in or out of school refers to the language used for teaching the basic curriculum of an educational system. The choice of language or indeed the languages of instruction (educational policy might recommend the use of several languages of instruction) is a recurrent challenge in the development of quality education. Although some countries opt for one language of instruction, often the official or majority language, others have chosen to use educational strategies that give national or local languages an important place in schooling.
76. Ibid.
84. In Canada, the 1982 Constitution Act recognizes three separate peoples as original inhabitants: Inuit, Métis, and North American Indian (more commonly known as First Nations).
85. A reserve is land set apart and designated for the use and occupancy of an Indian group or band— as such, the terms “on-reserve” or “off-reserve” are generally not applicable to Métis or Inuit.
87. The population of Aboriginal children entering schools in Canada has been increasing, particularly in the Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut, and in the provinces of Saskatchewan and Manitoba. For example, in 2006, in Saskatchewan, Aboriginal children made up 20% of all children under 6 years old. According to the 2006 census, there were approximately 7,000 Inuit, 35,000 Métis, and 47,000 off-reserve First Nations children under the age of 6 across Canada See Statistics Canada. (2006). *Census of the population 2006.* Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada.
89. Until recently, Indigenous peoples were excluded from educational opportunities equivalent to those offered to non-Indigenous peoples. Most options for postsecondary education were closed to them until the 1960s. Most parents and grandparents of Aboriginal children today were forced to attend Indian residential schools (or occasionally day schools) where the curriculum prepared students for nonacademic roles including manual and domestic labor. The last of these schools closed in 1996. See Fournier, S., & Crey, E. (1997). *Stolen from our embrace: The abduction of First Nations children and the restoration of Aboriginal communities.* Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre.
We: We are coming to the light of day. Retrieved from http://www.fncfcs.com/docs/WendyReport.pdf


92. For example, in 2003, the Ministry of Education in British Columbia found that Aboriginal students in grade 4 were "not meeting expectations" at a rate 16% higher than non-Aboriginal students. In grade 7, this rose to 21%. Between 40% and 50% of Aboriginal students failed to meet the requirements of grades 4, 7, and 10 literacy tests. See Bell, D., with Anderson, K., Fortin, T., Ottman, J., Rose, S., Simard, L., & Spencer, K. (2004). Sharing our success: Ten case studies in Aboriginal schooling. Kelowna, BC: Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education. Retrieved from http://www.arts skirmt.ca/media/it/sharingoursuccess.pdf. Among Canadian children enrolled in school, the proportion of indigenous people who have not attained a high school diploma is approximately 2.5 times greater than the proportion of non-Aboriginal Canadians, accounting for nearly half of Aboriginal youth leaving secondary school early (see Mendelson. (2006). Aboriginal peoples and postsecondary education.). The gap in high school attainment is highest for Inuit (3.6 times higher than the Canadian average). One of the primary reasons Inuit students now state for leaving high school is to care for a child. See Government of Nunavut and Nunavut Tunngavik, Inc. (2004). Background paper submitted to the Canada-Aboriginal peoples roundtable. Iqaluit, ON: Government of Nunavut and Nunavut Tunngavik, Inc.


