

Aboriginal Early Childhood Development and Care

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- 700,000 First Nations & 50,000 Inuit
- 3% of Canadian population
- Avg. age 25.5 yrs :
 - 10 yrs. Younger than other Canadians
- Proportion under 5 yrs 70% greater
- 3% pop. Increase in 10 yrs.:
 - Double the rate for other Canadians
- 800 communities, 77% under 1000
 - Many isolated or remote

Source: Statistics Canada, 1998

- Long-standing disparities between Aboriginal & non-Aboriginal in overall health & access to health services
- Cumulative effects colonial abuses, persistent racism, & pervasive poverty show on nearly all indicators of health & social well-being
- For example:
 - Lower life expectancies
 - Higher chronic illnesses (diabetes, HIV, cardiac)
 - Higher injury
 - Higher poverty & unemployment
 - Higher suicide & attempts
 - 27% single parent families
 - 40% single mothers earn less than \$12,000/yr.

Aboriginal Children & Families in B.C.

- Higher birth rate
- More adolescent mothers
- 50% off-reserve children in single parent homes compared to 17% in general pop.
- Aboriginal children 7 times more likely to be in government care
- 40% of children in care are Aboriginal
- 52% Aboriginal children below poverty line

“Children are Our Future”

- Many strong socially cohesive communities in urban & especially rural settings
- Value children & support for young children & parents as key to community development
- Emphasis on preserving heritage language and indigenous knowledge of child development and family life
- Revitalization of elder roles / inter-generational
- transmission as key to cultural sustenance
- Enormous investments in strengthening capacity
- Promising practices to meet health & social goals

'Aboriginal ways' in child care and health services

- 82% of eligible First Nations & Inuit communities have or are in process of transferring responsibility for community health, primary health, & children's services
- Diversity among Aboriginal people about ways forward
- Agreement on improving developmental conditions for children
- Agreement on primacy of culture
- What are 'Aboriginal ways'?
- What are 'promising practices'?

Program of Research on Aboriginal ECD (AECD)

- Multi-funded, multi-component, multi-year
- Attention to Indigenous research ethics & protocols
- Community-university collaborations
- Focus on selected communities
- To yield some guidelines, learning points, & promising (not 'best'!) practices
- Mentoring Aboriginal researchers in community agencies & university

- 1998-2001: ECD training program evaluation
'First Nations Partnership Programs'
- 2001-2003: HRDC funded project:
 1. Determinants of successful transitions from training to practice in AECD
 2. Incorporation of IK in AECD
 3. Community & policy level determinants of program sustainability
 4. Determinants and effects of parent involvement in AECD
 5. Child health impacts of participation in AECD

Human Early Learning Partnership

➤ HELP (MCFD) funding:

1. Early language facilitation in AECD:
Community priorities & strategies
2. Impacts of culturally focused AECD
practices on children's self-concept
3. Impacts of AECD on parents' perception
& reception of social support
4. Student thesis: Heritage language
facilitation in AECD

SSHRC: Major Collaborative Research Initiative

- Consortium for Health, Intervention, Learning & Development (CHILD) Project
- Aboriginal Child Development
- Universal & culturally specific goals & practices
- IK – sources, preservation, continuation
- Culturally relevant indicators of child health & development
- Culturally appropriate assessment tools
- Articulation of responses to dominant culture research questions, human service models, & outcome evaluation

AECD as 'hub'

- Early Childhood Development & Care initiatives as central components of multi-sectoral service delivery
- Streamlined, culturally appropriate, geographically & financially accessible services
- Holistic approach to child development
- Laddered service system for support, prevention, early identification, referral, diagnosis & intervention

Documenting Promising Practices

- ...AECD as 'hub'....
- Reciprocal program enhancement
- Enhanced social cohesion
- Network enhancement
- Streamlined administration
- Streamlined accountability processes
- Case management approach to child protection
- Principles & models for other communities seeking self-governance & for social policy