

# Community Development Through Community-Based, Bicultural Partnerships in ECCE-CYC Using a Generative Curriculum Model

[Presented as "Community-based Generative Curriculum Model of ECCE Training with First Nations"]

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## Workshop Summary

This workshop highlighted findings to date of an ecologically comprehensive research study of the process and impacts of an innovative approach to training culturally grounded early childhood care and education/child and youth care (ECCE/CYC) practitioners using a generative curriculum model (GCM). Key features of this approach, including community initiative and collaboration with a University of Victoria-based team, were illustrated with reference to a current partnership program involving First Nations communities of the Mount Currie Band. Discussion also provided an overview of the effects of this innovative training approach in six other First Nations communities in Western Canada.

## Outline

Research is currently in progress to document the process and outcomes of an innovative, community-based ECCE/CYC training program that involves respected community members in a GCM whereby community-specific knowledge is articulated and considered alongside

mainstream research and theory. This exploratory training model originated when a First Nations Tribal Council in Saskatchewan initiated a partnership with a project team at the University of Victoria. Their aim was to elaborate a training program that would build community capacity for delivering on-reserve child and family services in ways that resonated with the cultural values, traditional knowledge, contemporary practices and objectives of their constituent First Nations communities.

This training model depends on the initiative of First Nations in partnering with the university-based team, fund raising, recruiting students and instructors, the involvement of Elders, and delivering the program entirely in the community by community members. In this bicultural, "all ways" respectful GCM, students are introduced to mainstream Euro-Canadian theory, research and practice, and are asked to consider these ideas as potentially useful perspectives. At the same time, the courses are structured using an "open architecture," with room for the voices of students, Elders and others in the community to enter into the active, constructivist teaching and learning process. Thus, the trainees are invited to consider knowledge of the social and cultural contexts in which children live, offered by those individuals whom First Nations communities feel best understand these contexts.

Beginning in 1998, research was undertaken to explore and document the delivery process as well as the immediate and long-term effects of this model in the seven communities where this ECCE/CYC program has been delivered through partnerships, including Mount Currie, British Columbia. The program at Mount Currie provides a good "case study" of this partnership approach at work. Mount Currie Band is strongly committed to community development "from the inside out." Through a recently articulated employment and training process, Mount Currie community representatives have begun to implement a human resources strategy which includes all current and projected community development programs, including initiatives to enhance the quality of life and services to children and families. A key development initiative includes the construction and operational launching of a multiplex that will house a 32-seat daycare centre. A community awareness and consultation process led to a community decision to seek training for community members to become qualified to direct and assist in the planned daycare centre. This was the springboard for initiating a partnership with the First Nations Partnership Programs team at the University of Victoria.

The choice by Mount Currie representatives to use the ECCE/CYC GCM for training daycare staff was determined primarily because the model is:

- community-based;
- incorporates university credentialling that students can use to ladder into child and youth care and other 4-year degree programs; and
- includes Elders and other community resource people in the construction of curriculum.

Most importantly, the curriculum provides students with a thorough grounding in mainstream theory, research and practice, while also providing them with opportunities to explore more about their own culture and culturally desirable child care perspectives and practices. All instructors in this particular iteration of the ECCE/CYC GCM program at Mount Currie are Band members who hold graduate and post-graduate degrees in education. All course work occurs in the community, where students meet in regularly scheduled classes to complete the 15 university courses that lead, in part, to a university diploma. In addition, students travel to nearby communities to complete five practicum courses. A steering committee composed of community members oversees and ensures a “positive program delivery” and keeps the community-at-large informed about how the program is progressing and how they can be involved.

## **Role of Elders**

In each delivery of the ECCE/CYC GCM program, an important role is played by the Elder coordinator in the First Nations community. At Mount Currie, for example, Martina Pierre arranges weekly sessions when several Elders and other community resource people present to the class and interact with students about current topics and issues coming up in their ECCE/CYC courses. Guidelines for culturally desirable child care practices emerge through dialogue in class about the cultural reconstructions and experiences elaborated by the Elders; contemporary social conditions and goals for children in the community; and ideas and research found in mainstream texts and practicum observations. The First Nations instructors at Mount Currie believe that true understandings of traditional values start with a personal vision of who we are and what we could become. The students, instructors and, ultimately, the children are enriched with the history and traditions of their people as well as with an appreciation for contemporary research about child development in other cultures.

## **Reasons for Success**

Evidence accumulating from ongoing research evaluation shows that the training program yields unprecedented high rates of First Nations student completion. For example, at Mount Currie, among 15 students who registered to take the 2-year program, 15 are now in the final semester. The program is also effective in helping communities to achieve internally identified community goals. Positive program outcomes appear to be attributable to several factors, including:

- the geographic and social accessibility of the program in students’ communities;
- the students’ undisrupted family life and continued availability of natural support networks;
- high levels of community initiative, involvement and encouragement in all aspects of the program;

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- the possibility for achieving “goodness of fit” between what students learn and what they observe and experience in practice settings and family life in their own community; and
- the satisfaction and self-esteem that students attribute to being part of rediscovering and revitalizing their cultural heritage and identity and being able to “give back” to their culture and their community. Community forums and individual interview data indicate that the processes involved in a training model that incorporates community-specific cultural knowledge can build capacity and have other far-reaching effects on the culture and social organization of the community as a whole.

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