

The Community within the Child

Integration of Indigenous Knowledge into First Nations Childcare Process and Practice

JESSICA BALL AND MAUREEN SIMPKINS

If children really know who they are, then they can go into white society. We teach them to be proud. The racism is not going to faze them. Instead of shaming, they're going to hold their head high.

First Nations Partnership Program graduate, March 26, 2003

The training has taught me a lot about "who I am." I have culture and traditions. It's so important to teach kids at a young age their own traditions as well as the traditions of others. There are others in this world who are different.

First Nations Partnership Program graduate, March 26, 2003

What does Indigenous knowledge mean in the evolving contexts of First Nations communities?¹ How do Indigenous processes of knowing in both a traditional and modern sense become integrated into early childhood care and development programs? How does the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge in community programs such as childcare impact cultural identities at the level of individual members and the community as a whole?

These questions were asked as part of a research study undertaken with twenty-seven First Nations early childhood development (ECD) graduates and thirty-one childcare administrators, parents, and community Elders from three diverse groups of communities in British Columbia (BC), Canada. This article describes the research and highlights some of the approaches taken by First Nations community members to un-

derstand and work with Indigenous knowledge in community program development.

METHOD

Two university researchers traveled to each of the three groups of First Nations communities in rural areas of BC. Together they conducted free-flowing, conversational interviews with individuals and groups and also observed activities and materials in the childcare program operated by the participating First Nations. The interviews predominantly consisted of listening to accounts of how the interviewees saw culture as part of their own process and practice with young children. Both interviewers have extensive experience living and working with First Nations people but are not of First Nations heritage themselves. Our understandings and perceptions of the integration of Indigenous knowledge into early childhood education training and practice comes out of many hours spent discussing and researching these issues inside and outside of this project.

GENERATIVE CURRICULUM MODEL

In order to give context to this research it is important to begin by briefly describing the "Generative Curriculum Model" used in the unique training program for First Nations community members to become early childhood practitioners. In light of the research done within the First Nations Partnerships Programs (FNPP), this article will describe what community-specific or Indigenous knowledge looks like in terms of: (a) language and traditional activities; and (b) beliefs, values, and the involvement of Elders.

Important impacts of this training program on individuals and the community include: (a) an apparent, community-wide perception of the childcare practitioners as leaders and as role models for youth, parents, other community members, and external service providers who visit the community; and (b) the emphasis placed on "knowing who you are" as a pivotal learning process during the training program, which then flowed into the childcare programs as knowledge passed on by the graduates and their stimulation in the children of the process of explor-

ing their identities and coming to “know who they are” within their extended family and community context.

These findings raise important questions about knowledge that is “authentically” First Nations as opposed to “staged” or “add-on” curriculum.²

BACKGROUND: FIRST NATIONS PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

The FNPP began in 1989 as a partnership between the University of Victoria’s School of Child and Youth Care and the Meadow Lake Tribal Council (MLTC) in Saskatchewan. Since that time, nine more First Nations tribal organizations and communities in Saskatchewan and British Columbia have used this program to train community members in early childhood care and education in partnership with the University of Victoria. All aspects of this training, with the exception of some practicum placements, take place within the community setting of the First Nation that initiates the partnership with the university.

Using a Generative Curriculum Model the program’s course content is designed to enable First Nations community members enrolled in the program to co-consider European-heritage theories, research, and practice models, and their own community or Nation-specific Indigenous ways of teaching, learning, and raising infants and young children.³ There is an assumption that culturally valued and useful knowledge about childhood and childcare is embedded within the community and that this knowledge needs to be afforded a central place in the development of training curricula.⁴ The process that generates curriculum could be termed “dialogical constructivism,” a constant, collective building and testing of knowledge with reference to its “degree of fit” with local understandings, experiences, and goal orientations.⁵ Instructors and students are encouraged both to consider the university-provided curriculum and to go beyond it. This process encourages a reconceptualization of the nature of childhood, goals for children’s development, and how to support optimal development from the students’ own cultural vantage points. Exactly how this is done varies from community to community. The process is rarely a smooth one. In a sense, each time a community begins the FNPP training, a new process begins and organically evolves. There is no doubt that implementing a Generative Curriculum Model is time consuming. Yet, the partnering First Nations preferred to take on

the challenge because in the end it is the community that decides, creates, and works through the content and the delivery of the program and that lives with the learning and practice skills and orientations that communities develop as they go through the training and begin to innovate programs for children and families. This "constant testing of knowledge" becomes an integral component of the integration of Indigenous knowledge into early childhood training and practice.⁶ Armstrong points out that in First Nations communities, diversity of opinion is valued because the more diverse viewpoints that can be brought to bear on a problem, the stronger the possibility of arriving at a valuable, realistic, and efficient solution.⁷

Following a program evaluation carried out between 1998 and 2000, interviews were conducted in the winter of 2003 in three diverse groups of communities in British Columbia that had completed the two-year training partnership program three years earlier. One of the main topics program graduates, parents, administrators, and Elders were asked about was the integration of community-specific or Indigenous knowledge into early childhood education training and practice. The following description and analysis comes out of the information and perspectives gained during that time.

INDIGENOUS OR COMMUNITY-SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE

What is Indigenous or community-specific knowledge in the context of First Nations early childhood programs in British Columbia, Canada? There are several perspectives or definitions of Indigenous knowledge that help to inform this research.

Emery defines traditional or Indigenous knowledge as "a way of life, an experience-based relationship with family, spirits, animals, plants, and the land, an understanding and wisdom gained through generations of observation and teaching that used indirect signals from nature or culture to predict future events or impacts."⁸ He then distinguishes between ancient and modern traditional or Indigenous knowledge. He defines ancient traditional knowledge as "that which is passed down from generation to generation," and modern traditional knowledge as "that which is acquired in present-day circumstances, and will be handed down in generations to come."⁹

Battiste contends that no short answer or definition exists. First, In-

digenous knowledge does not fit into the Eurocentric concept of “culture.” Second, Indigenous knowledge is not a uniform concept across all Indigenous peoples. Possessors of this knowledge often cannot categorize it in Eurocentric thought, partly because the processes of categorization are not part of Indigenous thought. Third, Indigenous knowledge is so much a part of the clan, band, community, and the individual that it cannot be separated from the bearer to be codified into a definition.¹⁰ Conversely, Indigenous knowledge can be identified as a dynamic cultural process that cannot be separated from the individual or the cultural community.¹¹

For purposes of the following discussion, Indigenous knowledge is defined as knowledge that is embedded in a local geo-cultural community, that has evolved over a long period within that setting, and that is not knowingly imported from a “foreign” geo-cultural context.¹² This knowledge is not only intricately tied to place and local environment but also to relationships and ways of being over time.

CULTURAL ACTIVITIES: THE “HOW” AND THE “WHAT”

What exactly does Indigenous knowledge look like in the context of First Nations early childhood programs in BC? This question is much more complex than at first may be perceived. We can easily identify activities such as dancing, drumming, singing, or weaving as specific to a community or region and as manifestations of particular cultures. While there is no doubt that these activities enhance cultural programming in early childhood practice, they are typically the tip of the cultural iceberg. If knowledge itself is “not a thing or a possession, but rather the name for a series of relations that are always shifting,”¹³ then the Western tendency to look for concrete, identifiable practices as signifiers of “culture” may overlook the more durable and deeply significant underlying attitudes, meanings, memories, and values being passed on by First Nations child-care practitioners to the children and parents whom they serve.

It is perhaps easier to “see culture” when it is tangible and holds the possibility of being revisited or modeled. This preference provides impetus for enactments of cultural activities that can be readily reproduced in various programs and at various times, with various practitioners, whether they are or are not First Nations themselves. An example of this would be “Aboriginal” “Multicultural” days at schools when all the teach-

ers, whether First Nations or not, are invited to participate in a play, craft making, or Aboriginal games. While there may be some merit in terms of intercultural understanding, these cultural enactments may well lack the depth or authenticity of practice generated by community members who hold community-specific knowledge and who are themselves creators or re-creators of practices informed by Indigenous knowledge.

The "how," or process, is part of the work of creating a cultural program and has a unique cultural output. In the research study graduates of the early childhood care training program talked about how important their training had been in helping them to understand that their culture was not lost, to connect/reconnect them to specific Elders, and to regain the forms of relationships that were lost during the process of conquest and colonization by Europeans. Intergenerational relationships, in particular, were not incidental to the work of creating a cultural program in new childcare programs. Without these connections, students lacked guidance and the special knowledge that each individual possessed as well as the support and encouragement that each contributing community member could provide. For instance, some community members might know songs, another might be fluent in the traditional language, and yet another might have experience ice fishing or drying fish in a special location. Individual staff talked about specific songs that certain Elders had, or the special ways of preparing food that some families practiced, or the ancient knowledge preserved by some of the older women about what women should eat when they were pregnant. The development of a network of participating community members in the process of creating and operating childcare programs served to reconnect people along uniquely cultural lines and in specifically cultural ways.

Today it is widely acknowledged that Native American children "need a careful balance of teachings about their traditions, tribal values, and languages. Tribal children need to experience and recognize that their center of strength and identity comes from feeling and understanding the sacred meanings behind their tribal practices."¹⁴

When discussing cultural programming a wide array of activities that are dependent on the culture and history of the community were reported. These activities include preparation of traditional foods, skinning and snaring animals, drumming, dancing, singing, crafts, cultural events, language programs, storytelling, and Elder involvement. There

are also activities, behaviors, attitudes, and values that are so much a part of the cultural community that they cannot be easily separated into individual practices.

This is where knowledge that is authentically First Nations–based becomes integral to early childhood training and practice. For example, it often is found that within First Nations childcare centers each worker contributes what they have to offer in terms of culture and tradition. There is no meeting to discuss who will be responsible for what. It is quietly acknowledged that each has something to offer. In one First Nations childcare center one worker teaches the children sign language. By the time the children leave the baby room they know some sign language. For another worker it is very important that the children know who their relations are. As a part of cultural programming during her training, she saw it as important for children to know who their cousins, aunts, uncles, and relations are, especially since so many children and workers are related in the daycare center. Another worker brings in her hand-drum and has also taped some traditional songs for use in the baby room. She was brought up by parents who were involved in drumming and singing.

Unlike European-heritage ways of organizing knowledge and teaching, which tend to be hierarchically authoritarian or elitist and predominantly universalistic in their presuppositions, in the First Nations communities the unique contributions of each member are valued. For example, in a Eurowestern setting it is often assumed that apart from individual experience and the limitations on learning everything, all teachers should know and teach more or less the same thing. In turn, it is assumed that all students shall learn approximately the same things and that these things are seen as important. In the First Nations communities that participated in the research, the opposite is true. It is assumed that each child and each childcare provider has a unique contribution to make to the knowledge of the whole community of learning. It is also assumed that knowledge changes depending on experience and the seasons and that when necessary what is “true” or “necessary” may give way to new, more “fitting” knowledge. This type of adaptability is the opposite of what is so often espoused in the dominant society regarding the compatibility of First Nations cultures and the modern world. Indigenous knowledge within the ongoing colonization process too often is seen as historical and unchangeable.¹⁵ Rogoff states that “Cultural tools thus are both inherited and transformed by successive generations. Culture is not

static; it is formed from the efforts of people working together, using and adapting material and symbolic tools provided by predecessors and in the process creating new ones.”¹⁶

One interviewee stated that in her childcare program they make up different songs and activities, not just the ones that have been handed down “but ones they are creating.” When the training finished, this graduate offered workshops on making dream catchers, for example, in the school. She exclaimed: “Just made this up, go with the flow, adapt to Native learning style.”¹⁷

Indigenous knowledge and values become part of childcare programs in First Nations communities without much conscious deliberation or planning, simply because of the beliefs, experiences, and backgrounds of the First Nations staff. In the context of the participating First Nations communities, it is accepted that no one knows all, but everyone has something to offer.

One of the aspects of the cultural activities in these First Nations childcare centers was the work of bringing together the unique knowledge of individual community members and teaching children both the content of that knowledge and the value of the sharing. This did not necessarily mean the passing on of facts. It meant being in relationship with and to people, both personally and as a community that was larger than any of them. This knitting of community was a direct output of the “how” of creating cultural activities.

This also reinforces the valuing of diversity and the acceptance that not everyone was brought up the same way. Some of the childcare practitioners grew up outside of the community. Others grew up in the community yet often in dysfunctional homes. Others grew up in a more traditional way. As Dei points out, “Indigenous knowledges recognize the multiple and collective origins of knowledge as well as its collaborative dimensions.”¹⁸

Elders talked about the importance of diet for a healthy upbringing. The introduction of traditional foods at the daycare programs in the partner communities has spurred some parents to take an interest in these foods and how to prepare them. The children are learning about traditional foods such as berries, salmon, dried meat, and fried bread and how they are prepared. Since only certain families engage in these traditional practices, it does not happen regularly. In one community, traditional food gathering involves traveling up river into the mountains,

fishing, and then wind-drying the fish in a certain way. Young children who do not belong to families participating in these traditional activities miss out, but they benefit when some of these parents share their experiences in the childcare setting.

LANGUAGE

Interviewees commented that as traditional language is incorporated into cultural activities, children tend to learn quickly. In all of the communities, whether they are culturally homogenous or culturally plural, staff and community members are very focused on teaching heritage languages. In many cases, language is introduced in a variety of natural ways such as using traditional words for “boots,” “coats,” and “mittens,” as well as for foods that are regularly eaten in the daycare setting. “Children need to know our ways . . . especially the language.”¹⁹

In one childcare setting there are days specifically planned for making and eating traditional foods, including fried bread, dried fish, salmon, rice, soapberry drink, and berries. One of the community specialists commented:

In one small community I visited I saw a little girl singing away to herself as she was playing. She was singing in her own [heritage] language, as naturally and happily as you could imagine. They [the childcare staff and children] are making their own curriculum around fishing, skinning, and other things that are natural to their community and culture.²⁰

Children are learning about traditional activities and language skills that many of their parents do not know or do not feel competent to teach them. The children, in turn, are coming home and teaching their parents aspects of the heritage language and traditional culture. Parents in these communities have been very supportive of this shared learning process.

The transmission of language and cultural skills from child to parent varies greatly from region to region. For example, in one of the more northern, isolated communities, 90 percent of households rely on wild meat from hunting for part of their subsistence. In this community there is the highest percentage of parents who speak the language and engage in traditional activities. In the childcare setting in this community, there

are a number of people who can be called upon to share their knowledge with the children.

They start learning their culture early. Me, I started learning my culture late. When I was growing up I heard Carrier every day and I still don't know it. In this program they are using the language often. They're actually seeing things and doing it. They're going into the bush, going out to see it. It's different now because different people are coming and getting into and explaining what they are doing. It's not like learning on paper. The person who is doing it explains it with their hands.²¹

Typically within the childcare setting there is at least one person who is either fluent in the traditional language or has some grasp of the language. Part of that person's role and responsibility is to be a language teacher. This often brings on a positive, new acknowledgement of traditional skills. It is a way for others to see the importance of language and provides more of an impetus to learn it themselves. The only drawback identified by childcare practitioners was that sometimes the language skill of the delegated person was less than fluent. Incorrect language instruction might not be noticed until an Elder or more fluent speaker is around to correct it, and in communities with few mentors this is sometimes a problem. In many cases there are very few people who speak the traditional language, leaving this person to pass on inaccurate translations. Alternatively, there may be multiple meanings/translations that are appropriate in different contexts. In any case, some community members commented that growing interest in reviving teaching of their traditional language contributes to the growing atmosphere of respect and eagerness to learn more about their cultural identity, history, and culture.

One difficulty in language programming is lack of resources. Some communities have a lot of print resources while others have few. Some interviewees feel that more print resources are needed as reference material. For example, one of the communities has a dictionary in the heritage language that is heavily used by the childcare program staff.

Chamberlin makes the point that "collective voices are bound to particular places and particular language."²² Hence, the approach of integrating traditional words for everyday activities reinforces the idea that authenticity lies within a person and is bound to place, to their own sto-

ries, whether they are traditional and formal or personal and fragmented. In other words, it does not appear to matter whether the First Nation childcare practitioner grew up in the community, practiced traditional activities, or grew up disconnected from culture and community. All First Nations childcare practitioners possess their own stories that are all part of being a First Nation person. This sense of community and place is part of an innate authenticity that gets carried forward within the everyday activities of childcare practice. "Knowledge production is not merely an exercise for the academy, but it is also for lay people, since knowledge is acquired through everyday experiences."²³

One of the childcare training program instructors described her understanding of the innate authenticity within: "Knowledge, as I have experienced it, is often derived from outside myself; this information is objectified, logical and provable. Listening to the Elders and other community members, knowledge for them appears to be generated from within oneself, and set within the context of their reality."²⁴

ELDER INVOLVEMENT

We learn a lot from the Elders, for example, drumming, introducing songs, where it came from, who wrote the song and what it means. Re-introducing the songs is passing on the knowledge. Some songs are from legends. . . . That's interesting. My mother sang songs but she didn't teach us. We heard them, but didn't sing. I know the meaning of the words. We tell the Elders to explain.²⁵

We would get moose when it got tired . . . we would track it for an hour. Then we would share the moose in the community. We don't throw anything away. They have to learn that. That's what we're doing as Elders . . . when we get a little piece we share. It's good for young people to learn things . . . sewing, cutting fish, canning.²⁶

The role of Elders in the training of childcare practitioners and within the childcare setting varies greatly from community to community. One community began their childcare training saying that they had no Elders who were knowledgeable about tradition and language. Yet by the second year of the program, Elders were gradually participating in the program. For this community, there is a renewed interest and acknowledgement of the role of Elders in the education of young children.

One program graduate commented on the important role of Elders:

The training was helpful in talking with the Elders. We never used to before. When we invited the Elders in it was easier to talk to them, [easier than] before. Before, we wouldn't have. We now incorporate a lot of culture in what we do . . . beading, doing circle, etc. We plan art and circle-time for two different age groups. We made purses for Mother's Day.²⁷

In most cases there is some awkwardness regarding the participation of Elders at the daycare. This could be understood in part with reference to the disruption of traditional family roles and community structure during the one hundred years of concerted efforts by the colonial government in Canada to disrupt and destroy First Nations cultural communities, including family ties and Indigenous knowledge. The precontact family structure would have been an extended family clan in which all people of childbearing age would have been aunts/uncles and all people of the grandparent's generation would have been grandparents to the child. Thus a child would have many adults involved in their care and as teachers. This is rarely the case today. Some Elders feel uncomfortable instructing children they are not related to, as they do not want to be seen as interfering. Parents also do not always like someone else making suggestions or intervening when it comes to raising or teaching their children.

At times, both the childcare practitioners and the Elders are unsure of the role and place of Elders within this new community development of center-based childcare, which one can appreciate. Couture cites "the practical requirements of establishing and maintaining a relationship with Elders which takes much time and patience" as an issue when calling upon the use of Elders for cultural education.²⁸ Although the participation of Elders within childcare programs is still being worked out, all of the interviewees in the participating communities acknowledge the value and importance of Elders' contributions to the preservation and transmission of Indigenous knowledge.

Some of the Elders interviewed talked at length about "respect" for others as being a fundamental traditional value. One Elder also said that "you can't separate culture from spirituality. Everything we touch or gather is spiritual."²⁹ They also believed that it is the parents' job to instill cultural values such as respect and spirituality.

The values that all of the childcare practitioners carry with them and

ultimately teach the children are difficult to see and seem impossible to measure. Implicit in the statement "I teach what I was taught" is the idea that they are passing on values and beliefs, not just the specific activity.

Some Elders also talked about the "structure" that is set by the daycare routine before the children enter school. The Elders emphasize "discipline" as an important aspect of traditional practice. One Elder talked about how she always got up early along with her parents as she was growing up. She was expected to contribute to the family chores and practices along with the rest of the family. The Elders see the structure of the childcare program routines as well as values such as sharing and respect for others as being extremely important for the growth of First Nations children.³⁰

The effects of culturally based childcare practice upon the community will take time to fully evaluate. It is clear to community members and to outside observers that there is a positive ripple effect.

ROLE MODELS

"Individuals are able to reach completeness by learning how to trust their natural instincts . . . [to] recognize and honour the teachers of the spirit within themselves and the natural world."³¹

The topic of "role models" came up consistently in the interviews. How the childcare practitioners are seen within the community is important because they are role models not only for the children but also for adults considering career advancement or job training. Several of the childcare graduates said that they are now asked questions pertaining to children and child development by community members. The graduates realize that this puts them in positions of leadership. In terms of being role models for the children, one Elder said:

Seems like they make an impression on those children. My grandchild saw a caregiver in the store and she said "when can I go back to day care"? And she was in kindergarten and she wanted to go back to the day care cause she saw her worker and connected with her. They do make a really good impression on those children as workers. The day care workers are role models.³²

A major theme throughout the interviews was the idea of modeling how to be with young children and how to teach them. After complet-

ing the training, there is often the realization that there are different ways of being with children. Whether that modeling is themselves being different and the youth noticing, or the children coming home with new cultural skills, positive modeling is slowly taking effect in some communities.

Role modeling by staff is seen as having a positive effect particularly on children at risk. This reinforces that "children become members of their culture by learning it from the way people in their lives behave during everyday activities."³³ The childcare program provides a secure and positive cultural atmosphere for children to feel good about themselves. In one community in particular, a recurring theme in the interviews was that since the childcare program opened, there has been a sharply increased sense of pride throughout the community in their First Nations heritage and identity.

KNOWING WHO YOU ARE

The importance of "knowing who you are" as young Aboriginal adults and children is a major component of a study by Agbo in the context of a Mohawk community: "Education that focuses on ancestral continuity, idealized human relations and a sense of personal and collective dignity would boost students' self-esteem and self-confidence and raise their academic standards."³⁴

Although little research has demonstrated a direct connection between positive cultural identity in very young children and later developmental outcomes, studies of older children are suggestive of the contributory effects of nurturing positive cultural identification in childhood to adjustment later in life. The collective results of several studies "provides evidence that Aboriginal language and cultural programs, and student identification with such programs, are associated with improved academic performance, decreased drop out rates, improved school attendance rates, decreased clinical symptoms, and improved personal behaviour of children."³⁵

The concept of "knowing who you are" is very much culturally informed, therefore the significance varies greatly from culture to culture. "In exploring our own expression of indigenous education, an expression of education that is truly ours, truly coming from your own sensibility, our understanding of the world and who we are, we are empower-

ing not only ourselves but also the vision of a brighter future through education.”³⁶

For many First Nations in BC, “knowing who you are” is deeply connected to knowing your relations and the inherent responsibilities within the cultural community. As a part of cultural programming, several childcare practitioners underscored how important it is for children to know who their cousins, aunts, uncles, and relations are. Many children and childcare practitioners in the childcare programs are related to one another. A First Nations community member explained that children grow up knowing who they are. It is the parents’ and families’ responsibility to teach the children who their relations are and the roles and responsibilities that are so deeply connected to that particular culture and community. She went on to explain that many First Nations are not asking “who am I?” because this is something they know from a young age. At the same time, many aspects of cultural identity or “knowing who you are” are ongoing personal and community explorations.

“The interconnectedness is essential for tribal children’s social and emotional development, and it is the centerpiece for the development of the self. Language, culture, and the home environment tell children who they are and how to construct their learning. It is from these incredible eyes that tribal children see and interpret their world.”³⁷

Listening to the stories and experiences of First Nations childcare practitioners, administrators, parents, and Elders, it is clear that the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge into early childhood training and practice has an impact on individual and community cultural identity. There is enormous cultural and geographic diversity between the communities and regions studied. Each group is in a very different place in terms of self-government, traditional language use, Elder involvement, and available resources. Still, there are two recurring themes. The first major theme is the significance of strengthening community capacity to provide safe, stimulating programs of care for the communities’ children through the community-based delivery of a childcare training program that reinforces the value and substance of Indigenous knowledge. The early childhood practitioners became important in these communities as people who are learning and transmitting Indigenous knowledge and heritage language and who are role models and leaders in their community. The second area of significance is how much “knowing who you

are” is part of the process and the outcome of culturally based training and practice.

The idea that community members can teach their children in a more culturally responsive way is in itself not revelatory. For First Nations in Canada, it is a cyclical process: as the community strengthens its capacity to care for children, adults become stronger and more open to reengaging in relationships with Elders, and Elders stimulate curiosity, confidence, and pride in the Indigenous culture and become supporters and resources for childcare practitioners who can transmit culture and language to children. As children become engaged with and proud to know their culture and language of origin, they motivate their parents, and the cycle continues, gaining in strength and velocity over time. “This cultural orientation towards common goals and objectives, perceives that the community must be strong to adequately meet the needs of individuals.”³⁸ The more knowledge that stays in the community, the more Indigenous or community-specific knowledge becomes an evolving, strengthening community process. “People contribute to the creation of cultural processes and cultural processes contribute to the creation of people.”³⁹

The incorporation of Indigenous knowledge is less about finding “the truth” or getting “the facts” and more about asking or discussing ideas about truth and cultural facts, how they are constructed in the first place, and how they continue to be deconstructed, reconstructed, and applied.

A leader in one of the First Nations partners in delivering the childcare training program put it succinctly: “It will be the 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 strengthened resolve, clear in who they are and where they come from, to plan their own destiny.”⁴⁰

NOTES

I would like to acknowledge Silvia Vilches for sharing her “Comments on Cultural Communities” (unpublished paper, University of Victoria BC, First Nations Partnership Program, 2004) and for many stimulating discussions we had as we dodged logging trucks along dusty BC back roads. I [Maureen Simpkins] would also like to acknowledge the First Nations students who I have taught for sharing their stories and insights with me and the many First Nations people who continue to teach me about myself in relation to First Nations experience in Canada.

1. In Canada "First Nations" is the contemporary term used to describe groups formerly called "Indian" or "Native" bands and communities.
2. I use the term "authentically" to refer to the everyday cultural values, attitudes, stories, and activities both consciously and unconsciously carried out by First Nations community members. I use "staged" or "add-on" to refer to the modules of Aboriginal-specific curriculum that are merely added on to the existing educational materials. This material is often not specific to that culture nor is it generated by the culture where the training is taking place.
3. For more information refer to www.fnpp.org.
4. Jessica Ball, "Incorporating Indigenous Knowledge in Post-Secondary Teaching," in *Teaching Large Classes: Usable Practices from Around the World*, ed. Mary Cherian and Rosalind Y. Mau (Singapore: McGraw-Hill Education, 2003), 84–101.
5. First Nations Partnership Program, *First Nations Partnership Programs Generative Curriculum Model: A Program Evaluation* (Victoria BC: University of Victoria, 2000), 48.
6. Marlene Brant Castellano, "Updating Aboriginal Traditions of Knowledge," in *Indigenous Knowledges in Global Contexts: Multiple Readings of our World*, ed. George J. Sefa Dei, Budd L. Hall, and Dorothy Goldin Rosenberg (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 21–36.
7. Jeannette Armstrong, "Racing: The Global Systemization of Race Violence" (Keynote address, Making History, Constructing "Race" conference, Department of History, University of Victoria BC, October 23–25, 1998).
8. Alan Emery, "Guidelines: Integrating Indigenous Knowledge in Project Planning and Implementation," in *Indigenous Knowledge for Development Program* (Washington DC: Joint publication of CIDA, ILO, KIVU Nature and the World Bank [date unknown]), 37; also available online at <http://www.worldbank.org/afr/ik/guidelines/index.htm>.
9. Emery, "Guidelines," 79.
10. Marie Battiste and James Sa'ke'j Youngblood Henderson, *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage: A Global Challenge* (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing, 2000), 35–36.
11. Barbara Rogoff, *The Cultural Nature of Human Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). Rogoff discusses at length the idea that individuals are not separate from cultural processes or independent of their cultural communities.
12. Ball, "Incorporating Indigenous Knowledge in Post-Secondary Teaching," 86.
13. Marianna Valverde, *Law's Dream of a Common Knowledge* (New Jersey: Princeton and Oxford University Press, 2003), 221.

14. Nila M. Rinehart, "Native American Perspectives: Connected to One Another and to the Greater Universe," in *The Politics of Early Childhood Education*, ed. Lourdes Diaz Soto (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 135–42.

15. An example of this stereotypical attitude in which Aboriginal knowledge and culture is frozen in time is *Delgamuukw vs. British Columbia* [1991], (3 W. W. R. 97; [1991], 79 D. L. R. [4th] 185), in Maureen Simpkins, "After Delgamuukw: Aboriginal Oral Tradition as Evidence in Aboriginal Rights and Title Litigation" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2000). In Judge McEachern's view, eating a pizza, driving a car, using a hunting license, or using electricity was enough to prove that the Gitksan and Wet'wewet'en no longer lived an Aboriginal life. On the basis of lifestyle, Aboriginal rights were frozen in time as if culture is not changing and evolving.

16. Rogoff, *The Cultural Nature of Human Development*, 51.

17. FNPP graduate, interviewed March 25, 2003, Treaty 8 community.

18. George J. Sefa Dei, "African Development: The Relevance and Implications of 'Indigenism,'" in *Indigenous Knowledges in Global Contexts: Multiple Readings of Our World*, ed. George J. Sefa Dei, Budd L. Hall, and Dorothy Goldin Rosenberg (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 70–88.

19. FNPP graduate, interviewed February 5, 2003, Lil'wat Territory.

20. Community Specialist, interviewed April 7, 2003, Carrier Territory.

21. FNPP graduate, interviewed April 8, 2003, Carrier Territory.

22. J. Edward Chamberlin, *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories? Finding a Common Ground* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2003), 51.

23. Njoki Nathani Wane, "Indigenous Knowledge: Lessons from the Elders—A Kenyan Case Study," in *Indigenous Knowledges in Global Contexts: Multiple Readings of Our World*, ed. George J. Sefa Dei, Budd L. Hall, and Dorothy Goldin Rosenberg (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 54–69.

24. Instructor, Meadow Lake Tribal Council Program, as quoted in Ball, "Incorporating Indigenous Knowledge in Post-Secondary Teaching," 94.

25. FNPP graduate, interviewed April 7, 2003, Carrier Territory.

26. Elder, interviewed April 10, 2003, Carrier Territory.

27. FNPP graduate, interviewed April 8, 2003, Carrier Territory.

28. Joseph Couture, "The Role of Native Elders: Emergent Issues," in *Visions of the Heart: Canadian Aboriginal Issues*, ed. David Alan Long and Olive Patricia Dickason (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Publishing, 1996), 41–56.

29. Elder forum, February 5, 2003, Lil'wat Territory.

30. Elder forum, February 5, 2003, Lil'wat Territory.

31. Gregory Cajete, *Look to the Mountain: An Ecology of Indigenous Education* (Skyland NC: Kivaki, 1997), 227.

32. Elder forum, February 5, 2003, Lil'wat Territory.

33. Janet Gonzalez-Mena, "Culture, Identity and Caregiving Practices," *Every Child* 7, no. 3 (2001): 2.
34. Seth Agbo, "Enhancing Success in American Indian Students: Participatory Research at Awkwesasne as Part of the Development of a Culturally Relevant Curriculum," *Journal of American Indian Education* 40, no. 1 (2001): 31-56.
35. William G. Demmert Jr., *Improving Academic Performance Among Native American Students: A Review of the Research Literature* (Charleston WV: Eric Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 2001), 9.
36. Gregory Cajete, *Native Science: Natural Laws of Independence* (Santa Fe NM: Clear Light Publishers, 2000), 181.
37. Nila M. Rinehart, "Native American Perspectives: Connected to One Another and to the Greater Universe," in *The Politics of Early Childhood Education*, ed. Lourdes Diaz Soto (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2000), 136.
38. Lisa Terreni and Judi McCallum, "Considering Culture," in *Providing Culturally Competent Care in Early Childhood Services in New Zealand* (Wellington, New Zealand: Early Childhood Development Nga Kaitaunaki Kohungahunga, 2003), 3.
39. Rogoff, *The Cultural Nature of Human Development*, 51.
40. Meadow Lake Tribal Council, "Vision Statement 1989," in *First Nations Partnership Programs Generative Curriculum Model: Program Evaluation Report* (Victoria BC: University of Victoria, Child and Youth Care, 2000), 8.