

Strengthening Indigenous Capacity for Early Childhood, Youth & Family Programs

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Supporting Indigenous Children's Development: Community-University Partnerships

This book challenges and offers an alternative to the imposition of best practices on communities by outside specialists. It tells the story of an unexpected partnership initiated by an Aboriginal tribal council with the University of Victoria's School of Child and Youth Care. The partnership has produced a new approach to professional education, in which community leaders are co-constructors of the curriculum and implementation proceeded only if both parties are present and engaged. Word of this "generative curriculum" has spread to numerous Aboriginal communities and now over sixty communities have participated in the First Nations Partnerships Program. Jessica Ball and Alan Pence show how this innovative program has strengthened community capacity to design, deliver, and evaluate culturally appropriate programs to support young children's development.

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Investments to strengthen Indigenous capacity to introduce and operate programs and services for young children are a priority in many countries. In Canada, Aboriginal capacity building efforts are yielding some increase in the numbers of First Nations, Inuit and Metis adults qualified in the fields of early childhood education, supported child development for children with special needs, youth outreach, and family support. There remains a critical shortage of Aboriginal community members with training to participate in health, education, infant development, and early language programs, and a critical shortage of accredited, in-country training programs that are effective in recruiting, retaining, and graduating Aboriginal trainees. Successful capacity building initiatives demonstrate the need for extraordinary ingenuity, flexibility, deployment of resources, and persistence in the manner in which training is delivered and the content of training curricula. Most importantly, education and training must be shown to address community-identified goals for development, harness and build upon local resources, and

incorporate Indigenous knowledge in order to yield sustainable capacity to meet local needs.

First Nations Partnerships Program: Success Story

The First Nations Partnerships Program at the University of Victoria's School of Child and Youth Care is one such success story. Initiated by the Meadow Lake Tribal Council of Saskatchewan, the program became the first in Canada to deliver two years of university accredited education in Indigenous communities and involving cultural Elders in those communities to co-generate the training curricula. Alan Pence pioneered the development of this approach, and Jessica Ball assumed the program directorship and evaluation research arm of the program in 1998. To date the program has involved 10 partnerships training 151 Indigenous students from 57 First Nations. The program's unprecedented success has been recognized with awards. In 2002, UNESCO selected the First Nations Partnership Programs as one of 20 'best practices' across disciplines from around the world that incorporate Indigenous knowledge. Tri-annual research evaluations of this innovative program have yielded new knowledge about how to support participation post-secondary education and promote community capacity for development of child and family services.

Determinants of program success shown in evaluation research

Community-based delivery	Face-to-face education without leaving home
Generative Curriculum Model	Incorporation of Indigenous Knowledge alongside university-based curricula
Recruiting emerging leaders	Involving community-identified leaders with recognized skills in promoting child well-being
Cohort engagement	Social support, cultural safety, regional networking
Flexible scheduling	Accommodating cultural and harvesting cycles
Laddered credential sequence	Incremental professional development and credentials through articulated, accredited courses

Promising Practices demonstrated by program graduates

A follow-up study found significant positive change in three of the groups of First Nations communities that had all completed delivery of the program in 1999. Four years after program completion, nearly all graduates were employed in child and family serving agencies or schools in their home communities. Goals had been achieved for providing community-based services for children and families, drawing upon cultural traditions as well as knowledge from western science. A comprehensive report entitled Hook and Hub

(available at www.ecdip.org) has informed several new federal and provincial initiatives in Aboriginal learning, child care, and advocacy for coordinated service delivery.

Visit www.fnpp.org for more information about the First Nations Partnerships Program. Stories of the 10 partnership programs are told in a booklet: *Our Children Are Our Future* and in extensive print materials, five video documentaries, book chapters and journal articles (available by request to Jessica Ball, jball@uvic.ca).

Also see: Ball, J. & Pence, A. (2006). *Supporting Indigenous Children's Development: Community-University Partnerships*. Vancouver: UBC Press.

Selected reports

Ball, J. & McIvor, O. (2005) *Learning and Teaching As If Communities Mattered* (253 KB). Workshop presented at the World Indigenous People's Conference on Education, Hamilton, Aotearoa/ New Zealand, November. [PDF] (248 KB)

Ball, J., Pence, A., Pierre, M. & Kuehne, V. (2002). *Intergenerational teaching and learning in Canadian First Nations Partnership Programs* (1.3 MB). In M. Kaplan, N. Henkin & A. Kusano (Eds.), *Linking lifetimes: A global view of intergenerational exchange* (pp. 83-100). New York, NY: United Press of America, Inc. [PDF] (1.3 MB)

Ball, J. & Pence, A. (2001). *Training in First Nations communities: Five "secrets" of success* (519 KB). *Interaction* 15(1): 19-24. [PDF] (519 KB)

Ball, J. & Pence, A.R. (1999). *Beyond developmentally appropriate practice: Developing community and culturally appropriate practice* (15 MB). *Young Children March*: 46-50. [PDF] (15 MB)