

early CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT INTERCULTURAL  
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**Incorporating Indigenous Knowledge in Indigenous Early Childhood Programs**

**TEAM**

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**Research Associate:**

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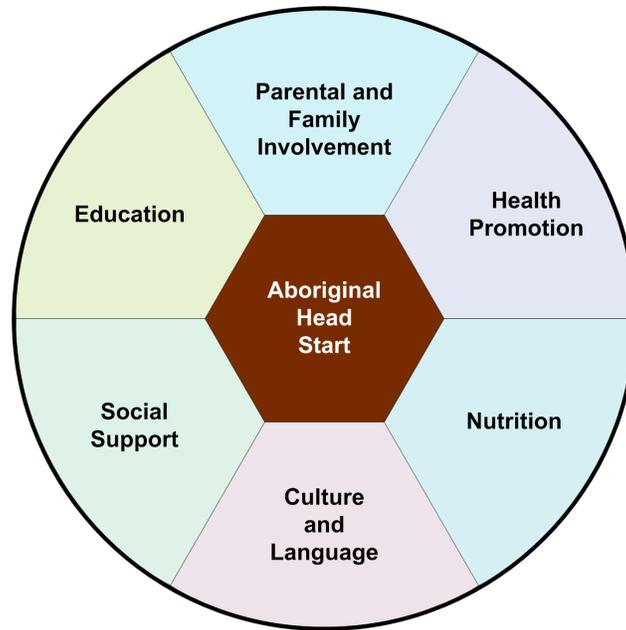
**Community Partners:**

Lil'wat Nation, Mount Currie, B.C.  
Tl'azt'en Nation, Tache, B.C.  
Treaty 8 Tribal Association, Fort St. John, B.C.

**Project Background**

Indigenous Peoples around the world are seeking ways to ensure that their unique cultural knowledges, languages, and ways of living in the world are transmitted to the young generation for continuous renewal. In Canada, following the Residential School debacle, Indigenous Peoples have long sought authority over child care, child welfare, and education programs for their children. In 1996, a ground-breaking, comprehensive report by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People repeatedly identified early childhood programs as a critical avenue for laying the foundation of cultural literacy, heritage language learning, and positive Indigenous identity. Since 1996, there have been significant investments by the federal government to provide early childhood care and development programs, such as the Aboriginal Head Start program on reserves and in urban and northern communities. The Aboriginal Head Start program model is truly exemplary, with its mandated six components (health promotion, nutrition, education, culture and language, social support, and parental and family involvement) and openness to local innovation.

In communities that are lucky to have funding for an Aboriginal Head Start program, the program is invariably a pivotal place of engagement for family support, community development, and cultural revitalization.



It is widely recognized that although this investment has been sustained, it is not enough: a majority of Indigenous children in Canada have no opportunity to participate in an early childhood program that recognizes or builds upon their cultural heritage. Most programs subscribe to so-called ‘best practices’ which are popular Euro-Western approaches to health, nutrition, early learning and socialization. Therefore, many Indigenous early childhood practitioners and funding agencies are asking: “Are we achieving our goals for transmission of culture and, if so, what components of our programs are having the desired effects on children’s development?” Many non-Indigenous early childhood practitioners are also asking: “How can ‘mainstream’ early childhood programs support positive cultural identity of children who are not of the same culture as the program staff?” This project explored these questions.

### **Project Goal**

The project documented and interrogated the manner and meaning of embodiments of Indigenous ‘culture(s)’ in Indigenous early childhood care and development programs that have cultural transmission through the socialization of young children as an explicit program goal.

## **Project Activities**

Through collaborations with early childhood care practitioners in First Nations, this project:

- Examined First Nations practitioners' goals for cultural transmission in children's programs and how they set out to achieve these goals
- Documented program elements that staff identified and defined as 'cultural' elements
- Explored the role and cultural influence of First Nations child-care practitioners themselves on children's cultural programming and children's development
- Explored impacts of cultural child care programs on children's cultural literacy and identity as preliminary clarification for future research.

## **Project Outcome**

This project has helped to stimulate critical discourse about the meaning, manner and intention of embodiments of culture in programs that have an explicit goal of cultural transmission. Discussions of project findings in workshops and reports takes this discussion beyond a 'beads and drumming' litany of tangible curriculum elements to an understanding of the forms of cultural authenticity exhibited by Indigenous child-care practitioners and the forms of interaction among Indigenous staff and children that engender cultural awareness, cultural learning, and positive cultural identity.

## **Funding**

Project funding was provided by the B. C. Ministry of Children and Family Development through the Human Early Learning Partnership: [www.earlylearning.ubc.ca](http://www.earlylearning.ubc.ca) and through the federal Social Development Partnerships Program of Human Resources Canada.

## **KEY RESOURCES**

### **ECDIP Publications, Presentations, and Reports**

Wyatt, T. R. (2014). Teaching across the lines: Adapting scripted programs with Culturally Relevant/Responsive Teaching. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 22(3), p. 447-469. (10.5 MB)

Ball, J. (2012). Identity and knowledge in Indigenous young children's experiences in Canada. *Childhood Education*, 88(5), 286-291. (3.4 MB)  
<http://www.questia.com/read/1G1-305838933/identify-and-knowledge-in-indigenous-young-children-s>

Ball, J. (2012). Equity for Indigenous children in early childhood programs. In J. Heyman & A Cassola (Eds.), *Lessons in educational equality: Successful approaches to*

*intractable problems around the world.* (pp. 282-312). Oxford University Press. (15.8 MB)

Ball, J. (2012). Federal investments in strengthening Indigenous capacity for culturally based preschool. In N. Howe & L. Prochner (Eds.). *Recent perspectives on early childhood education and care in Canada* (pp.337-366). Vancouver: UBC Press. (14.7 MB)

Wyatt, T. R. (2011) Atuarfitsialak: Greenland's culturally compatible reform, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 25(6), p. 1-18. (107 KB)

Ball J. (2010). *Culture and early childhood education.* In: Tremblay RE, Barr RG, Peters R. DeV, Boivin M, (Eds.). *Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development* [online]. Montreal, Quebec: Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development; 2010:1-8. Available at: <http://www.child-encyclopedia.com/documents/BallANGxp.pdf>.

Ball, J. & Simpkins, M. (2004). The community within the child: Integration of Indigenous knowledge into First Nations childcare process and practice. *American Indian Quarterly*, 28(3/4): 480-498. (265 KB)

Ball, J. (2004). *Early childhood care and development programs as Hook and Hub: Promising practices in First Nations communities.* Victoria, BC: University of Victoria, School of Child and Youth Care. (6.5 MB)

Ball, J. (2004). *Characterizing child-environment impacts on the development of Indigenous children in Canada.* Panel presentation on children in especially difficult circumstances. 33rd Annual Meeting of the Society for Cross Cultural Research, San Jose, CA, February 18-22.

Ball, J. (2003). *Supporting Indigenous communities' goals for young children: Studies in Indigenous knowledges, developmental assessment, and inter-sectoral service delivery.* Human and Social Development Faculty Research Symposium, University of Victoria, Canada, April 11. (202 KB)

## **Resources**

The *Aboriginal Head Start Association of British Columbia* (AHSABC) hosts a website with a bulletin board for practitioners in culturally-based programs and lists wonderful resources for developing drawing upon local cultures in programs. [www.ahsabc.com](http://www.ahsabc.com)

The *BC Aboriginal Child Care Association* (BCACCS) is a resource and referral clearinghouse. The website lists and provides links to many documents about culturally-based programming that can be downloaded free: [http://www.acc-society.bc.ca/files\\_2/accs-publications.php](http://www.acc-society.bc.ca/files_2/accs-publications.php)

*Te Whariki*: The Aotearoa/New Zealand Bicultural Early Childhood Curriculum <http://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Early-Childhood/te-whariki.pdf>