

Incorporation of Indigenous Knowledge in Aboriginal Early Childhood Programs

TEAM

Principal Investigator:

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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

Aboriginal peoples have long sought authority over child care, child welfare, and education programs for their children. In 1996, the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples repeatedly identifies early childhood programs as a critical avenue for laying the foundation of cultural literacy, heritage language learning, and positive Aboriginal identity. Since 1996, there have been major innovations in Canada to mount early childhood care and development programs, such as the Aboriginal Head Start program, as a centrepiece for family support, community development, and cultural revitalization following the Indian Residential School era. Some Aboriginal 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-Aboriginal early childhood practitioners are also asking: "How can we 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 documents and interrogates the manner and meaning of embodiments of Aboriginal 'culture(s)' in Aboriginal 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 innate cultural authenticity exhibited by Aboriginal child-care practitioners and the forms of interaction among Aboriginal staff and children that engender cultural awareness.

Project Reports

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. [PDF] (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. [PDF] (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 Aboriginal 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. [PDF] (202 KB)

Funding

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Funding for this project has now been spent.

Student involvement

One Aboriginal graduate student completed her M.A. program in Child and Youth Care at UVic while working on this project. Another graduate student completed her M.A. in Public Policy at UVic while working on this project. Both students are now enrolled as doctoral students at UBC (Onowa McIvor and Silvia Vilches).

Dr. Maureen Simpkins, who worked on this project as a post-doc, has obtained a faculty position at the new University College of the North, which is specializing in training Aboriginal early childhood practitioners.

Contact Us

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Compendium of Aboriginal Resources for Early Childhood Programs

A Compendium of practical resources for Early Childhood Programs seeking to provide Aboriginal cultural content is available at the Aboriginal Head Start Association of British Columbia (AHSABC) website, <http://www.ahsabc.com/compendium>. The AHSABC website (www.ahsabc.com) also hosts a bulletin board and other useful tools. The Compendium is also available on the website of the Aboriginal Children's Circle of Early Learning (www.accel-capea.ca), which is a national clearinghouse in Canada for sharing information and developing ideas about Aboriginal early childhood services.

The Compendium was initially developed by Jessica Ball and Ken Moselle for Aboriginal Head Start programs to support the education and cultural components of those programs. It includes information about over 800 culturally relevant resources on First Nations, Inuit and Métis subjects covered in books, videos, learning activity kit, audio tapes, maps, etc. Specific types of resources can be found through an easily searchable database that includes a description of the theme of the resource (art, cognitive skills, cultural identity, legends, nature, reading readiness, traditional language), the geocultural focus (community, language, cultural group, etc.) and the resource type (book, video, audio tape, etc.) for each material, if available. The cost and publishers of the resources is also provided.