

early CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT INTERCULTURAL  
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**Indigenous Children's Early Language Development:  
Goals and Facilitation Strategies**

**TEAM**

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*I used to think that language would lead us inexplicably to grace. I still do.*  
Charles Wright, USA Poet Laureate, 2010, Sarabande Books

**Project Background**

Indigenous leaders in Canada have argued that lack of services, as well as culturally inappropriate pedagogies, developmental screening and assessment, and early intervention services result in serious negative consequences for Indigenous children – especially high levels of diagnosis of pathology. Research in child and youth care and community psychology emphasizes the socio-cultural context of children's experiences as a source of information about what is typical and expected for children's growth and development. Culture can be a cornerstone for meaningful programs of family and community-centred strategies to ensure children's optimal development.

In the field of speech and language services for young children, current approaches to delivering services tend to focus on the child within the family unit as the context for overall child development including language and communication. Little attention has been paid to developing models that also incorporate the cultural aspects of language socialization or the community context, including schools. Intervention strategies used in Canada have been developed in middle-class urban settings based on the values, beliefs and goals of families primarily of English language heritage. Recently, alternatives are being considered that involve adjusting expectations for language development and adapting language facilitation and intervention strategies to be congruent with families' culturally based valued, beliefs, and socialization practices within families.

## **Project Goals**

Projects on early language facilitation and culturally based goals for children's communication skills have contributed significantly to recent efforts to improve the practice of speech and language pathologies when working with First Nations, Inuit and Métis children and families. In particular, the Speech-Language and Audiology Association of Canada (formerly known as CALPA) has made tremendous efforts since 2010 to prepare clinicians to work in a cultural safe, informed ways with Indigenous people.

Two important studies completed within the Early Childhood Development Intercultural Partnerships Program include:

(1) A national survey of speech-language pathologists' experiences of working with Indigenous children and families, their perceptions of how well their clinical training prepared them, and their needs and goals to improve their self-assessed readiness and effectiveness.

(2) An exploration of how First Nations parents and Elders think about children's early language development and their own goals for their children's communication, including which language(s) they should learn first, how more proficient speakers should interact with young children to promote their language skills, how children should learn to regulate their speech depending on social situations, and how talkative children should be.

Both of these successful studies were published in the Journal of Speech Language Pathology and Audiology, presented at several conferences, disseminated in the form of policy briefs, and discussed in various public media.

Another project area, undertaken by Jessica Ball and Sharla Peltier, involves the creation of guides for parents and early childhood practitioners to promote early language development and identify children's needs for extra supports. Sharla and Jessica have also provided training for early childhood program staff and for clinicians on strategies for facilitating children's language development in ways that draw upon mainstream science of language acquisition and on cultural and local resources, knowledge, and forms of interaction.

## **Funding**

Funding for this project work 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)

## KEY RESOURCES

### ECDIP Publications, Presentations, and Reports

Ball, J., & Lewis, M.M. (2014). First Nations Elders' and Parents' Views on Supporting their Children's Language Development, *Canadian Journal of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology*, 38, 224-237. (7.9 MB)

>> Click here to view the entire, second, special issue on service delivery to First Nations, Inuit and Métis children and families in Canada.

Ball, J., & Lewis, M. (2011). "An altogether different approach": Roles of speech and language pathologists in supporting Indigenous children's language development. *Canadian Journal of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology*, 35 (2), 144-159. (867 KB)

>> Also available at: <http://www.caslpa.ca/english/resources/detail.asp?ID=1067>

>> Click here to view the entire special issue on service delivery to First Nations, Inuit and Metis in Canada, Part I.

Peltier, S. (2011). Providing culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate services: An insider construct. *Canadian Journal of Speech and Language Pathology and Audiology*, 35, 126-135.

[http://209.217.105.25/english/resources/database/files/2011\\_CJSLPA\\_Vol\\_35/CJSLPA\\_2011\\_Vol\\_35\\_No\\_02\\_Summer.pdf](http://209.217.105.25/english/resources/database/files/2011_CJSLPA_Vol_35/CJSLPA_2011_Vol_35_No_02_Summer.pdf)

Ball, J., & Lewis, M.M. (2006). Aboriginal parents' goals for children's language: What is our role? *IMPrint: The Newsletter of Infant Mental Health Promotion*, 46, 11-16. (4.1 MB)

Ball, J. (2008). *Aboriginal young children's language and literacy development: Research evaluating progress, promising practices, and needs*. Canadian Language and Literacy Networked Centre of Excellence, National Literacy Strategy. (613 KB)

Ball, J. (2006). *Talking points: Exploring needs and concepts for Aboriginal early childhood language facilitation and supports*. Concept paper prepared for the Public Health Agency of Canada, Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities. (2 MB)

Ball, J. & Lewis, M. (2006). *Partner roles in supporting early language development of First Nations children*. Paper presented at The Early Years Conference: Child Development Practices: A Decade of Change. Vancouver, BC, February 2-4.

Ball, J., Lewis, M., & Warwyko, C. (2005). *Supporting early language development of First Nations children: Views of speech-language pathologists, First Nations Elders and parents*. Conference of the British Columbia Association of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology, Richmond, BC, October 28-29.

Ball, J. & Lewis, M. (2005). *Talking points: What can speech-language partners contribute to Aboriginal early childhood development?* In J. Whitehead (Ed.), *Research Connections Canada: Supporting Children and Families*, Vol. 12, pp. 21-40. Ottawa: Canadian Child Care Federation. (Available at Aboriginal Children's Circle of Early Learning website.)

Ball, J. & Lewis, M. (2005). Using Indigenous parents' goals for children's language to guide speech-language practice and policy. Paper presented at the World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education, Hamilton, Aotearoa New Zealand, November 27 – December 1. (312 KB)

Ball, J. & Lewis, M.M. (2005). *First Nations Elders' and parents' views on supporting young children's language development*. Report presented at the Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists, Regina, SK, May 6. (805 KB)

Ball, J. & Lewis, M. (2004). *Speech-language services to Indigenous children: Critical reflections and recommendations*. Poster presented at the Early Childhood Development Forum: How Research Influences Public Policy, Vancouver, BC, September 7.

Ball, J., Lewis, M., & Peltier, S. (2004). *Culturally appropriate practices for facilitating early language development of Indigenous children*. The Early Years Conference. Vancouver, Canada, February 6-7. (206 KB)

Ball, J. & Lewis, M. (2004). *Culturally appropriate practices for facilitating early language development of Indigenous children: Recommendations from experienced practitioners*. Paper presented at the Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists, Ottawa, ON, May 7. (269 KB)

Ball, J. (2003). *The challenge of creating an optimal learning environment in child care: Cross-cultural perspectives*. In L. Girolametto & E. Weitzman (Eds.), *Enhancing caregiver language facilitation in child care settings* (pp. 1-12). Toronto, ON: Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network and The Hanen Centre. (150 KB)