

Indigenous Ways of Knowing: The Early Learning Perspective

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Key Terms/Definitions

Indigenous: In Canada Indigenous people are First Nation, Inuit, and Metis. Internationally Indigenous people the original peoples of a given regions. The people that were settled on that region before it was colonized.

First Nation: A term that refers to the Indigenous peoples in Canada who are ethnically neither Inuit nor Metis.

Inuit: Members of the Indigenous population who live in the northern parts of Canada, as well as Greenland and Alaska.

Metis: A person of mixed Indigenous and Euro-Canadian ancestry and is distinct from any other Indigenous group.

Colonization: The action or process of settling among and establishing control over Indigenous peoples and their land mostly with violence and force.

Assimilate: To become like something else. Europeans forcibly assimilated Indigenous people in Canada to adapt to their culture and way of life.

Residential School: Government sponsored; religious schools established to forcibly assimilate Indigenous children into European culture. Residential schools ran for over a century and the last one closed in 1996.

The Truth and Reconciliation

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was created in 2008, so that residential school survivors could tell their stories and experiences of being lawfully removed from their families and cultures, the trauma they suffered because of forced assimilation, as well as the physical, emotional and sexual abuse that many endured. The first part of the commissions mission is to get the truth about Canada's dark history, heard. It is important that people know about the atrocities related to the residential schools. "From 2008 to 2014, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission heard stories from thousands of residential school survivors. In June 2015, the commission released a report based on the individual stories. From that came the 94 Calls to Action: individual instructions to guide government, communities and faith groups down the road to reconciliation" (CBC News, 2018). The second part of the commissions mission is reconciliation and there is so much work to be done when it comes to implementing the calls to actions. Reconciliation is a

process that will continue throughout generations and every single person within Canada must acknowledge and participate in reconciliation for it to be effective. The TRC has many different aspects to it and the 94 calls to action are broken down into sections, which include: Child Welfare, Education, Language and Culture, Health, Justice and Reconciliation. Unfortunately, moving forward with the calls to action has been a slow process, and to date there has only been 10 out of the 94 calls to action that are fully complete. The Canadian Government played a major role in completing the ones that are fully complete. An informative resource for the TRC's call to action is called "Beyond 94: Truth and Reconciliation in Canada," (CBC, 2019) which is an interactive website that stays up to date on the progress of the TRC. This website is run and updated by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). One of the TRC's recommendations was to increase funding to CBC/Radio Canada to enable its support of reconciliation, which is why and how this website was created. A common theme throughout the Reconciliation's calls to action, is for Canada to adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Article 43 of UNDRIP states: Adopt and implement UNDRIP and article 44 states: Develop a notional plan, strategies and other concrete measures to achieve the goals of UNDRIP.

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

In September of 2007 the UNDRIP document was complete and most countries worldwide endorsed the document. "UNDRIP, a declaration of the General Assembly of the United Nations, provides a new global platform upon which Indigenous peoples can fight for and assert their autonomy. It is an elaborate and comprehensive statement of the entitlements of Indigenous peoples, one that implicitly acknowledges the histories [of colonization] and global breadth of Indigenous dispossession" (Decosta, 2011, p. 56). Unfortunately, Canada was not one of those countries that endorsed the document in 2007. Canada did not endorse UNDRIP until November 12, 2010 and their endorsement was a limited one. "In Canada's view UNDRIP is, 'a non-legally binding document that does not reflect customary international law nor change Canadian laws'" (Decosta, 2011, p. 63). The Canadian Government stated that they wanted to continue to work on their relationship with the Indigenous people of Canada, but this weak endorsement of UNDRIP did nothing to reconcile the relationship. Canada biggest apprehension about endorsing the document had to do with the principle of Indigenous people having to give "free, prior, and informed consent," before anyone can access their lands for resources or anything else. "Thorough

implementation of UNDRIP should mean considerable shifts in ownership of lands, particularly Crown or public lands, and that some lands will be secured from development and some resources made unavailable to the global or national economy” (Decosta, 2011, p. 59) This would mean that Indigenous groups would have to consent to pipelines, logging, mills, etc., being put through or on their land which we can assume the government knew wouldn’t happen. This is in part why the Canadian Government made sure to state that the document is not legally binding. This is unfortunate because UNDRIP is such a major part of reconciliation and in order for reconciliation to be authentic UNDRIP needs to be fully endorsed and legally binding. UNDRIP consists of 46 articles and in part it recognizes the following: “self-determination, equality, and freedom from discrimination; the right to a nationality and participation in the state; the right of Indigenous peoples to their distinct cultures and legal systems; rights against forced removals and policies of implicit genocide; Indigenous cultures and spiritual identities and Indigenous languages. . . rights to land, waters, and other resources” (Decosta, 2011, p. 57). Indigenous peoples have been displaced and traumatized from the intentional violence of colonization. Canada has a dark history with Indigenous people, the residential school system and colonization. If the reader would like to explore UNDRIP further, visit https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfi/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf. It is important to review material with a critical lens. It is best to use the United Nations website when accessing the document. There is also a document written for adolescents. Ideally Canada will fully implement UNDRIP soon as a significant step towards reconciliation. Another step towards reconciliation is acknowledging whose land we are visiting on. Recently Land Acknowledgments are becoming more common, and they are one small minor step towards reconciliation.

Land Acknowledgements

We do the Land Acknowledgement to honour and remember the peoples that took care of this land for thousands of years before it became Canada; to honor our ancestors and acknowledge their sacrifices, as well as, an act of reconciliation. The Land Acknowledgements tells the true history of this land we now call Canada, and that it was inhabited by the First Peoples long before Christopher Columbus claimed to discover it. “The explorer Christopher Columbus made four trips across the Atlantic Ocean from Spain. . .determined to find a direct water route from Europe to Asia, but he never did. Instead, he accidentally stumbled upon the Americas. Though he did not really ‘discover’

the New World—millions of people already lived [here]” (History, 2019). There were millions of Indigenous people already occupying this land. From the moment Christopher Columbus stepped foot onto the America’s years and years of violent colonization would ensue. To this day there are schools that still teach the myth that this land was discovered by him, and this is in part why we do the Land Acknowledgements; telling the story of whose land we are visiting on dispels the myth of this land being discovered and tells the true history, that Indigenous peoples have lived on these lands for thousands of years.

Territorial land acknowledgements are usually done at the beginning of conferences, presentations, or any other public engagement. The Calgary Alberta Land Acknowledgment would go like this: Calgary, Alberta sits on the traditional lands of the Treat 7 territory including the Niitsitapi (nit_SIT_ah_pee or Blackfoot), Nations of the Siksika (Sick_sick_ah), the Kainai (Guy_nuy), the Piikuni (pih_GAH_nee), the Tsuut’ina (TSOO_tunuh), as well as the Stoney Nakoda (nuh_KO_dah) First Nations, which includes Chiniki (CHIN_ee_kee), Bearspaw, and Wesley First Nations, as well as the Metis Nation Region 3. Through this Land Acknowledgement we honour the agreements between the ancestral peoples of this land and the first Euro Canadian settlers known as the Treaties. Calgary’s traditional Blackfoot name is Mohkinstis meaning elbow, because this is where the Bow River meets the Elbow River, and this has significant meaning for the peoples that occupied this land long before it became known as Calgary. For anyone that wants to learn more or further research on the land acknowledgements there are three websites listed below:

<https://www.caut.ca/content/guide-acknowledging-first-peoples-traditional-territory>

<https://native-land.ca/territory-acknowledgement/>

<https://www.whose.land/en/>

All three websites have further information about the land acknowledgments with interactive maps that will help you to learn and acknowledge the lands you are a visitor on. There is also further links with more information about why we do the land acknowledgements, along with any other further information one might be seeking.

Language and Terms

There are often a lot of questions around the right words and terminology to use when referring to Canada’s First Nations, Inuit and Metis peoples, because there seems to be a new, politically correct

word every few years. “A collective noun for the inhabitants of Canada has been a challenge ever since Christopher Columbus arrived in 1492. Believing that he had landed in India it followed that the existing population would be referred to as ‘Indians’” (Indigenous Corporate Training, 2016). It did not take long for the settlers to realize that they were “blatantly wrong” about landing in India but that did not stop them from using the term Indians, which initially was the “collective noun,” used to refer to First Nations, Inuit and Metis. In present day Canada the term Indian is no longer the respectable term “due to its incorrect origin and the connections to colonizer policies and departments such as the Indian Act, Indian Agent, Indian residential schools etc.” (Indigenous Corporate Training, 2016). The term Indigenous seems to be an up to date term that is respectable and presently the preferred term for many First Nations, Inuit and Metis people in Canada (a quick reminder that every person, every nation and every culture is different so this report does not speak for everyone and others may feel very different.) What may be appropriate for one person may not be appropriate for another. It’s important to be respectful and listen when Indigenous people are talking about their preferred terms. The definition of Indigenous according to Merriam-Webster’s dictionary is “produced, growing, living, or occurring naturally in a particular region or environment” (2019). Keep in mind there are some old derogatory terms that are absolutely not used anymore. “Let’s just start with things it is never okay to call Indigenous peoples: savage, Red Indian, redskin, primitive, half-breed, squaw, [eskimo]” (Vowel, 2016). “Names are linked to identity, and notions of identity are fluid. They change, they evolve. What was a good term 20 years ago might be inappropriate now” (Vowel, 2016). If unclear what terminology to use it is best to listen or ask. Throughout the remainder of this paper the term Indigenous will refer to First Nations, Inuit, and Metis people.

History of Indigenous Education

“Indigenous peoples experience with education in Canada has been a contentious one” (Toulouse, 2016, p. 1). When settlers set out to assimilate Indigenous people, they did it under the guise of education and through the Indian residential school system. Children were forcibly taken by law from their families, their homes and their communities to residential schools throughout the country. The experience of being cut off and taken away from everything and everyone that is familiar to you is a traumatic enough experience for a young child, and on top of that many children were sexually, physically, and emotionally abused. Justice Murray Sinclair who was the Chief

Commissioner of The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has famously said “Education is what got us into this mess—the use of education at least in the terms of residential schools—but education is the key to reconciliation.” This is where the early years can play an important role. Education is key and it starts in the early years. Indigenous children have the same right to the early learning classrooms as any other child, but there seems to be a large gap in the number of Indigenous children in the classrooms. There are a few different factors that cause the gap in numbers, such as economic status and the cost of child care, the lack of Indigenous culture in the classrooms, as well as the lack of resources to access quality care.

Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Frameworks

In 2018 the Government of Canada compiled an Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework (IELCCF) in regard to the TRC’s call to action 12: “Develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs” (CBC, 2019). The IELCCF consists of 26 pages, which is quite minimal, so it can be hard to put the IELCCF into practice; there isn’t very much instruction or guidance included. The province of Alberta has *Flight: Alberta’s Early Learning and Care Framework’s* (2014), which consists of 153 pages that include suggestions to implement practices into the classroom. There are many similarities between both documents. The Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework (IELCCF) states that Indigenous children are sacred gifts and they must be treated as such. Many Indigenous groups know that their children are the future generation and the children will carry on the traditions, the culture, and the way of life, as well as protect the lands from being destroyed. The BC Ministry of Children and Family Development (2018), corroborates the IELCCF by stating “Elders tell us that children are to be seen as gifts from the Creator to love, nurture and respect” (p. 4). For this to happen Indigenous children must be surrounded by their culture. “From an Indigenous perspective or [world view], children are embraced as naturally strong and are positioned as equal members of the community, with the right to act autonomously and to make their own decisions” (Guilfoyle et al., 2010, p. 69). This aligns with “Flight,” the Alberta Early Learning and Child Care Framework’s “image of a strong, resourceful, capable child – a mighty learner and citizen” (Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette & Thomas, 2014, p. 38). All children no matter race or ethnicity or geographical location should be seen as “strong, resourceful, and capable learners and citizens” (Makovichuk et. al., 2014, p. 39) and this view should also be evident in the early learning environment that the children are playing and learning in. The image of the child

should help educators to shift the “intention of our interactions from ‘doing to’ a child toward ‘participating with’ each child” (Makovichuk et. al., 2014, p. 39)

In addition to the similarities between the Images of the Child within Indigenous and westernized communities, there is also similarities within the well-being and healthy development of the child, which Flight (2014) states as, “children experience safe and caring environments where their emotional and physical health, positive identities and sense of belonging are nurtured and protected” (Makovichuk, et. al., 2014, p. 91). Flight’s view on holistic health aligns very closely with Indigenous ways of knowing which states, “children’s well-being is a wholistic experience that is supported through the health and development of all aspects of self. This includes balanced development of physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual dimensions of self” (The Winnipeg Boldness Project, 2017, p. 6). When children feel safe in the spaces they are occupying, they are building and shaping their sense of identity “throughout their life long negotiations within personal, social, and cultural landscapes,” (Makovichuk, et. al., 2014, p. 93) which is why it is important to be immersed in and celebrate children’s Indigenous culture. “In the same way that early childhood programs in the past were designed to assimilate young Indigenous children, post-colonial programs may be poised to take a lead role in preserving culture” (Prochner, 2004, p. 14).

In Indigenous communities’ relationships are what keep the families and communities strong and intact. According to Flight “a practice of relationships describes the complex and dynamic relationships with diverse community members and begins as you learn with and alongside children and families” (Makovichuk, et al., 2014, p. 50). According to Guilfoyle et al., “research shows that the inclusion of parents and family members in childcare programs provides an opportunity for parents to receive support in their child rearing roles. . . helping them to provide for their children’s developmental needs, early education and so forth” (2010, p. 69), which is all related to a practice of relationships. In Indigenous cultures parenting and rearing children “is not the sole responsibility of the parents; extended family members have key roles to play in raising children,” along with the community (Province of British Columbia, 2018, p. 4).

Flights idea/concept of places of vitality, “when you engage in a practice of relationships, you create places of vitality. . . with children as mighty learners and citizens—and their families. . . Places of vitality are strong, active, and energetic communities” (Makovichuk, et al., 2014, p. 50). It is also

important to remember what Indigenous families look like, as they may not be your typical nuclear family. “For Indigenous people, family includes the most immediate members of the child’s environment—mothers, fathers, and siblings—but equally includes aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, family established by kinship systems and other members of the community with whom the child is in contact” (Guilfoyle et al., 2010, p. 69).

Within Flight’s well-being and belonging section “children and their families have the right to experience social recognition and acceptance, and to see themselves reflected in their learning communities. Learning requires secure and consistent relationships, the affirmation of social and cultural practices, and opportunities to form connections with new people and places” (Makovichuk, et al., 2014, p. 50). In connection to Flight’s belonging is The Winnipeg Boldness Project’s belonging (2017), which states “Belonging is a feeling that one is connected to and supported by a community and knowing one’s place within the community. Belonging is feeling loved and being accepted for who you are. . . . Belonging is a feeling of reciprocity and responsibility within a community. For many, connection to culture and land are a critical sense of belonging” (p. 7). When comparing Flight, Alberta’s Early Learning and Child Care Framework and Indigenous ways of knowing and being, the similarities are abundant. The holistic child, the practice of relationships, and the sense of belonging are all connected and can be accomplished with the same practices. Learning requires that adults treat children with respect, show compassion, and honour established relationships while encouraging new ones (Makovichuk, et al., 2014, p. 93). In Indigenous culture a strong identity is crucial for all children to help them build that strong, capable, sense of self and to be proud of who they are and where they come from. While child development refers to the whole child, including their health, education and culture, the most important aspect of development for Indigenous children is their identity. “Secure identity formation, which contributes to the child’s overall wellbeing, is dependent on the inclusion of culture and tradition, as well as the inclusion of the development of their spiritual, emotional, social and physical aspect” (Guilfoyle et al., 2010, p. 69). The IELCCF (2018) “provides a guide for communities, program administrators, service providers, policy makers and governments to work towards achieving a shared vision that all Indigenous children have the opportunity to experience high quality, culturally strong ELCC”. Flight (2014), talks about cultural, economic and gender diversity. “When inclusiveness and equity are practiced, children come to appreciate their physical characteristics and their gendered, racialized, linguistic and cultural identities. They become sensitive to the effects of poverty and begin to

contribute to local and global initiatives that address it” (Makovichuk, 2014, p. 111). This is speaking for all cultures and ethnicities and can be relevant for Indigenous communities as well. They also give suggestions on how to be inclusive and equitable and their suggestions are “local museums, places of worship, soup kitchens, shelters, small business, farms, small factories” (Makovichuk, 2014, p. 111). In Alberta there are many museums that tell the history of First Nations people such as The Glenbow Museum and the Tsuu T’ina Culture Museum. Books are also another great way to learn about history.

Culturally Relevant Programs

It is important to seek out knowledge and information about the different cultures of the children that occupy classrooms and programs. By having greater cultural awareness, sensitivity and understanding, educators will be better equipped to work with Indigenous children. According to Guilfoyle et. al., “culturally strong programs incorporate a firm understanding of a community’s history, standards, beliefs, values and practices, together with the incorporation of these into the daily early learning and care experiences of children, families and communities” (2010, p. 68). This goes for any culture and traditions. It is important to gather knowledge and understanding, also remember that there are many different Indigenous cultures and communities and they may have different practices values and beliefs, so to not lump all Indigenous cultures into one. Indigenous groups have many different teachings about life and life skills. For First Nations some more well-known teachings are The Medicine Wheel, as well as the Seven Sacred Teachings. The Inuit are known for Shamans, mythology and legends which contain life guiding principles.

The Medicine Wheel

“The term ‘Medicine Wheel’ is not a native term. Initially it was used in the late 1800’s and early 1900 by American’s of European decent in reference to the Big Horn Medicine Wheel. . . The Big Horn Medicine Wheel consist of a central circle of piled rock surrounded by a circle of stone, [usually about 12 meters in diameter located outside on the vast lands]” (Laframboise & Sherbina, 2008, p. 1). The complete history and exact age of The Medicine Wheel is still up for debate, but it is known that the traditional Medicine Wheels built out of rocks are just as old, if not older than the Great Egyptian Pyramids. “Alberta Canada has about 66% of all known Medicine Wheels (a total of

46) this suggest that Southern Alberta was a central meeting place for many Plains tribe who followed Medicine Wheel ceremonies” (Laframboise & Sherbina, 2008, p. 2). Throughout the years the Medicine Wheel has evolved into a symbol that is familiar in most First Nations tribes. There are many different versions of the Medicine Wheel, we will focus on the Cree/Algonquin/Plains Medicine Wheel. “The Medicine Wheel includes all four directions [North, East, South and West], and the fours aspects—mental, emotional, physical and spiritual” (Dapice, 2006, p. 251). The Medicine Wheel is a circle split into four equal parts, the top quarter is white, representing the direction of North, and is the spiritual aspect of self. The next quarter to the right is yellow, representing the direction of east, and is the mental aspect of self. The bottom quarter is the color red, representing the direction of south, being the emotional aspect of self. The last quarter is black, representing the direction of west, and being the physical aspect of self. “Through the Medicine Wheel, we learn that if we focus on or become stuck in the mental, emotional, physical, or the spiritual, we lack wholeness in all aspects. It is important to work on achieving health, positive change, and growth in each aspect for balance and wholeness (Dapice, 2006, p. 251). The Medicine Wheel is a common practice and life guiding tool amongst many First Nation communities. “The term ‘Medicine’ as it is used by First Nations people does not refer to drugs or herbal remedies. . . The Medicine Wheel and its sacred teachings assist individuals along the path towards mental, spiritual, emotional and physical enlightenment” (Laframboise & Sherbina, 2008, p. 2). A great book to get familiar with The Medicine Wheel as well as other First Nations teaching is called “The Sharing Circle” written by Theresa Meuse-Dallien and Illustrated by Arthur Stevens.

The Seven Sacred Teachings

This set of life teachings, life guiding principles, is known as The Teachings of the Seven Grandfathers, The Seven Teachings, The Seven Grandfathers, and/or The Seven Scared Teachings. “The Seven Grandfather Teachings are instructions about the foundational values that make up our relationships with each other and the natural world (Verbos & Humphries 2013, p. 1). These teachings are a gift from Creator, and they are a reminder that everything on Mother Earth is equal and to treat everything with respect. “We are taught that we originated from the Earth, that the Earth is the Great Mother to all. She provides everything we need in order to survive in this life, the clothing, the shelter, medicines, food and water” (Cubello & Weber, n.d., p. 10). The Seven Sacred Teachings are in place to remind humans beings of their responsibilities in life. “These teachings

state that human beings are responsible to act with wisdom, respect, love honesty, humility, bravery, and truth toward each other and all creation” (Verbos & Humphries 2013, p. 1). Each teaching is connected to an animal and it goes as follows: Eagle = Love, Buffalo = Respect, The Bear = Courage, Sabe (a giant who walked among the people) = Honesty, The Beaver = Wisdom, The Wolf = Humility, and The Turtle = Truth (Cubello & Weber, n.d., p. 12). It is said that the teachings are considered interdependent, and it takes a lot of work and discipline to embody these teachings in your everyday life.

Wisdom is to be used for the people; it is borne of experience and living the teachings. *Love* is to care for other human beings, including future generations, and to be generous with them. Generosity is an important value that is an outgrowth of love. *Respect* attaches to all things created, including nature, creatures, and people. In Native American perspectives, nature is animate. The dimensions of Earth’s vitality are not to be treated as mere resources to be exploited nor harnessed to the interest of human beings at the expense of other life forms. *Bravery* is to face adversity, act, and preserver through difficulty. *Honesty* means to act in a genuine way without fraud or deception and with good intentions in one’s heart. *Humility* is to understand that one is equal to, not great nor lesser than, everyone else. *Truth* is to have integrity in all things, especially as it relates to one’s self and the people. (Verbos & Humphries, 2013, p. 3)

These teachings are said to have been passed down from the Elders, like many First Nation, Inuit and Metis teachings. “These teachings are universal to most First Nations people and are links that form a bond between all First Nation, Metis, and Inuit people” (Cubello & Weber, n.d., p. 10). Most Indigenous communities have a long history of oral traditions that are passed down from Elders, for instance the Inuit have oral myths and legends. A great Children’s book to explore this topic from an Inuit perspective is “Sweetest Kulu” written by Celina Kalluk and illustrated by Alexandria Neonakis. It is not directly about The Seven Sacred Teachings, but the book talks of animals blessing a child with values and virtues for her life to come.

Inuit Myths and Legends

Inuit are known for their oral traditions and storytelling. “Inuit who make their homes across the vastness of Canada’s Arctic belong to a much larger family that extends from the Bering Sea through Alaska and northern Canada to Greenland” (The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2015, p. 7). The Inuit

population in Canada continues to grow and like most Indigenous nations in Canada, the Inuit are reclaiming their culture and traditions after years of being suppressed. “Inuit mythology is a repository of Inuit culture, passed down by Elders through generations to enrich and enlighten. Traditionally used in all aspects of daily life, Inuit mythology has undergone a resurgence in popularity as community groups aim to preserve traditional teachings as a method of cultural and political solidarity” (The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2015, p. 2). One might be familiar with the Robert Munsch book called “A Promise is a Promise,” which is based on the Inuit legend of Qallupilluit, who lives in the sea and a young girl named Allashua who disobeys her parents. This book is based on Inuit myths and legends. These types of stories are used to help children make the right decisions. Water and ice are plentiful where Inuit people live, so stories like these help to remind children to not play around the ice when it is dangerous. “Though [Inuit] myths may be fantastic, or unbelievable to some, this does not diminish their importance or the messages they contain. . . Like all mythology, Inuit myths and legends are both entertaining and instructive” (The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2015, p. 2). A common theme within Indigenous oral traditions and stories is that there are important teachings and life lessons in the stories. Indigenous people also have a strong connection to the water, the land, and the animals that surround them depending on their region.

Indigenous People’s Connection to Mother Earth

A common theme across many Indigenous Nations is the people’s connection to Mother Earth and all things in it. Every being, every resource, and every body of water is sacred to Indigenous peoples. Indigenous people’s “worldview: Water, (including surface water, subterranean water and evaporated water) carries the essential cultural, social, historical, genealogical and economic connectedness of all people, plants and animals in the region” (Polacca & Sanderson, 2018, p. 1). Indigenous people have a special relationship with Mother Earth and all things in it and they have for thousands of years. “Mother Earth provides us with our food and clean water sources. She bestows us with materials for our homes, clothes and tools. She provides all life with raw materials for our industry, ingenuity and progress. She is the basis of who we are as ‘real human beings’” (Assembly of First Nations, 2019, p. 1). Indigenous people treat the Earth with respect and only ever take what they need and never more, because Indigenous peoples are the care takers of Mother Earth and it is important that the future generations are able to sustain themselves as well. Indigenous people’s connection to the land and animals can be explored with the book “Sharing our

World: Animals of the Native Northwest Coast” which is a book that is the work of First Nations communities and artists from around the Pacific Northwest. Another way to explore Indigenous people’s connection to the land is to be in nature with children, explore nature, talk about the importance of the trees, the grass, and all things that sustain life on Earth. Many Indigenous children who grow up in rural communities spend time playing outdoors. Outdoor play for children has significant positive effects on children. “For example, children’s power of observation of their environment is much sharper in outdoors than indoors. The outdoor environment has a significant impact on a child’s developing motor skills and self-concept. Outdoor play stimulates social play because there is more space than indoors, the noise levels are less distracting in outdoors, and there are more active play opportunities” (Dietze & Kashin, 2012, p.10). Being outside in nature is an important part of healthy child development as well as an important part of most Indigenous cultures. There are many ways to incorporate Indigenous culture in the outdoors for instance, talking about the cycle of life and how everything on Mother Earth serves a purpose. A conversation about respecting Mother Nature can also lead to talks about taking care of the environment by not being a litter bug, or by reducing the amount of plastic we use, as well as remember to recycle. “Outdoor play is an integral part of the early learning experience. It requires planning for all types of weather across our Canadian landscape. . . Children need to be exposed to outdoor play as part of their daily living routine” (Dietze & Kashin, 2012, p.10).

Inclusivity

“All children, regardless of race, religion, age, linguistic heritage, social and economic status, gender, or ability are entitled to inclusion in everyday activities and routines” (Makovichuk, 2014, p. 111). Many early learning classrooms are culturally diverse now more than ever. “One classroom may contain students from a dozen countries and even more cultural experiences. To produce conscientious and creative global citizens, early years teachers must be prepared to effectively educate and care for student from a variety of backgrounds. To do so, the teachers themselves must be informed about global issues, such as human rights, social justice, environmental protection, and war and conflict” (Jean-Sigur, Bell, & Kim, 2016, p. 3). Being inclusive is written into the Flight Framework, as well as being taught in the University Bachelor of Child Studies degree. Inclusivity is a part of quality childcare, which is why “researchers have stressed the importance of improving quality by increasing the number of early care providers who have earned at least a bachelor’s degree

in early childhood or early care and learning” (Jean-Sigur, Bell, & Kim, 2016, p. 4). Inclusivity and learning about the different cultures are an important aspect of child care. Alberta Canada has a large rural and urban Indigenous population. Statistics Canada states that the Indigenous populations continues to grow in Alberta meaning more Indigenous children should be entering the early learning classrooms. Educators may find it helpful to look into First Nation, Inuit and Metis cultural practice as a step towards inclusivity. “Cultural practices refer to the understanding, patterns of behaviours, practices, and values shared by a group of people. These shared understandings help groups of people make sense of their world and communicate with one another” Makovichuk et. al., 2014, p. 142). Again, this is an important step for educators to take when working with children from different ethnic backgrounds, especially since Canada is a very diverse country. “Working effectively with people from cultures different from our own requires a willingness to examine our own values and biases. . . It may be helpful to explore experiences of oppression/marginalization/racism that families have experienced” (Shimoni & Baxter, 2014, p. 134). Indigenous peoples in Canada have faced a long history of oppression, being displaced and having their way of life altered. Colonization has had a lasting effect on Indigenous peoples, and it may be important to remember this when working with Indigenous children and families. “Working with children from diverse cultures challenges us to understand the world view of others and to empathize with challenges faced by many families. Taking a journey to deepen our understanding of other cultures often reaps meaningful rewards, the least of which is a greater understanding of our own roots and culture” (Shimoni & Baxter, 2014, p. 137), and on top of that being culturally inclusive in the early learning classrooms can help build accreditation standards. “Children develop higher levels of social competence, physical ability, language, emotional development, creative thinking and problem-solving skills within inclusive child care environments” (Government of Alberta, 2017, p.11).

Culture and Accreditation Standards

“Child care accreditation in Alberta is a voluntary process through which licensed and approved childcare programs (day care programs, out-of-school care programs, and family day home agencies) can demonstrate that they meet the accreditation standards of excellence which are over and above the provincial licencing regulations and family day home standards” (Government of Alberta, 2017, p. 6). There are six main standards for accreditation, which are all based on current

research and the positive outcomes for the children, the families, the staff and the communities.

The accreditation standards are “divided into four categories: i) outcomes for children; ii) outcomes for families; iii) outcomes for staff; and iv) outcomes for the community. Each of the six standards is comprised of numbered ‘criteria’ (principles and guiding principles that make up the standard) which are further broken down into ‘indicators’ that serves as observable measurements”

(Government of Alberta, 2017, p.6), Being an inclusive child care center is a small part of the accreditation standards. “Help children develop a sense of self by recognizing their unique qualities and background” (Government of Alberta, 2017, p.8), this falls under standard one. This goes for all cultural and ethnic backgrounds including Indigenous culture. This can be accomplished by inviting Indigenous content into the classroom such as books about Indigenous children written by or illustrated by Indigenous peoples. There are many activities that can be implemented from the book subjects. Indigenous peoples have a strong connection to the land and animals, and many of the children’s books talk about that. Another standard that can be accomplished by incorporating Indigenous culture and content into the classroom is standard 2.1: “a) Incorporate experiences and cultural backgrounds of children in daily programming. b) Ensure a variety of appropriate materials, equipment, and resources are available to meet the diverse needs of children. C) Incorporate inclusive practices to involve all children in the program” (Government of Alberta, 2017, p.11).

There are many activities that can be done to celebrate Indigenous culture. Talk about animals and the importance of every animal on this Earth. Indigenous people like to tell stories through art, so it would be a great idea to let the children paint or draw a story. Make time for the children to explore nature and talk about the importance of the grass, the insects, the birds, the water and all the bigger animals as well. Another important conversation that can be had is taking care of and respecting what is on this Earth. Indigenous people believe that it is only okay to take what is needed from the Earth and never more. Also, if you are going to pick a flower, or pick up acorns for an art project to give thanks to Mother Earth for those items because it is Mother Earth that provides us with all of the lovely things on this Earth. Respect the Earth as a way of life and in everyday practice.

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