

Supporting Indigenous Children's Development

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COMMUNITY-UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS

Jessica Ball and Alan Pence



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Preface

This book describes the evolution and practice of an innovative community-based partnership approach to strengthening community capacity to design, deliver, and evaluate culturally appropriate programs to support young children's development. The approach, created through partnerships between First Nations in Canada and the authors at the University of Victoria, represents a significant departure from the established and familiar paths of training and education in North America, which typically promote knowledge transmission and prescribed best practices based on assumptions of their universal validity and desirability. The success of this partnership approach has meant stepping outside expected institutional relationships to identify a common ground of caring, respect, and flexibility, and an orientation toward action from which collaboration in program delivery and co-construction of curriculum can flow.

The pilot partnership that led to the First Nations Partnership Programs was initiated in 1989 by Meadow Lake Tribal Council, representing nine Cree and Dene First Nations in the province of Saskatchewan in north-central Canada. The Tribal Council had determined that the future well-being of these communities rested on the current health and wellness of their children. Since its formation in the early 1980s, Meadow Lake Tribal Council had undertaken several training and economic development ventures. Without reliable child care services, however, participants in the training programs were often forced to drop out. Small business developments, many of which depended on single parents as entrepreneurs and employees, were struggling (Pence and McCallum 1994). The Tribal Council's constituent communities recognized an urgent need for child care services

“developed, administered, and operated by [our] own people” (Meadow Lake Tribal Council 1989). The communities wanted to ensure that child care services reflected community knowledge, culture, and values.

Meadow Lake Tribal Council developed a long-range plan to educate community members in early childhood care and development (ECCD). It envisioned that these practitioners would “walk in both worlds” (Louis Opikokew, tribal Elder coordinator) – the world of non-Indigenous, largely urban-based ECCD and the world of the nine rural Cree and Dene communities represented by the Tribal Council. This vision was the starting point for an innovative approach to co-constructing a bicultural university diploma program in child and youth care focusing on early childhood. The approach has evolved continuously through ten diploma deliveries (ten partnerships) with nine tribal organizations and Indigenous child and family service agencies. These bicultural partnerships have come to be known collectively as the First Nations Partnership Programs. More than sixty First Nations communities in rural areas of western Canada have been involved. Although distributed across distances up to twenty-five hundred kilometres and applied in very different cultural and institutional contexts, the First Nations Partnership Programs, with their partnership approach, have thrived. The programs have had immediate positive impact on caregiving and the development of services for children, as well as far-reaching impacts on community capacity, empowerment, and revitalization of cultural and social structures. The words of some of the partners in the journey described in this book convey their excitement in co-creating an effective approach to strengthening capacity for Indigenous early childhood programs:

It has been sixteen years since our initial contact with the School of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria, in 1989. Our dream was to develop early childhood training for First Nation child care workers. Our thoughts at the time were of readiness toward development and operation of First Nation child care facilities on reserve. Who would have thought that the spin-offs to community pride, community development, community empowerment, care and safety of children, community awareness of early childhood development, identity of community strengths and integration and development of many more program initiatives which support children and families would be the outcomes of this initial work? (Marie McCallum, administrator, Meadow Lake Tribal Council)

I think what this program has is truly bicultural, where they have the Indigenous philosophy being the core of the program, being the first priority in the whole two-year curriculum. They also have the same academic excellence ... It's not that the program gives them that Indigenous way, they've had it, they know it, and the process just allows it to come out ... Students say, "Our story is important." "Listen to my story." They become convinced that their cultural history and experience are important. (Lisa Sterling, instructor, Nzen'man' Child and Family Services)

We are working hard in Lil'wat Nation to develop our human resources and to create strong programs, and I think that having the interest from the university in what we're doing here is very positive. It holds a mirror up for everyone to see what we're doing, and it amplifies the excitement.

We want to retain the staff we have helped to develop, and keep qualified people working in our community, and so for them to hear from researchers that other people are interested in what is going on here, and that we are doing things here that can be useful for others to learn from, that's good ... And especially in the way that the research is being done – developing long-term relationships, making sure everyone knows what they are agreeing to, and ensuring benefit to the community itself ... there is a mutuality and respect that I think is exemplary. (Sheldon Tetreault, senior administrator, Lil'wat Nation)

The training in early childhood care and development brought forth more programs – not only child care – but [other programs] for children and families. This is still growing. Two of the First Nations just started a child care and development program – expanded beyond the Aboriginal Head Start program. They are sharing, and this sharing is also an outcome of the communication and understanding that developed between people who were originally students in the post-secondary training together. It is good to see the communities working together in this way. (Diane Bigfoot, education coordinator, Treaty 8 Tribal Association)

After participating in ten partnership programs with First Nations, we are convinced that the popular demand for culturally sensitive programs cannot be met through established education and professionalization practices. To respond meaningfully to the goals and practices of cultural communities – and to the children and families within them – we must

acknowledge the cultural specificity of mainstream research, theory, and professional practice and forge new understandings for preparing human service practitioners to work in cultural communities. By telling the story of the First Nations Partnership Programs, we hope to encourage and support the elaboration and extension of an alternative discourse to the largely exclusionary, Western, modernist agenda of ECCD, which defines universal care principles and best practices to the neglect of many good ways and a multitude of good practices.

Acknowledgments

Over the course of seventeen years and ten partnership programs, we have been privileged to have been invited by nine groups of First Nations in western Canada to visit and work in their traditional territories. We have been welcomed as partners, colleagues, and friends. It has been an honour to have shared with these partners the journey of these explorations in the space between our cultures.

Writing the story of our journey with First Nations in the partnership programs has been a joint effort, and authorship is listed alphabetically. Alan Pence initiated the First Nations Partnership Programs in 1989 through the partnership with the Meadow Lake Tribal Council, and coordinated partnerships with four other communities through 1998. Jessica Ball joined Alan in 1996, and in 1998 she became the coordinator of program deliveries with the five most recent groups of community partners. She also undertook the main program evaluation and related research studies.

A program like the First Nations Partnership Program could not succeed without a community of diversely talented people committed to nation rebuilding and children's well-being. These people worked in First Nations communities and university offices. They were variously engaged as Elders sharing their cultural knowledge and wisdom, as content specialists and advisors, as donors, institutional administrators, instructors, and student counsellors. While space does not allow for the identification of all who played important roles, we would like to recognize a number of key contributors.

In the earliest days of the First Nations Partnership Program (even before it had that name), Ray Ahenakew, Vern Bachiu, Mary Rose Opekokew, Marie McCallum, Louis Opikokew, Chief Richard Gladue, Frieda Iron, and

Brian Opikokew, all associated with the Meadow Lake Tribal Council, ensured that the program had a solid start. At the University of Victoria, Lynette Jackson (Halldorson), Margo Greenwood, and Betty Cameron were indispensable. The insights of Drs. Betty Jones, Emmy Werner, Don Barr, and Cassie Landers helped identify principles that would guide the program over time. A formative evaluation by Elder Debbie Jette yielded insights that were invaluable for understanding the program as not just education but as an educational approach to culturally appropriate community development.

The second partnership – with the Cowichan Tribes of Vancouver Island and the Cowichan Campus of Malaspina University-College – became the first three-way partnership delivery. Louise Underwood, Carol Matthews, Ruth Kroek, Diana Elliott, Sharon Tilly, Linda McDonnell, and Lynn Trainor all supported the program's development in this new context.

Several partnerships commenced in the mid-1990s involving Treaty 8 Tribal Association (northeast British Columbia), Tl'azt'en Nation (north-central British Columbia), Lil'wat Nation (southwest British Columbia), Nzen'man' Child and Family Services (Fraser Canyon), and Onion Lake First Nation (Saskatchewan). The partnership with Onion Lake First Nation brought in a second institutional partner, the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT). Key persons involved in those partnerships include Diane Bigfoot, Chief Judy Maas, and Bev Wice with Treaty 8; Amelia Stark, Liz Burtch, Ginny Henniger, and Leisa Rossum with Tl'azt'en Nation; Christine Leo, Verna Stager, Jeanette Joe, Felicity Nelson, and Martina Pierre with Lil'wat Nation; Romona Baxter, Lisa Sterling, and Lana Maki with Nzen'man' Child and Family Services; Jenny Whitstone, Margaret Mulbach, Joanne McDonald, Brian MacDonald, and Terry Clark with Onion Lake First Nation; and Guy Poncelet and Dennis Esperanz with SIIT.

Since 2000, the program has been delivered twice through partnerships with the Little Shuswap Indian Band (central British Columbia), involving Chief Felix Arnouse, Joan Arnouse, Wes François, Brenda Robinson, and key instructors Kathy Leonhardt, Sandy Burgess, and Laura Jamieson. At the time of this writing, the First Nations Partnership Program is engaged in a thriving partnership with Penelakut Tribe (Kuper Island, British Columbia), involving six First Nations in central Vancouver Island, with support from band manager Lisa Shaver and education coordinator Cecilia Harris and teachings by Elder Florence James and instructor Heather Joe. In addition, both Malaspina University-College and SIIT continue to offer the program with First Nations partners in British Columbia and Saskatchewan.

The university-based team has benefited from the contributions of several talented curriculum writers as the courses have been developed, expanded, and updated over many years. Debts of gratitude are owed especially to Vicki Mulligan, Heather Siska, Susan Gage, Robin Hood, Carol Orom, Silvia Vilches, Enid Elliot, and Arlene Wells. Onowa McIvor and Silvia Vilches served capably in community liaison and many other roles over several years. Both completed masters' degrees while employed with the program and have gone on to pursue their doctorates. We also wish to thank support staff members, including Vicky Point, Lori Isaac, Rena Conibear, Karen Fitzgerald, Corrine Lowen, and Jaime Apolonio.

The partnering First Nations communities secured their own funds to prepare for and deliver the program. Several communities worked for many years to secure funds from combinations of federal, provincial, and local and regional sources. The curriculum was developed, revised, and extended over the years with the help of the Child Care Initiatives Fund of Human Resources Development Canada and the Vancouver Foundation. The Lawson Foundation and the Vancouver Foundation funded the production of a set of video documentaries requested by First Nations partners to share the excitement of their innovations in initiating university-accredited training partnerships. The program evaluation research and a longitudinal follow-up study of graduates' careers and community-based program development were funded primarily by the Child Care Visions Social Development Partnerships Program of Human Resources Development Canada.

The First Nations Partnership Programs have enjoyed strong support from the directors of the University of Victoria's School of Child and Youth Care, Drs. Jim Anglin, Valerie Kuehne, and Sibylle Artz, as well as from the deans of the Faculty of Human and Social Development at the University of Victoria. Allison Benner deserves our deepest gratitude for her thoughtful and informed contributions to the articulation of ideas in the preparation of this book. We thank Leslie Prpich for her careful editorial work on the manuscript.

No sustained social development initiative occurs in isolation. Communities do matter, and we feel honoured and blessed to have been joined by so many talented and caring people dedicated to preserving cultural diversity and sustaining richly enculturated communities for children to belong to, develop, and co-create.

Supporting Indigenous Children's Development



Location of the University of Victoria and of ten First Nations groups participating in the partnership program

Turning the World Upside Down

1

It will be children who inherit the struggle to retain and enhance the people's culture, language and history, who continue the quest for economic progress for a better quality of life, and who move forward with a strengthened resolve to plan their own destiny.

– Meadow Lake Tribal Council (1989)

First Nations' Priorities for Children

Over one million people in Canada identify as Aboriginal, including approximately 700,000 First Nations, 70,000 Inuit, and 260,000 Métis peoples (Statistics Canada 2001b). First Nations are culturally and linguistically diverse, comprising eleven distinct language groups (Statistics Canada 2001a). About half of the First Nations population lives on lands reserved for them by the federal government;¹ among the half that resides off reserves, most live in urban centres (Statistics Canada 2001b).

The Indigenous population is young, with a mean age of 25.5 years – ten years younger than that of the non-Indigenous population – and its birth rate is almost double that of other populations in Canada (Statistics Canada 2001b).² The Assembly of First Nations, representing First Nations in Canada living on federal reserve lands, has urged that caregivers be trained

1 Groups of First Nations on reserves are often organized for administrative purposes into tribal councils or tribal associations representing several communities that are usually clustered together geographically. Constituent communities may or may not share the same cultural and migration history, language, and customs.

2 The terms "Indigenous" and "Aboriginal" refer to the same groupings of peoples who identify themselves as descendants of original inhabitants of the land that is now called

in communities to support the burgeoning population of First Nations children needing comprehensive care in a culturally appropriate manner (1989, Recommendation 39). The need for child care facilities and trained community members to staff them is particularly urgent for families living on federal reserve lands, where access to child care, health, and development services is limited by geographic distances, social and cultural barriers, and eligibility regulations.

Many First Nations are prioritizing early childhood care and development (ECCD) training and services as a prerequisite for economic development and as a way to protect and enhance the physical and psychosocial health and the cultural identities of First Nations children and families. Like many Indigenous groups around the globe, First Nations in Canada are seeking ways to ensure the survival, or revival, of their cultural beliefs, values, and practices, while at the same time wanting to ensure that their community members have access to and competence in the dominant society (Armstrong, Kennedy, and Oberle 1990; Battiste 2000; Le Roux 1999; Smith, Burke, and Ward 2000).

As First Nations exercise greater political control over their futures, they are understandably wary of so-called best practices and improvements from the dominant society (Battiste 2000). First Nations peoples in Canada have been subject to every kind of colonial assault, from assimilationist requirements to genocidal practices (Barman 1996; Greenwood and Fraser 2005; McMillan 1995; Ross 1992). Reams of poignant testimony describe the suffering caused by the infliction of Western best practices – including enforced residential schooling, child welfare practices that undermine extended family support systems, and other “helping” services – all deemed at the time to be in the best interests of Aboriginal children and their families (Fournier and Crey 1997; Haig-Brown 1988; Ing 2000; Lederman 1999; Waldram 2004; White and Maxim 2003; White, Maxim, and Beavon 2004).

First Nations communities in rural areas perceive a disconnection between mainstream ECCD training programs and their own distinct circumstances, histories, cultures, and goals. In most universities and colleges, theories and methods of ECCD are grounded in largely Euro-North American developmental theory and research, and are often seen by First Nations

Canada. Some of these people prefer the term “Indigenous” because it connects them to a global advocacy movement of Indigenous peoples who often use this term, notably the Maori peoples in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The term “Aboriginal” was coined by colonial governments as a catch-all label, and some Indigenous people avoid this term because of its colonial derivation.

communities as not transferable, relevant, or even desirable within the cultural enclaves, socioeconomic conditions, and often remote geographic settings of many First Nations and Inuit communities. First Nations communities have also experienced the difficulties and risks of sending community members away to colleges and universities for long periods of study. Away from the supports of their home communities and unused to urban centres, many of those who leave home do not complete their degree programs. Those who do often do not return to their home communities. For the small percentage who complete their educational program away from home and then return, the relevance of what they have learned may be questioned locally. Such a dynamic can be viewed as educational complicity in community capacity depletion, as opposed to capacity building.

“What of Us Is in Here?”

Virtually none of the available ECCD curricula in Canada includes information specific to the First Nations communities that have asked us to partner with them to construct a culturally specific curriculum. Some Canadian and American institutions providing ECCD training have responded to popular demand for culturally sensitive curricula by introducing purportedly pan-Aboriginal information (Taylor, Crago, and McAlpine 2001). Typically, generalizations are made about the ways of life and beliefs of a conglomerate of Aboriginal peoples who are presumed to be relatively homogeneous – or at least whose distinctive characteristics, circumstances, and goals are taken to be too inconsequential for ECCD program providers to differentiate.

A “beads and feathers” approach (Whyte 1982) to increasing the purported multicultural flavour of curriculum has also been taken, involving adding on bits and pieces of cultural lore about the Cree, Dene, Mohawk, Haida, Ojibway, and a potpourri of other distinct Indigenous populations.

When the Meadow Lake Tribal Council reviewed the available ECCD programs, they were unimpressed with these superficial reflections of difference. They wanted to know, “What of us – our Cree and Dene cultures – is in these programs? How are the particular needs and circumstances of our communities going to be addressed?” These questions provided the stimulus for the First Nations Partnership Programs.

In proposing the initial partnership, the Meadow Lake Tribal Council sought an innovative ECCD training program that would reflect the nine First Nations it represents by incorporating and advancing cherished aspects of their Cree and Dene cultures, languages, traditions, and goals for children: “We must rediscover our traditional values – of caring, sharing,

and living in harmony – and bring them into our daily lives and practices” (Ray Ahenakew, executive director, Meadow Lake Tribal Council, personal communication). The importance of involving constituent Meadow Lake communities by allowing them to speak for themselves and bring their particular priorities and practices to the process was a guiding principle: “The prime focus of this project was developing child care services at the community level which would be administered and operated by the communities. As Tribal Council staff, we could not make the error of walking into any of the communities to show them the correct and only way of doing things” (M.R. Opekokew and M. McCallum, personal communication).

Because the Elders are the bearers of traditional knowledge in their communities, it was clear to Meadow Lake Tribal Council from the outset that the curriculum structure would need to provide opportunities to integrate the Elders’ teachings into the program. In eight of ten partnership programs to date, Elders have played significant roles in bringing cultural content, historical knowledge, and their experience with generations of the community’s children and families into the classroom on a regular basis. The Elders’ participation helps ensure that students develop practical perspectives and skills that are informed by the culture and appropriate to the community where they will work after graduation. As one student from the Meadow Lake program said, “Students who took this program have learned a lot about how our cultures think about children, and what they have learned will make a difference to our children and grandchildren. I believe our children – our future – are going to get back on the right track.”³

Regardless of who asks the question “What of us is in here?” modernist education is focused on what learners are presumed to lack, rather than on what they bring to the endeavour. The intent of modernism, be it in ECCD training and service delivery or in other educational enterprises, is to transmit pre-established ideas – knowledge that is presumed to be immutable and universally significant – as well as to prescribe the parameters that will guide the creation of “new knowledge.” By disregarding the voices and experiences of individuals and groups, modernist education is a powerful vehicle for shaping unidimensional understandings of the world. Yet

3 Interviews with instructors and students conducted from 1998 to 2000 as part of a comprehensive research study of the first seven partnership programs illuminated some of the conditions that enable successful teaching and learning. Excerpts from these interviews are quoted extensively in this book.

singular notions of truth and the best are inadequate for understanding a world of multiple, reciprocally influencing causes and effects that are rooted in an infinite array of historical and cultural specificities (Lather 1991).

While the innovative work described in this book did not take form in the crucible of postmodernist thought, it can be understood within that discourse (Ball and Pence 2000; Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence 1999). The openness of the Meadow Lake Tribal Council to draw on multiple cultural inputs to co-construct understandings of child development and care gave rise to an exploration of the postmodern as it applies to a tertiary-level ECCD training program.

Guiding Principles

From the outset, the First Nations Partnership Programs team at the University of Victoria's School of Child and Youth Care has seen its role as developing a model for generating curricula in collaboration with communities in a way that, while demonstrated with partnering First Nations communities in Canada, could be used in partnerships with other communities elsewhere and in other human service fields. The First Nations Partnership Program currently consists of twenty university-accredited courses, including five practica, that cover topics equivalent to those offered in mainstream college and university programs for preparing ECCD practitioners, which are delivered by and in communities. There, they are enriched by the cultural teachings and experiential wisdom of Elders and other community-based resource people. Each course includes a structure of activities and assignments, including weekly sessions in which students meet with Elders and other carriers of the First Nations culture and experience to discuss specific areas related to child and youth care and development. Because of the generative curriculum, in no two partnerships has the program delivery or the generated curriculum looked exactly the same. Table 1 shows the career and educational ladder in terms of various credentials that students can obtain through the First Nations Partnership Program. Students can step off the ladder at several junctures along the post-secondary coursework continuum, with a credential at each juncture that makes them eligible for new vocational opportunities. Table 2 shows the sequence of courses that make up the two-year post-secondary program.

While agreeing that consensus on what is of value in curriculum content and activities was not required, we developed with our First Nations partners a set of guiding principles to serve as navigation points in uncharted waters. These principles are:

- support and reinforcement for community initiative in a community-based setting
- bi/multicultural respect
- identification of community and individual strengths as the basis for initiatives
- the ensuring of a broad ecological perspective and an awareness of the child as part of a family and a community
- provision of educational and career laddering for students such that credit for this coursework is fully applicable to future study and practice
- awareness that while the immediate focus is on ECCD, this training should provide the basis for a broader range of training and services for children, youth, families, and communities.

TABLE 1

A child and youth care career and educational ladder

Coursework	Professional status	Responsibilities
40-hour introduction to becoming a family day care provider	Pre-professional	Daily operation of a family daycare program under central First Nations agency supervision.
1-year early childhood education certificate (provided by BC Ministry of Health)	Para-professional Early childhood care and development / Year 1	Supervise child care programs for 3- to 5-year-olds. Staff programs for 0- to 5-year-olds.
2-year university diploma in child and youth care	Professional Early childhood care and development / Year 2	Supervise and staff programs for 0- to 5-year-olds, including children with special needs.
3-year child and youth care courses	Professional Early childhood care and development – Child and youth care / Year 3	Plan, administer, and staff programs for children and youth.
4-year bachelor's degree in child and youth care	Professional Early childhood care and development – Child and youth care / Year 4	Plan, administer, supervise, and staff a wide range of child and youth care programs.

TABLE 2

Generative curriculum in early childhood care and development

Child and youth care strand	Communication skills strand	Child development strand	Practicum strand
Introduction to play	Interpersonal Communications	Child Development I	Practicum 1: Community Care Settings for Children and Youth
Foundations of Curriculum Planning	Communicating with Children and Guiding Children's Behaviour	Child Development II	Practicum 2: The Whole Child
Curriculum Design and Implementation	The Caring and Learning Environment	Introduction to Human Behaviour	Practicum 3: The Child in the Curriculum
The Ecology of Health, Safety and Nutrition	Introduction to Planned Change	Program Development for Infants and Toddlers	Practicum 4: Developmental Specialization Practicum for Working with Infants and Toddlers
Administration of Child Care Facilities	Communication Skills for Professional Helpers	Supported Child Care for Children with Special Needs	Practicum 5: Supported Child Care

These principles articulate the partners' shared belief that a cooperative and co-constructionist approach is not only desirable but necessary. Through these principles we commit ourselves to a position that multiple truths must be respectfully represented in this program and that such knowledge must come through the people who live it. A critical characteristic of the First Nations Partnership Programs is a willingness for the partners to take a risk – and to depend on one another's support in doing so. Partnerships with members of the dominant culture have been problematic for Aboriginal people. Most often they have been required over time, implicitly or explicitly, to accommodate to the dominant culture and to act as if

assimilated. This dynamic is one that neither the First Nations with whom we have partnered nor we at the university have wanted to repeat.

Some of our guiding principles, such as educational laddering, reflect structural issues in Canadian post-secondary education that the university partner must take the lead in addressing. Most, though, involve a joint role for both partners. In addition, the partnerships operate within some constraints – for example, the need for the program to be viewed as academically credible and rigorous, and the need to meet provincially legislated licensing and accreditation criteria within the province while ensuring the appropriateness of the knowledge within a community context.

What has emerged from the application of these principles is an approach to generating ECCD practice that project team members have referred to as “community and culturally appropriate practice” – an approach that truly embodies a community’s values, choices, and goals for caring for its children. As a Meadow Lake program administrator notes, “Curricula that are not respectful of cultural diversity, that do not acknowledge that there are many trails that lead up the mountain, cannot expect to generate the pride and self-respect necessary to develop caring caregivers.”

Grounding ECCD Capacity Building in Culture and Community

Community development has never been the goal of post-secondary practitioner training or of mainstream conceptualizations of ECCD programming. The Generative Curriculum Model, which values being true to the spirit of the partnership and to the community’s desires to reclaim and reform, violates assumptions of modernist academia and its historical foundation in doctrines of revealed truth (Pence et al. 1993). As long as truth is conceived as singular and revealed, rather than as multiple and constructed, there is little room for accommodation of the beliefs and values of culturally distinct others. By challenging and confronting established assumptions in a forum that depends on community involvement and dialogue, the Generative Curriculum Model provides elements of an other-than-modernist model of education that imbues learners with a respect for many truths (Ball and Pence 2000). Rather than seeking consensus, the goal of the Generative Curriculum Model is to engender community dialogue, exploration, and testing of the validity and desirability of concepts and practices in the context of the community, in a manner similar to that called for by Indigenous educators Armstrong (2000), Battiste (2000), and Cajete (1999).

A basic assumption of the Generative Curriculum Model, consistent with critiques of developmental psychology by Burman (1994), Cole (1996),

Kagitcibasi (1996) and Nsamenang (1992, 2004), is that no empirical or logical bases exist to assume the validity of theories and research findings about child development across cultures, socio-political conditions, or geographic contexts. Thus, we cannot presume the universal appropriateness of various strategies of promoting children's growth and development that have been effective in largely middle-class European and North American settings, as a growing number of ECCD leaders have argued (Bernhard 1995; Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence 1999; Lubeck and Post 2000a; Moss and Pence 1994; Penn 1997, 2005; Swadener and Kessler 1991; Woodhead 1996). The objectives and methods of child care embody and either reproduce or change the culture in which children and caregivers live and work. Hence, significantly different but equally useful and valued ways may exist to encourage and respond to children across diverse communities and cultural groups (Ball and Pence 1999, 2000; Chang et al. 2000; Derman-Sparks and Phillips 1997; Gonzalez-Mena 2001; Lamb et al. 1992; Pence 1998; Rogoff 2003; Rosenthal 2003; Swadener 2000; Tobin, Wu, and Davidson 1989; Valsiner and Litvinovic 1996; Woodhead, Faulkner, and Littleton 1998).

Illustrating the construct of distributed knowledge elaborated by Lubeck and Post (2000a), students in the training program, their instructors, community supporters, and the university-based team collaborate in the context of each community's visions for their children to share their knowledge, experiences, and skills, working incrementally toward the goal of elaborating curricula and program designs that address the community's particular needs and goals for nurturing children. Thus, the Generative Curriculum Model refocuses attention from the false promise of universality to the reality of diversity. As ECCD specialist Kofi Marfo (1993) remarked when asked to critically review the Meadow Lake program: "I have found the ... project to be one of the most innovative and well conceptualized approaches to addressing the educational and personnel preparation needs of cultural minority communities I have come across ... The curriculum model acknowledges the limits of the knowledge base the principal investigators bring to the project, while appropriately respecting and honoring the tremendous contributions that Elders, students, and community members at large can make to the program."

The Generative Curriculum Model involves communities in mutual learning, sharing of skills, and collaborative construction of concepts and curricula needed to initiate new programs that foster the well-being of children and families within their communities. By supporting the skills

and processes required for effective, community-supportive, and community-involving practices, the Generative Curriculum Model has had demonstrated impacts on community commitment, confidence, and the capacity to improve conditions for children and families.

The First Nations communities that have initiated partnerships with us at the University of Victoria have done so with an understanding that the ways to enhance conditions for their children's well-being might not match either Western best practices or the traditions of their Indigenous forebears. The Generative Curriculum Model builds an open curriculum that sits between two cultures, allowing both the message and the medium from each to enter the training process (Ball and Pence 1999; Pence and McCallum 1994). A community-based instructor in the Lil'wat Nation program notes: "We don't have all the answers. In a generative program, we can enjoy learning about what research on child development has shown and what methods seem to be helpful in certain situations. And we can delve further into our own history and traditions, and see how these can help us with our children." A Meadow Lake Tribal Council Elder describes the bicultural features of the Generative Curriculum Model as "two sides of an eagle feather," pointing out that "both are needed to fly."

Co-Constructing Quality through Dialogue and Praxis

Most post-secondary education requires two bodies of participants: students and representatives (instructors, administrators) of the post-secondary institution. The approach innovated in the First Nations Partnership Programs requires the addition of a third participating body – the student's community. A key characteristic of the partnership process is that the curriculum generated through it is open to and respectful of information from academia, from the community, and, potentially, from other sources as well. Elaboration of the curriculum for each course in the training program involves members of the community and the university working together to incorporate knowledge from the mainstream of theory, research, and practice pertaining to early childhood and from the communities represented by the First Nations band or tribal council. A student in the Lil'wat Nation program describes the approach succinctly: "Being in this program is like having the best of both worlds. We love to learn about what researchers have found out about child development and such from our textbooks, and we love to learn more about our own culture and how we can use it to help the children of our community."

In contrast to the assumptions of community deficiencies that underlie many expert-driven approaches to professional training and service delivery,

an empowerment approach assumes that “all families have strengths and that much of the most valid and useful knowledge about the rearing of children can be found in the community itself – across generations, in networks, and in ethnic and cultural traditions” (Cochran 1988, 144). The principles of respect and voice that guide the work of partnership within a caring, supportive, and inclusive educational environment approximate Benhabib’s (1992) principle of egalitarian reciprocity.

Although students in a partnership program using the Generative Curriculum Model learn about mainstream theories, research, and practice pertaining to ECCD, the partnership approach to generating ECCD training curriculum does not rest on modernist assumptions about universally shared goals for children or caregivers or about common pathways toward optimal developmental outcomes. Rather, in the manner called for by a growing number of postmodernist and other than modernist educators and developmental psychologists (e.g., Bloch and Popkewitz 2000; Dasen and Jahoda 1986; Green 1993; Kagitcibasi 1996; Kessler and Hauser 2000; Lubeck 1996, 1998; Lubeck and Post 2000b; Nsamenang 1992, 2004; Steffe and Gayle 1995; Swadener and Kessler 1991), students explore diverse possibilities of the meaning and implications of development for caregivers within the context of their own culture and community. They are routinely asked to engage with questions of goodness of fit of various concepts and practices in ECCD. Through continuous input from and dialogue with Elders and other community members, and through the physical proximity of the children and families through which the community’s culture is embodied, students are constantly challenged to work the tensions between high theory and everyday practice (Lather 1991).

Valuing process over product and construction over prescription, students, instructors, and community resource people in the program engage with questions rather than prescriptive answers about the correct ways to encourage children’s development and handle challenging situations. As described in detail later in this book, the pedagogical approach is constructivist (Steffe and Gayle 1995). Teaching is guided by the principles of active and interactive learning and discovery, necessitating and celebrating dialogue among the various perspectives in a manner also described by Bernhard (1995), Bernhard et al. (1998), Brookfield and Preskill (1999), Goffin (1996), Gonzalez-Mena (2001), Jones (1994), Kessler and Swadener (1992), Pacini-Ketchabaw and McIvor (2005), and others. Students are actively involved in an ongoing process of articulating, comparing, and sometimes combining perspectives contributed by members of their own community and by the university-based curriculum team.

As a partner, the University of Victoria brings to the training program a representative sample of theory, research, and practical approaches to ECCD from the largely middle-class, Euro-North American mainstream. These materials have value, as a community-based instructor of a partnership program with Treaty 8 Tribal Association in northern British Columbia notes: "The course material really supports the instructor by giving ideas to follow and suggestions of activities and resources. But it's also flexible enough to allow us to adapt it to the needs of this particular group of students and the communities and cultures they are part of."

As a partner, the First Nations community brings knowledge of its culture, values, practices, and (sometimes) language, as well as its vision of optimal child development and its perspective on how best to facilitate healthy development. In the words of a community-based program administrator: "We can consider what mainstream theories say and if we [choose] to believe them and use them in our work, that doesn't make us less Indian. And if we [choose] to assert the importance of our cultural traditions and ways of raising children, that doesn't make us wrong. This program recognizes and encourages this give and take, pick and choose. It doesn't cage us and expect us to act like Europeans."

First Nations and university partners agree that the curriculum should not emerge based solely on a consideration of community-based perspectives and practices. Even within cultures, individuals carry different messages, knowledge, and forms for conveying that information. Furthermore, not all of the relevant information exists "in community." The generative curriculum needs to be suspended in the space between, in the void – the unfilled space that is charged with potential (Pence 1999a). This space is one that is respectful of many voices and perspectives. As one instructor explains, the generative program offers a learning experience for all individuals participating, including the community-based instructors, who can explore their knowledge through generating a curriculum, and who are given new tools and methods with which to share their history and traditions with the next generations.

By bringing together the worlds of Western academia and Indigenous communities, plausible alternatives to Euro-North American modernist ways of conceptualizing child development and care are created. Some of these alternatives build on each other, stimulating additional changes and new directions throughout the generative curriculum process. Thus, there is a synchronous, mutually stimulating co-occurrence of learning, developing, and teaching the curriculum and of formulating culturally resonant programs for children and families in the students' own community. Greater

understanding of the potential fit and utility of alternative constructions comes, in part, from an appreciation of the varying contexts from which different concepts, findings, and child care models emerge, as well as from greater sensitivity to the history, socio-political positioning, conditions, and evolving goals of the communities in which trained ECCD practitioners are likely to work. The recursive consideration of these different views – the seeking out of what Freire (1970/1993) would call “new knowledge” – represents the heart of the Generative Curriculum Model. The goal is not to progress toward a state of consensus or completion, with the risk of formalizing an ossified curriculum similar to those on offer in most educational institutions. Instead, the ongoing dialogical, process-driven approach of participatory praxis which is the essence of the Generative Curriculum Model has the potential to create a new “generation” at each delivery – a living, responsive, evolving curriculum.

Our experiences with First Nations communities in Canada suggest that when we truly grasp the significance of taking community and culture into consideration and put this principle into practice, we can no longer engage in the business-as-usual delivery of mainstream ECCD programs, no matter how adequately they respond to research and theory reported in mainstream literature and lecture halls about the developmental needs of children studied by Euro-Western psychologists and educators. Being responsive to communities and sensitive to culture means opening the foundations of how training programs are conceived, of how optimal developmental outcomes are defined. It means transforming our training from a prepackaged, didactic process to one that is open-ended and participatory. It means engaging in dialogue, co-constructing curricula that will further a community’s own internally identified goals, sharing the floor in course delivery, and moving over so that communities can determine the desired end products of training. In the words of Vern Bachi of Meadow Lake Tribal Council: “What we are trying to do is turn the world upside down.”

