



Quality Indicators and Dispositions in the Early Learning and Child Care Sector:

Learning from Indigenous Families

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Introduction

In the spring of 2020, the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care (ECELC) and MacEwan University began a joint research project to explore the ideas and experiences of Indigenous families accessing child care in Edmonton. Specifically, the project focused on two research questions:

1. For Indigenous families, what are indicators of quality in early learning and child care?
2. What are the essential dispositions child care educators demonstrate that meet the needs of Indigenous children and families?

To answer these questions, researchers first conducted a scoping review of current academic literature. This document highlights the results of this review.

TERMINOLOGY

While varying definitions are used throughout the literature, for the purposes of this scoping review, we use the term *Indigenous* to signify “persons of First Nations, Inuit or Métis descent, regardless of where they reside and whether their names appear on an official register. Self-identification is a fundamental criterion for defining Indigenous peoples” (Government of Canada, n.d.). Additionally, child care, child care centre, centre, and program are used interchangeably to refer to the out-of-home spaces where children under the age of six years old are cared for by adults other than their family members. Finally, the term educator is used to denote employed individuals who plan and care for children in child care centres. At times, different terms may be used in the works cited below, but the terms defined here will be used throughout this document for consistency.

The term *dispositions* refers to the “tendencies [of educators] to respond to situations in particular ways” (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 22 as cited in Davitt & Ryder, 2019, p. 20). The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) (2002) defines dispositions as “the values, commitments, and professional ethics that influence behaviours ... as well as the educator’s own professional growth” (p. 53). According to the NCATE (2002), individual educator values, beliefs and attitudes influence dispositions within a sociocultural context.

Methods

In order to assess what the current literature states in response to this project’s research questions, a modified scoping review method was employed based on Arksey and O’Malley (2005). Unlike a systematic review, where the aim is to prodigiously summarise a research area, a scoping review offers both initial insight as well as sets a preliminary research stage for future exploration without providing a conclusive synopsis of the research topic. Specifically, this scoping review offers an agenda for future qualitative research focused on the experiences of Indigenous families accessing child care, using the scoping review as a starting point.

The researchers began by defining a series of search terms and then employing those terms in several research databases. Additionally, an extended search was also conducted in the same databases using an extended series of search terms. Articles arising from these two searches were pulled and then were reviewed by the researchers to check for alignment with the research questions. The reference lists from these articles were also searched, in order to find more relevant articles. Once a finalized list of articles was established, researchers reviewed the full text of each article. Articles that directly and meaningfully relate to the research questions posed above are included in this document. An appendix is also available with more information on each article referenced here, and those used in the other components of this project.

CONSIDERATION OF VOICE

As non-Indigenous researchers, it is imperative to address the lens in which this study occurred. Absalon and Willet (2005) state that, at a minimum, any methodological approach through a non-Indigenous researcher lens should include “a critical analysis of colonization and an understanding of Western scientific research as a mechanism of colonization” (p. 120). Absalon and Willett (2005) also argue that “identifying at the outset, the location from which the voice of the researcher emanates is an [Indigenous] way of ensuring that those who study, write, and participate in knowledge creation are accountable for their own positionality” and that “location is about relationships to land, language, spiritual, political, economic, environmental, and social elements in one’s life” (p. 99).

Rather than presenting presumptive narratives under the guise of knowledge regarding Indigenous experiences under historical and current colonization policies and practices, non-Indigenous researchers can use *what they know* in conjunction with *how they know* to work as an ally with Indigenous researchers. Coming from a position of relative power and privilege, non-Indigenous research can also seek to contribute to the process of decolonizing and shaping a more socially just society. Graveline (2000) shares that “only those who are Indigenous can speak about being Indigenous” (p. 361). Through questioning whose voices might be silenced or buried, and questioning whose voices inquiries represent, critically reflexive research may support efforts for redressing systems of oppression through critical theoretical and methodological lenses.

With that in mind, we would like to stress that what is discussed here is not representative of all Indigenous family experiences, and is strongly situated in the contexts of Eurocentric research, dominant languages, and non-Indigenous epistemologies. Nevertheless, we will use this literature as a helpful starting point for considering what may be important to Indigenous families living in the Edmonton area. Please see *Next Steps* for more information regarding how this information will be used in future phases of this project.

Results

What follows is a synthetic summary of the different indicators of quality identified through the scoping review, followed by a similar summary of educator dispositions offered in the explored literature that support Indigenous children and families.

INDICATOR OF QUALITY: DEFINING QUALITY

A number of articles sought to define elements of quality in the Indigenous family context (Endfield, 2007; BC Aboriginal Child Care Society, 2005; Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2008). Endfield (2007), in the article "Defining quality: New insights for training practitioners," reveals various possible indicators of quality from both non-Indigenous and Indigenous lenses, including educator knowledge, inclusion of culture and language, as well as communal values. The article suggests that "[childcare] staff, parents, and community should determine their own definition of quality as it applies in their community based on established best practices as well as their own cultural experiences" (p. 157). The author emphasizes that it is in the best interest of all childcare centres to communicate and engage with families and communities to determine what fits best in terms of quality. Regardless, cultural contexts should and must be involved in the childcare sector in order to ensure children and families receive the best experiences possible.

INDICATOR OF QUALITY: CURRICULUM/PROGRAMMING

"It is essential for policy makers and practitioners to understand why early childhood care and education facilities...fail so dramatically to attract and engage members of Indigenous communities" (Bowes et al., 2011).

According to some studies (Simmers, Saggars, & Frances, 2012; Martin, 2017), a range of programming related factors may impact the experiences of childcare for Indigenous children and families. These include (but are not limited to) programmatic aspects such as cultural inclusivity, curriculum tailored to fit the needs of children and families in the program, and the potential role of community members in shaping and driving curricular decisions.

Although some Indigenous families seek out programming in an Indigenous-focused child care setting, in a longitudinal study of Indigenous children and their families from Australia, Martin (2017) determined that not all parents had an opinion on mainstream versus Indigenous services. However, "specific expectations for their child's early childhood education and what a good education would enable him/her to achieve" was noted (p. 103). Families send children to a centre "because they have specific expectations of the [program] and for their child's future" (p. 105). The majority of parents expressed in this study that developmental goals, personal and social skills, academic knowledge and some Indigenous values were quality indicators of a program (p. 101). Simmers, Saggars, and Frances (2012) emphasize that "for mainstream childcare services to be a viable option for Indigenous families, they would need to learn from Indigenous examples of what works well, and to incorporate these core ideas into their [program]" (p. 103).

In findings from an extensive research project seeking to understand the child care choices of Indigenous families (Bowes et al., 2011), results reflect the values that families place on child care programming. These include:

- the connection between child care programming and the valued learning taking place at home and in community, including with Elders;

- families experiencing a distance between themselves and the program related to a lack of communication and understanding of the curricular approaches;
- educators using Indigenous ways of knowing to influence their approach with children; and,
- focus on transition to schooling as part of child care programming.

As with the aforementioned research project, several additional studies recognized the expertise of child rearing knowledge within the home and community (Anderson et al., 2017; Bowes et al., 2012; Greenwood & Shawana, 2003; Nagel & Wells, 2009;). According to Nagel & Wells (2009), honouring family and culture within the learning environment are further supported by curricular considerations such as the inclusion of children's cultural literature that reflect children's community backgrounds, valuing and encouraging family contributions, and, when possible, using the child's home language in the childcare program.

Beaton and McDonnell (2013) also emphasize the significance of the role that childcare programming could play in addressing discontinuities in the transition between child care and the formal education system for children and families. They suggest a holistic approach starting with establishing partnerships with community programs and service providers that could assist in meeting Indigenous families' unique transition needs.

Anderson et al. (2017), in their study focused on the role that Indigenous funds of knowledge play in a childcare setting, describe how valuing family voice is pivotal in uncovering and confronting the common practices that view and dismiss Indigenous families' funds of knowledge as "not valid and thus not worthy of being integrated into curriculum and pedagogy" (p. 27). The authors define funds of knowledge as the "knowledge and information that [families] use to survive, to get ahead, or to thrive;" recognizing funds of knowledge is "a powerful way to showcase [families'] existing resources, competence and knowledge" (p. 21). According to the authors, a lack of integration of families' funds of knowledge, drawn from a deficit model, "often accompanies the expectation that families must learn the dominant culture in order to be academically successful. Even when diversity is recognized in [childcare], culture is often reduced to compensatory, fragmented programs that focus on the "Fs" (food, folklore, festivals and fashion)" (p. 27).

A number of studies emphasize the active engagement of Indigenous families in the curricular decisions surrounding the education of their children (Ball, 2001; Greenwood et al., 2007; Greenwood & Shawana, 2003; Mashford-Pringle, 2012). Greenwood et al. (2007), in their review of literature regarding the political, social and historical structures that have influenced childcare for Indigenous populations, determined that families must be given opportunities to influence the curriculum to ensure the integration of community and family based values into childcare programs (p. 15). As stated by the authors, both historically and in the present day, westernized childcare perspectives primarily focus on the importance of the nuclear family and individual. Indigenous perspectives of quality in childcare are generally much broader than this: they are often concerned with extended family and communal participation. Moreover, the article concludes that "culture and language should permeate all aspects of [Indigenous]-specific programs and services" (p. 15).

Kemble's (2019) report on Talking Circles that took place in Edmonton with parents and caregivers of Indigenous children highlights a number of recommendations related to programming and curriculum in childcare. These include (but are not limited to): offering holistic programs for families to choose (at very low or no cost); ensuring indigenization of programs that involves training for staff on Indigenous peoples' histories, child rearing perspectives and contributions; and the development of professional quality standards.

INDICATOR OF QUALITY: REFLECTION OF CULTURES

"Cultural resilience is about belonging and identity. It is built through traditional play, storytelling and role modelling. It is demonstrated through respect for Elders, family and other cultures, through an understanding of and pride in one's own identity, and through an ability to cope with the knocks and difficulties that life might present " (Harald, 2017, p. 116).

Many articles highlight the pivotal role that culture plays in childcare settings for Indigenous children and families (Ball, 2012; Gerlach, 2015; Greenwood, 2001; Preston et al., 2011; Tremblay et al., 2013). In Greenwood's (2001) overview of academic and non-academic literature examining childcare through an Indigenous lens, safe, nurturing, and developmentally appropriate environments that value cultures are something that was noted time and time again (p. 31). Furthermore, childcare must be situated in the context of families and community (Greenwood, 2001, p. 28). Specific indicators include: "culturally sensitive, non-profit, comprehensive, accessible, of high quality, affordable and administered by appropriate Indigenous caregivers whenever possible" (p. 28). Overall, according to Greenwood (2001), childcare offered to Indigenous children and families needs to reflect cultural values and have direct involvement by Indigenous peoples (pp. 29-30). Many of the studies listed above note that this effort provides a unique opportunity to integrate quality indicators that may also possibly reduce disadvantages for Indigenous children and families.

Desjardins (2018) mirrored this focus as well, highlighting key themes including a focus on "families, background knowledge on [Indigenous] history, culturally appropriate programming, empathy, respect and intercultural understanding" (pp. 26-33). The author's findings conclude that "incorporating [Indigenous] pedagogy enhances early learning programs" (Preston et al., 2011, as cited in Desjardins, 2018, p. 37). Indigenous cultures, knowledge, values and contexts must be taken into consideration when implementing childcare programming.

Ball (2012) also discusses the role of culture and suggests that the purpose of education from an Indigenous perspective is to foster children's identity, initiative and autonomy (par. 9). This is an important aspect to consider when implementing programming. As noted in the article, as well as by Binesi (2018), language development is significant as it strengthens bonds and fosters connections with the Creator (par. 11). Nurturing a child's spirit is valued in many Indigenous cultures as it is thought that a strong spirit will equip the child to face the challenges of life (par. 13). Furthermore, the author also places emphasis on storytelling and knowledge development occurring "at the right time" (par. 13). Finally, implications for learning involve addressing challenges faced by non-Indigenous educators when

supporting young children in care. Ball (2012) states that “non-Indigenous teachers may underestimate Indigenous children’s emerging bilingualism and bidialectalism, literacy of the land, and ability to take their place and perform rituals, songs, and dances alongside older children. They also may be unaware that many Indigenous children do not display emotions in the presence of Elders or when it is not the right time or place” (par. 15). Thus educators must be mindful and attentive to the specific and community-based cultural needs of children in order to recognize strengths and encourage such values.

Rhetoric surrounding representation of culture in childcare settings, according to Hill and Sansom (2010), may already be in place, but westernized and colonized views of learning and development still underpin the majority of programming and pedagogy in childcare settings. Harald (2017) notes that it is not possible to simply “plunk” Indigenous culture into childcare curriculum. Rather, reflection of culture must also relate to cultural resilience in children and families. According to Harald (2017), “cultural resilience is initially developed in the home and community environment. It is supported in the [childcare] environment if [educators] and [programs] are culturally inclusive and supportive of Indigenous families and communities. [Programs] that seek to engage with Indigenous families and embed culture within the curriculum are more likely to support the development of cultural resilience” (p. 5).

INDICATOR OF QUALITY: FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

“The fundamental shift in understanding that is necessary lies not in the organisation of structures to support effective communication, but rather in taking a view that the child is a composite of an extended family, community and set of cultural beliefs that do not always match those of the centre” (Fleer, 2004, p. 59).

Quality childcare programs have been shown to be a powerful ‘equalizer’ in nurturing children’s development (Ball, 2012; DeRiviere, 2016). According to Ball (2012), childcare environments include a broad range of inputs ranging from food quality to government policies that can influence Indigenous families’ access to and experience in programs. Family focused approaches and the involvement of families in various aspects of the childcare environment can encourage continued access as well as reflect family voice and children’s identities in programs. Ball (2012) goes as far to state that parent involvement must be a funded aspect of childcare initiatives, and that educators and decision makers must work together to support parents’ awareness of the role that childcare can play.

How family engagement is defined and actualized can be problematic, as highlighted in Fleer’s (2004) article. Fleer (2004) suggests that a fundamental shift in understanding needs to occur, where the ‘child as composite’ of their extended family and community do not always match the beliefs of the childcare centre. Moreover, educator-parent relationships can be suffused with power imbalances, and although involvement of families in programming and curricular decisions may on the surface seem to negate this imbalance, any power can be quickly lost if westernized approaches to programming continue to remain the norm. This “mono-cultural” environment can unknowingly silence other cultures, and “ what is often silenced is the known socio-historical and cultural world of Indigenous families, the familiar signs and symbols, and established social and cultural practices and beliefs” (Fleer, 2004, p. 65). Similarly, Gerlach

et al.s (2017) study found that initiative to create more power balanced relations between childcare and families is of great value. Providing voice to parents, families and communities is one way to combat imbalances. "The findings described in this article fill a current gap in the literature by identifying family engagement strategies and approaches that are tacitly aligned with the principles of cultural safety" (Gerlach et al., 2017, par. 7).

Effectiveness of early learning and care programs can be highly dependent on relationship building between families, children and community (Leske et al., 2015). In the Leske et al. (2015) study on perspectives regarding effective childcare programs and services for Indigenous families, educators stressed the importance of relationship building with families; an awareness and ability to respond to dynamic family circumstances was a significant component to relationship building. Findings reveal that early childhood professionals' perspectives of effective childcare provision were influenced by their understanding of family agency and responsibility as well as their reputation and ongoing relationship with families and community. The findings offer considerations on the 'what' of effective service provision and have implications for both policy and practice (p. 116).

INDICATOR OF QUALITY: EXTERNAL PERSPECTIVES

A number of articles in the scoping review shared external perspectives regarding indicators of quality childcare for Indigenous families, without consideration of family voice in the research process (Beaton & McDonnell, 2013; Grace & Trudgett, 2012;; Guilfoyle et al., 2010; Lee-Hammond, 2013; Martin & Rodriguez, 2007; Preston et al., 2011; Ritchie, 2008; Targowska et al., 2010). Although some considerations are shared below, it is important to note, as Martin (2017) showcases, the importance of data that emphasize Indigenous children and their families' voices as the central aspect of research.

Grace and Trudgett (2012) explored the perspectives of childcare educators in supporting Indigenous families. Educators identified three primary barriers to participation by Indigenous families they work with; transport, shame, and community division. Educators stressed the importance of building relationships with families and the local Indigenous community in a way that acknowledges their strengths. According to the authors, a strengths-based approach that seeks to understand the challenges facing each family, while also addressing ways to build on their strengths in an attitude of acceptance and non-judgement, is essential. Another layer essential to effective communication is building understanding amongst non-Indigenous educators of the socio-historical and cultural contexts of Indigenous peoples. This perspective and understanding may further support relationship building with families (p. 17).

Guilfoyle et al. (2010) highlighted quality indicators for Indigenous children, families and communities as determined by key stakeholders in the childcare sector such as childcare providers, community members, and government representatives. The research findings conclude that there are specific values of considerable importance to Indigenous peoples in relation to childcare. These quality indicators include a focus on the child, collaboration with families, development of identity and a space for Elders as educators. The article states that a significant theme emerging from the research is the ability of the childcare environment to foster a safe atmosphere for children to be independent and grow. The authors

state that "it is crucial that [childcare] centres are built on what Indigenous families identify as approaches that work for them." (p. 75).

BARRIERS TO QUALITY

"While [Indigenous] women are instrumental in the provision of care and support to their communities, their daily struggles to ensure the economic and social well-being of their families are largely ignored by policy makers" (Mulligan, 2007, p. 1).

According to Halseth and Greenwood (n.d.), Indigenous families face many barriers in society, and because of this, it is important that childcare addresses the need to offer protective factors as well as increase the general health and development of children attending programs. The authors suggest that collaboration and funding are needed to move forward to create holistic programs for children (p. 37). Intervention that starts in the early years can significantly decrease the risks and barriers faced by Indigenous peoples.

According to Mulligan (2007), matters related to Indigenous families' experiences and possible health issues, violence, abuse and the criminal justice system dominate much of the research, creating a dearth of understanding regarding the complexities and insights that may further support Indigenous families, and in particular mothers. Mulligan's (2007) study focusing on the challenges that Indigenous single mothers overcome, determined that a lack of culturally appropriate settings in childcare was a major concern for participants. Barriers included a general lack of childcare spaces available, affordability, accessibility, limited family support, and transportation. Furthermore, when mothers or children become ill, a critical gap in available childcare emerges.

It is also important to note that Bowes et al. (2011) identify significant distrust in families for childcare environments. According to the article, "families often felt judged and misunderstood by [educators]. As [educators] talked down to them, families felt intimidated and disempowered. They either persevered because they wanted their children to 'survive' in the education system, or avoided [accessing programs], especially when a parent was at home and could teach their children themselves" (Bowes et al., 2011, p. ix). In Greenwood and Shawana's (2003) study focused on giving voice and choice back to Indigenous families in childcare, Indigenous family participants further recommended that more authority over childcare programs by Indigenous peoples is critical. The overall goal for early education moving forward should be to preserve and retain "values, beliefs and traditions of the community" (p. 73).

EDUCATOR DISPOSITIONS: PRACTICE OF RELATIONSHIPS

"[Educators] can make available to young children pedagogies of hope grounded in relationality and an ethic of love. The examples of childcare and education practice demonstrate the potential for early childhood education settings to be sites of intentional pedagogical counter colonial renarrativization" (Ritchie, 2012, p. 95).

Many of the articles outlined in the scoping review addressing educator dispositions focused on the importance of relationship building when engaging with Indigenous families, rather than just on specific curricular approaches (Ball & Lewis, 2015; Docket et al. 2006; Fasoli & Ford, 2001; Gerlach & Gignac, 2019; Gerlach et al., 2019; Lambert, et al., 2014; Leske et al., 2015). Aligning with this relational orientation, findings from numerous studies also highlight the deep connection between educators' practice of relationships and the understandings of the historic and social complexities of families' everyday lives (Gerlach & Gignac, 2019; Grace & Trudgett, 2012; Gerlach et al., 2017). This focus on relationships can also create opportunities for educators to challenge existing power structures and underlying assumptions that may influence educator decisions (Gerlach et al., 2019b).

Practically speaking, a focus on relationships includes prioritizing time for building relationships between educators, children and families (Gerlach & Gignac, 2019). According to Gerlach and Gignac (2019) in their qualitative study highlighting family engagement, additional considerations include meeting families where they already gather, being flexible to family circumstances, involving Elders in the practice of relationships and programming, supporting the whole family, and "deferring child development assessments until trusting relationships are well established" (p. 62).

One study conducted in Australia (Leske et al., 2015) found that relationships formed between families, children and educators, as well as the relational reputation the program carried in the broader community, reported to impact sustained attendance of Indigenous families in childcare programs.

Another significant theme explored by Trudgett and Grace (2011) is the notion of trust between educators and families. The authors identified trust as a significant factor for family engagement in childcare settings. Another overarching finding was that the grouping of Indigenous families together and assuming common elements in family cultural backgrounds and practices is not meaningful. A barrier for one family may not be a barrier for another, and could potentially be a facilitator for another. Trust was a prominent issue in all of the family interviews in the study. Every family expressed wishes that they could trust the educator working with their child(ren).

Bang et al. (2018) emphasize that before trust and a practice of relationships can happen between educators and families, educators must "explicitly and intentionally address deficit assumptions about Indigenous families" (p. 16). While continuing to challenge assumptions and stereotypes, educators must begin the process of reaching out to families as well as Indigenous communities in order to build trust. "This could take the form of inviting family and community members into the classroom as teachers, collaborators, and decision-makers" (Bang et al., 2018, p. 18).

Day-to-day interactions between educators and children may also have an impact on how relationships between families and communities manifest. A case study by Harrison et al. (2017) that recorded interactions between educators and young children captured many examples of children co-creating with educators a culture of belonging. The experiences exemplified specific, specialist practices grounded in "the strengths of Indigenous cultural traditions [of] family life and raising children" (p. 203).

EDUCATOR DISPOSITIONS: CULTURAL HUMILITY

“Professional development must focus on educators critiquing their own position(s) of power, challenging their considerations of how and what they teach. That is, they must explicitly confront their role as curriculum gatekeepers, and the notions of colonization often embodied within education policy documents and traditional curriculum content” (Stark & Fickle, 2015, p. 16).

Many articles emphasized the importance of offering educators the opportunity to engage in cultural humility work, and in particular knowledge development regarding the historic and current contexts for Indigenous families (Canadian Child Care Federation, 2008; Desjardins, 2018; Madden, Higgins, & Korteweg, 2013; Santoro et al., 2011; Sinclair, 2019; Stark & Fickle, 2015). According to Cott et al. (2017), “current childcare conversations must be infused with a framework grounded in the context of institutional racism and trauma, must include a discussion around funding streams and childcare barriers, and must ensure cultural competency by deliberately applying an equity framework” (p. 81).

A study by Hare and Anderson (2010) explored perspectives of 25 Indigenous families in the process of transitioning their children to a childcare program in a large urban centre. Making Indigenous knowledge a part of childcare experiences for Indigenous children and families can be a particular challenge in urban settings, where access to cultural resources such as land, family, traditional practices and ancestral languages is often limited. However, it becomes the responsibility of educators to ensure that Indigenous ways of knowing and being are reflected in the childcare setting. According to the authors, educators working in childcare settings should make sure that they learn about the history of residential schooling and the forced child removal policies that disrupted generations of Indigenous families in Canada. Parental fears of institutional forms of care that seem at odds with community values may require special outreach efforts on the part of educators (p. 26).

Another study, highlighting five Indigenous Head Start educators, also emphasized the need for decolonizing opportunities for educators in the field (Peterson et al., 2018). The authors emphasize the presence of “dominating spaces of Euro-centric ways;” thus, “decolonizing education must take place in [childcare programs] across the country” (p. 45). Engaging educators in a practice of relationships with Indigenous families through a decolonization and cultural humility lens bodes well for transformative opportunities, especially in urban contexts.

EDUCATOR DISPOSITIONS: CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

Some articles deeply explored specific aspects of pedagogy through a critical lens, closely related to decolonization practices (Herbert, 2013; Middlemiss, 2018; Miller, 2014; Ritchie, 2014; Ritchie et al., 2011;). Some authors, such as Atkinson (2009), focused on challenging mainstream discourses on race and racism, while others, including Ritchie (2014), explored notions of “nomadic subjectivity,” enabling educators to “move across conventional categories and move against ‘settled’ concepts and theories,” offering incitement to shift beyond their previous boundaries and comfort zones (p. 123). Diaz-Diaz

(2020) mirrors this sentiment by suggesting that, generally, educators may have yet to adopt in their pedagogy new conceptions related to diversity and social responsibility as multicultural pedagogies continue to prevent educators from learning about the impact of colonialism in Canada.

Ritchie et al. (2011) examined pedagogy with a focus on criticality, indigeneity, and an ethic of care, expressing a need for educators to consider how they might foster experiences that may help develop *conscientization*, the development of critical consciousness. The authors proposed the "implementation of an ethic for caring for oneself, others and the environment. Fostering dispositions of empathy and caring through a pedagogy of listening: recognition that we are all members of the collective; includes listening to ourselves as well as listening to welcome and being open to differences" (p. 346).

A paper reporting on the findings of a critical qualitative inquiry within an Indigenous childcare program (Gerlach et al., 2018) illustrates the possibility that educators, when offered the means by which to do so, can "develop highly contextualised, historicised, and nuanced understandings of families' lives, through a relational process of inquiry... These findings draw attention to the importance of understanding and addressing the impact of mutually reinforcing and intersecting structurally rooted social determinants on family wellbeing. They also emphasise the importance of legitimising the time required for [educators] to learn from caregivers about their everyday lived realities, and provide further evidence for the centrality of relationship-building to the success of Indigenous [childcare]" (p. 118).

EDUCATOR DISPOSITIONS: HONOURING INDIGENOUS FAMILIES' FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE

"Initiatives that embody quality teaching with qualified educators who affirm children's cultural knowledge play an integral role in supporting transitions to formal schooling" (Maher & Bellen, 2015, p. 16).

Many articles addressed the critical need for educators to engage with Indigenous funds of knowledge within a practice of relationships (Ball & Pence, 2001; Desbiens et al., 2016; Kitson & Bowes, 2010; MacDonald et al., 2010;; Maher & Bellen, 2015; McLaughlin & Whatman, 2015; Miller, 2015). Places of learning for young children should thus, according to Hare (2011), avoid viewing Indigenous knowledge as just an "anthropological curiosity." "The challenge for educators who work with Indigenous children, then is to create space for Indigenous knowledge so as to support Indigenous children and families" (p. 408). This requires engaging in a practice of relationships with Indigenous families and communities that may also require outreach efforts.

Acknowledging funds of knowledge includes engaging with both families as well as children. Maher and Bellen (2015) emphasize the importance of supporting children to engage in funds of knowledge in the early years, and state that "initiatives that embody quality teaching with qualified educators who affirm children's cultural knowledge play an integral role in supporting transitions to formal schooling" (p. 16).

In many Indigenous communities, cultural transmission from Elders and family members to children takes place with young children, as exemplified by MacDonald et al.'s (2010) article. Following in-depth

interviews and observations of community events tied to a Stó:lō Head Start Family Program, the authors determined that, “children were not separated from events, and learned through active participation in cultural systems of practice” (p. 91). McLaughlin and Whatman (2015) further emphasize that “learning to see Indigenous funds of knowledge within the cultural interface--as a knowledge system in tension and agency with western knowledges and one with equal value—is an important professional development requirement for all [educators], both beginning and experienced” (p. 16).

EDUCATOR DISPOSITIONS: CULTURAL MATCH

Some articles suggested that cultural match - the culture of the educator matching that of the child - is a factor worth exploring for children in childcare settings (Ritchie, 2003; Sims, et al, 2012; Webb & Williams, 2019). In Webb and Williams’ (2019) study exploring children’s interactions with educators of the same or different culture, the authors concluded that the impact on children’s communication when culturally matched with an educator was notable. The authors state that, “[findings] in this research have indicated the relevance of considering cultural context as a support for developing [Indigenous] children’s language skills. These insights provide a starting point for further research exploring cultural match between educator and child in ECEC as a possible factor affecting [Indigenous] children’s communication and development (p. 59).

Sims et al. (2012) share that many Indigenous families would prefer an Indigenous educator working with their children “in order for families to feel culturally secure in using services; for services to be culturally inclusive; that services are tailored to fit the specific needs of the community; and that family- and community-centred practice forms the basis of that service. For mainstream childcare services to be a viable option for Indigenous families, they would need to learn from Indigenous examples of what works well, and to incorporate these core ideas into their services” (p. 103).

EDUCATOR DISPOSITIONS: PRESERVICE EDUCATION

A number of articles highlight the unique role that preservice education plays in the development of educator dispositions to support Indigenous families (Mills & Ballantyne, 2008; Peltier, 2017; Whatman et al, 2020). Of significance is the act of embedding Indigenous knowledge across multiple preservice educational experiences, and in particular for Indigenous preservice educators. According to Whatman et al. (2020), this includes post-secondary faculty actioning “their personal and professional commitment to embedding Indigenous knowledge,” resulting in “powerful learning and emancipatory experiences for preservice [educators]” (p. 178).

In an article exploring preservice educators’ beliefs regarding diversity in Australia, Mills and Ballantyne (2008) determined that “all students who demonstrated commitment to social justice also demonstrated both openness and self-awareness/self-reflectiveness, and all students who demonstrated openness also demonstrated self-awareness/self-reflectiveness” (p. 453). Thus the analysis from the study suggests that “these dispositions may develop in a sequential fashion from self-awareness/self-reflectiveness; moving towards openness; and finally a commitment to social justice” (p. 453). The authors state, however, that “if teacher education courses on diversity continue to operate in fragmented ways, rather than encouraging students to move from dispositions of self-awareness/self-reflectiveness through to a

disposition of commitment to social justice” (p. 454), students may not be able to demonstrate this disposition later in the childcare field.

Next Steps

Hare (2011) suggests that “rather than seeing Indigenous knowledge and its various forms as an anthropological curiosity or even entertainment, places of learning should come to see Indigenous knowledge as a legitimate source of knowledge” (p. 408). Additionally, Gerlach et al. (2017) state that “any initiative to create more power balanced relations between the early learning sector and families is of great value. Providing voice to the parents, family and community is one way they combat these imbalances” (p. 1770). As such, and given the varied findings described above, more specific exploration of the beliefs and values of Indigenous families in Edmonton will support the opportunity for families to share their knowledge and understanding of indicators of quality and educator dispositions.

To that end, this project will continue with a series of focus groups centred on the ideas and experiences of Indigenous families. In these focus groups, families as well as educators who work with them and their children will be asked to respond to the identified themes above by sharing the indicators of quality and educator dispositions that are most important to them. Focus group participants will also be invited to share broadly about their experiences and discuss the practices and approaches they have found supportive in their experiences with child care in Edmonton.

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