GENERATIVE CURRICULUM: A MODEL OF UNIVERSITY AND FIRST NATIONS CO-OPERATIVE POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

ALAN PENCE, VALERIE KUEHNE, MARGO GREENWOOD-CHURCH and
MARY ROSE OPEKOKEW

Meadow Lake Tribal Council, School of Child and Youth Care Project, University of Victoria, P.O. Box 1700, Victoria,
B.C. Canada V8W 2Y2

Abstract — The Meadow Lake Tribal Council (MLTC) and the University of Victoria's School of Child and Youth Care (SCYC) are working co-operatively to develop a culturally appropriate, post-secondary education training program for Cree and Dene child and youth care workers. The approach under development is termed the generative curriculum model. An initial step in the development of this innovative model involved joint MLTC, SCYC and advisor team meetings to identify foundation elements and principles that would guide the project over its 3 year funding period. Six of the seven elements are described briefly in the article, while the operationalization of the seventh element, the generative curriculum model, is discussed in greater detail.

Utilizing the model, students are learning Meadow Lake First Nations (MLFN) Cree and Dene caregiving traditions, values and practices as well as those of the majority culture. The generative approach integrates text-based material with information from students, elders, and other community members resulting, over time, in courses tailored to the First Nations of Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan.

The project is in its mid-term development stage and the information provided is primarily descriptive of the model. As the project evolves, insights gathered through formative evaluation are leading to the further refinement and elaboration of the model.

INTRODUCTION

The First Nations of Canada are increasingly involved in the development of post-secondary educational opportunities for their peoples. The nature of this involvement varies across First Nations groups and post-secondary institutions (McGivern, 1990; Barnhardt, 1991). One innovative approach to First Nations university education has been developed by the Meadow Lake Tribal Council of northern Saskatchewan (MLTC) and the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria in British Columbia (SCYC). The approach has been termed the 'generative curriculum model' and it is described in the following pages.

The origins of the MLTC–SCYC curriculum development and career ladder project lie in the experiences of several of the First Nation communities that comprise the Meadow Lake Tribal Council. During the 1980s, various individual communities and the Tribal Council attempted to establish a child day care program, but they were frustrated in their

efforts by federal and provincial jurisdictional conflicts. The communities resolved that when the opportunity arose for them to develop these services, they would be truly exemplary. That opportunity arose in 1988 with the federal government's establishment of the Child Care Initiatives Fund ([CCIF] Health and Welfare Canada, 1988). The MLTC received Phase 1 funding from CCIF to undertake an assessment of child care needs in its nine communities. The assessment identified a need for family day care homes in eight of the communities, and a day care center in the ninth community (MLTC, 1989). In addition, MLTC had, through other studies, identified a number of other service needs for MLFN children and families (MLTC, 1987).

The need for family day care, a day care center, and other child and family services pointed to the prerequisite need for caregiver training. Most established programs in early childhood and in child and youth care have been developed for students from the North American majority culture. While some graduates may be able to work with children from

culturally diverse backgrounds, their training reflects the values and practices of that cultural context. The Tribal Council sought a partnership with an institution that would attempt to incorporate Meadow Lake Cree and Dene culture and traditions into the caregiver training program. They also wanted courses that could lead to a university degree and which could dovetail with other services to children and families. The search for a partner led Ray Ahenakew, Executive Director of the MLTC, to Alan Pence, child care specialist at SCYC. Both parties agreed that a collaborative approach had significant potential and agreed to work together in a co-operative model of post-secondary curriculum development.

Preliminary work on the part of the MLTC–SCYC project team members included a review of early childhood, child and youth care, and related educational programs for First Nations people. The review identified a common approach to curriculum development that Whyte (1982) called the 'beads and feathers' approach. While Whyte used the term to criticize elementary school programs that placed an emphasis only on presenting the 'material things' of a culture, the MLTC–SCYC team felt that the term and accompanying criticism were equally valid in critiquing a number of the post-secondary, human services education programs it reviewed. In most cases the underlying philosophy, content, and structure of the majority culture course was little changed; the difference was the application of a pastiche of 'Indianness' — or what might be referred to as beads and feathers 'add-ons'. In addition to concerns regarding the immutability of the underlying structure and message of many of these programs, in many cases the pastiche itself was inappropriate, representing the traditions, customs and mores of Indian peoples far removed from those participating in the course. In undertaking a review of other educational programs it became clear that there was not only much room for innovation in the area of post-secondary, First Nations education, but a great need for such innovation as well.

Two initial tasks faced the MLTC–SCYC project team. On the one hand, the opening of family day care homes within the specified communities was a high priority. To address that need the project team began to develop a course for family day care providers, with the expectation that the process of delivering the course would provide the team with valuable experience and insight. At the same time, a larger part of the team's energy was directed toward the second task: the articulation of the broad goals and principles that would guide the project and serve as its foundation.

THE FOUNDATION ELEMENTS OF THE MLTC–SCYC CURRICULUM PROJECT

In the earlier review of programs, the project team members had noted the absence of a clear and comprehensive foundation for many First Nations curriculum projects. Often limited in their ability to invest the large amount of time and energy required to articulate a model of education attuned to the needs and abilities of both the educational institution and the specific First Nations community(ies), curriculum projects have often applied a veneer of 'other culture' to existing programs. In the eyes of the MLTC–SCYC project team, such an approach was severely limited at best and likely doomed to failure. While the project team was not aware of what problems and issues would arise on the 'path less travelled', it was quite certain that the more-travelled path was not the way for this project. It was also clear that the path to be followed must be guided by stated principles and supported by a foundation composed of those principles and mutual understandings.

A manuscript documenting the MLTC–SCYC project's foundation elements has been developed (Pence *et al.*, 1991). The first two foundation elements, the scope of child and youth care and the career ladder, are primarily structural and characterize the vision project partners have for participants' future work opportunities and career trajectories. The following three elements, community initiative, empowerment and the child as focus, represent the central role of the First Nations communities and their children as strong, knowledgeable 'drivers' of the collaborative project. The final two elements, bicultural education and the generative curriculum model, refer to the actual development and delivery of curriculum materials. While a number of these elements have been tested in other projects and programs, this appears to be the first time that these seven elements have
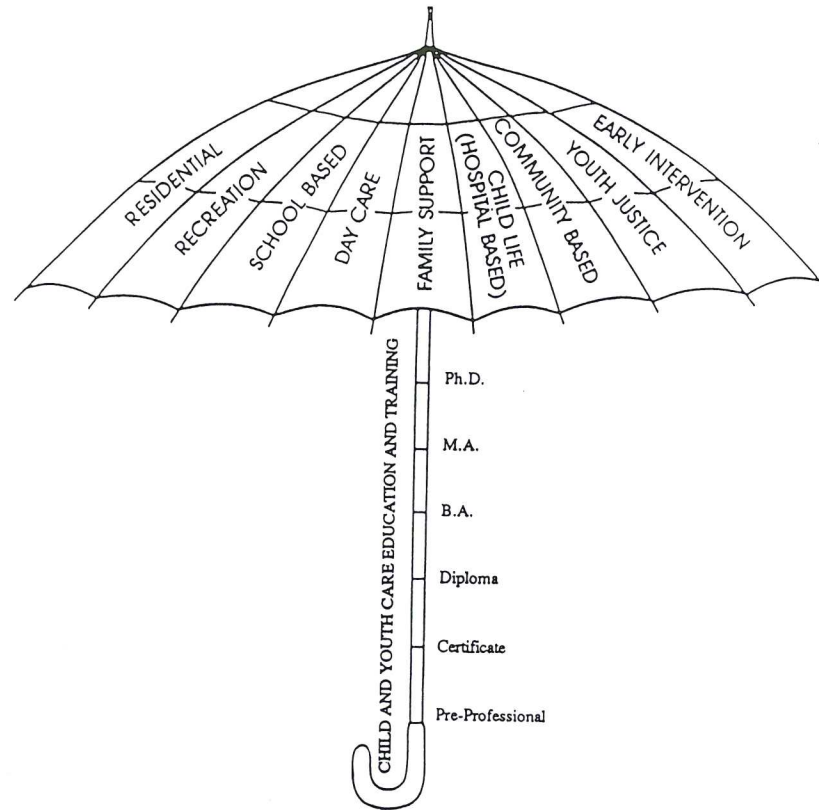
Source: Denholm, C., Ferguson, R., Pence, A., (Eds.). (1987)
         Professional child and youth care: The Canadian
         Perspective. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.

Fig. 1.

been linked together to support and direct the course of a human services curriculum project.

The first six elements will be described briefly; since the primary focus of this paper is on the generative curriculum model, considerable attention will be given to this seventh element.

The scope of child and youth care

The umbrella model seen in Fig. 1 represented the SCYC's view of the field of child and youth care. Anglin's work (1983) documented the similarities of tasks and functions that exist across the broad scope of child and youth care services and provided a framework for SCYC curriculum development in the 1980s (see Denholm *et al.*, 1987). For the MLTC

communities, this scope of child and youth care practice represents the broad range of service settings in which their project participants may someday work as well as the various services that the communities hope to provide for their own members through self-government initiatives.

The child and youth care career ladder

The MLTC–SCYC project incorporates an innovative step-on/step-off career and educational ladder. For the MLTC communities, it extends from a 40 hour Family Day Care Home Provider course through to a Bachelors degree in Child and Youth Care. A first step in the degree ladder is a 1 year certificate for an

A CHILD AND YOUTH CARE CAREER AND EDUCATIONAL LADDER

Course Work	Professional Level	Responsibility
A 40 hour Introduction to becoming a Family Day Care Provider	Pre-Professional	Daily operation of a FDC program under central agency supervision
10 month, Certificate level, ECCE educational course work and supervised practica	Para-Professional ECCE - Level 1	Assist, under supervision, in child care group program (day care centre)
10 month, Diploma level, ECCE educational course work and supervised practica	Professional ECCE - Level 2	Lead the delivery of daily activities and care for normative 2 to 5 year olds
3rd year Child and Youth Care Courses	Professional ECCE - CYC/Level 3	Planning, funding, and supervision activities for normative or specialized child populations
4 year, Baccalaureate Degree in Child and Youth Care	Professional ECCE - CYC Level 4	Planning, funding, and supervision activities for various child and youth care programs

Fig. 2.

Early Childhood Care and Education Assistant (ECCE/CYC Level 1). A student can elect to step-off the educational ladder at this point and seek employment in the field, or continue on to a 2 year diploma to qualify as an Early Childhood Care and Educational Supervisor (ECCE/CYC Level 2). Again, the student has the option of continuing educational studies or pursuing employment for some period of time. The career ladder, as noted, can ultimately culminate in a 4 year, university baccalaureate degree (ECCE Specialist Level 4 or CYC Specialist Level 4), which allows the graduate to practice in the broader field of child and youth care services.

The career and education ladder depicted in Fig. 2 supports the MLTC's commitment to providing high quality services for their members and establishing a multi-faceted child and youth care infrastructure, beginning with early childhood education and care.

The community initiative approach

The First Nations communities of the MLTC are working towards a future of heightened well being and self-government. Their goal is to return to a state of greater independence that First Nations people once enjoyed. Under the direction of the chiefs, the MLTC is working intensely to promote economic development, health and social development, and educational services. The initiative taken by MLTC in developing child care services and in establishing an educational partnership to train child and youth care workers is but one example of community initiated activities within the MLFN. Other areas under active development include health, education and child and family services.

From the Tribal Council's perspective, it is essential that child care programs and training curricula reflect the priorities and traditions of the individual communities. Accordingly, the Tribal Council has implemented a community-based child care committee structure (see for example, Waterhen Community Care Board and MLTC Child Care Team, 1991), and consciously avoided telling each of the communities the 'correct' way of proceeding. As a result, the energy and initiative for the child care programs emerges largely from the individual First Nation communities.

The empowerment model

The curriculum development team has adopted the Cornell University Empowerment Group's definition of empowerment:

Empowerment is an intentional, ongoing process

centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources.

(Cornell Empowerment Group, 1989, p. 2)

Historically, human services in North America have been based on deficit paradigms; professionals have seen themselves as having the knowledge to impart to needy and deficient consumers (Cornell Empowerment Group, 1989). In contrast, an empowerment approach to human service design and delivery, including child care, 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, p. 144).

The child as focus

In a collaborative, community-based project there are many possible groups on which to focus the energy of the curriculum development team. Nevertheless, it is clear to the team that the children of the MLTC communities are the primary target group. We hold 'children and their developmental needs as the fundamental building blocks of a human society' (Garbarino, 1982, p. 86). We agree with Bronfenbrenner (1970) that a society that does well by its children and their parents is basically sound. The advice of an elder to one of the MLTC chiefs was: 'Do not spend so much time worrying about economic development . . . . The future of our people is with the children. Look to the children for your direction.'

The bicultural approach

The bicultural approach to education is close to the spirit of the partnership that characterizes the project. Bicultural education has been defined as 'education designed to prepare persons to behave and to function appropriately in the context of two cultural environments, minority and mainstream, in any particular community' (Swerhun, 1981, p. 98). It is arguable that the project is actually multicultural as the MLFN are composed of both Cree and Dene communities and even within those two cultural groups each community has somewhat different traditions, values and

histories. Indeed, the level of differentiation could be carried further to differences among family groups within the same community. The term bicultural was adopted by the project to reflect the hope and expectation that graduates would be effective in either Meadow Lake First Nation communities or in majority culture settings outside of the MLFN, whichever they might choose.

The generative curriculum model

The greatest challenge of this curriculum project and the primary focus of this paper is the question of *how* mainstream child and youth care information can be respectfully and effectively combined with the knowledge and values of the Meadow Lake First Nations. A bicultural child and youth care curriculum requires the *combined* efforts of the SCYC curriculum writers and the Meadow Lake people. The school brings to the partnership its knowledge of majority culture North American child and youth care theories, approaches and methods of working with children and youth. However, the school lacks detailed and relevant information about the MLFN Cree and Dene traditions and mores. Since the MLFN elders are the main source of knowledge of traditional Cree and Dene theories and methods of working with children, their participation is essential if the curriculum is to include the desired cultural components.

Although a number of Canadian post-secondary institutions have developed programs for First Nations students (McGivern, 1990; Barnhardt, 1991), the curriculum development team found no programs that were integrating the elements that are the foundation of the MLTC–SCYC project. As a result, the MLTC–SCYC team developed its own plan for blending mainstream child and youth care content with MLTC Cree and Dene traditions. This plan, the seventh foundation element of the MLTC–SCYC joint project, has been given the working title of 'generative curriculum'.

The team sees the generative approach as a means of implementing a bicultural program. The generative approach encourages the MLTC communities to actively participate in and contribute to child and youth care curriculum development and delivery. The key to the generative curriculum model is a spiralling sequence of curriculum development and delivery activities which are intended to,
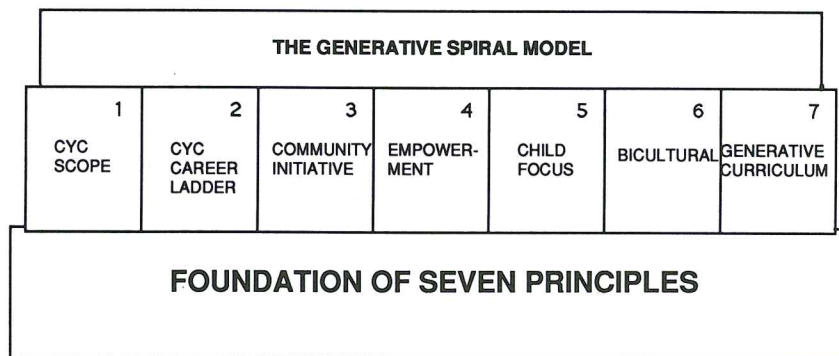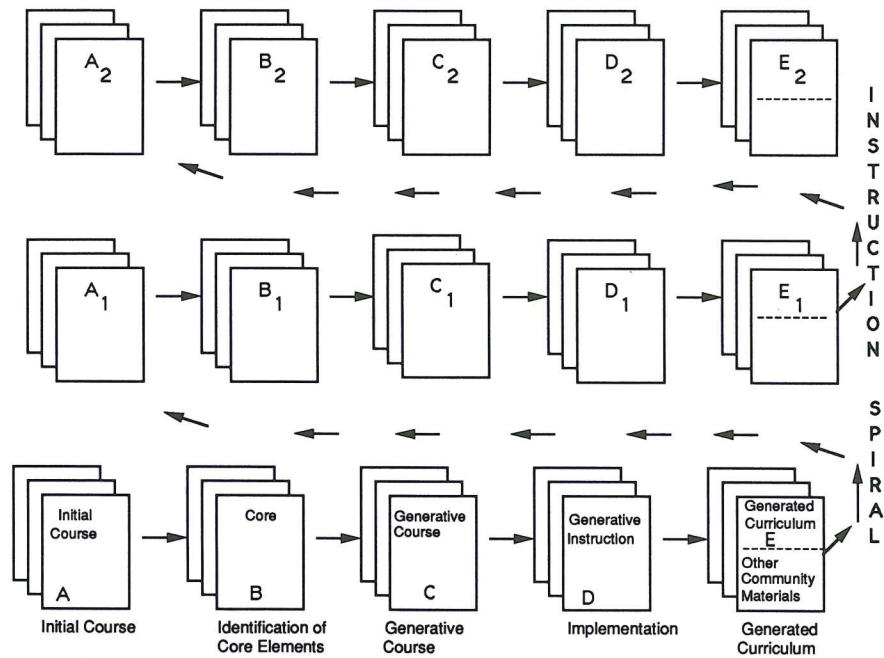
Fig. 3. Generative Curriculum: The Spiral Model.

THE GENERATIVE CURRICULUM SPIRAL

As seen in Fig. 3, the generative curriculum spiral is built on the project's seven foundation

over time, generate MLFN-specific content. The expectation is that the courses will change over time as community information is integrated into the course. Figure 3 provides a visualization of the generative curriculum instruction spiral; each component will be explained.

elements. This foundation is not viewed as static; it actively influences the curriculum development and delivery process, and is, in turn, affected by it.

The 'course' found in 'A' represents the specific child and youth care course under development. For example, the first course requested by the MLTC communities was training for family day care home providers. After locating several existing family day care courses, the core components of those courses were identified (box 'B'). In this example, topics such as child safety, nutrition,

child development, communication, and play emerged as core components of training programs for family day care home providers.

Once the core components, or major understandings, of the course are identified, curriculum writers draft course materials which incorporate them in ways that are consistent with the project's foundation elements (box 'C'). The draft materials are unlike typical university courses. While on-campus instructors generally receive a textbook and a one or two page list of topics to be 'covered', the courses developed for delivery at Meadow Lake are much lengthier and more detailed. Lecturing is kept to a minimum and classes are largely activity-based with much discussion, sharing, group work, role-playing and co-operative learning.

Box 'D' represents the delivery of the course. The course content is shared with students with the preface that its intent is not to represent 'universal' truths. Rather, the ideas reflect the assumptions that underlie child care practices in majority Canadian culture in the late twentieth century. The ideas introduced by the instructors are used as a stimulus for identifying MLFN Cree and Dene approaches to working with children. Although the students may bring much of this information with them, the participation of elders is essential. That participation is arranged by an MLTC elder who serves as a co-ordinator of elder activities for the Tribal Council. The elder co-ordinator approaches other elders whom he believes have knowledge relevant to the issue under discussion. The elder co-ordinator invites the selected elder to discuss the general topic with the students. The words of the elder are recorded by the instructor and, with the elder's permission, are available to become a part of the course in later iterations.

Box 'E' represents the generated course, which includes both the content of a typical on-campus child and youth care course and the MLFN Cree and Dene information generated by the students and the elders. While the proportions are not equal initially, the Cree and Dene components of each course are expected to grow over time. As different elders, students, and other members of the community contribute to the course and provide their permission to use the material, an expanding body of information about MLFN Cree and Dene views and practices will be compiled. This generated material may be made available for general community use as well as for the specific course. The above process means that a course is not 'final' when it leaves SCYC, indeed it is just at the beginning of its 'generative life'. The generative approach assumes that a course will be taught a number of times before there will be a balanced combination of majority and MLTC-specific content. Revision is seen as ongoing.

As the spiral continues to the next level, the generated curriculum from 'E' and the original course materials are reviewed ('A1') and necessary revisions are made ('C1'). Once again the course is taken to the classroom ('D1'). Within the classroom the materials are presented, information from the elders (perhaps a different group of elders) comes forward, a new group of students consider the information, add their new information, and knowledge is again generated that can be meaningful and usable not only for students, but for the broader community ('E1'). And so the spiral continues. Each time a course is offered the content will be somewhat different depending upon: the verbal and written information presented, the experiences the students bring to the class, the words of the elders for that iteration, and the unique 'gestalt' of the group.

TEACHING GENERATIVELY

A generative curriculum approach departs from the classroom experience commonly found in post-secondary educational programs. Typical university programs tend to be more instructor-friendly than student-friendly, instructor-focused than student-focused, and they tend to reflect the majority culture's point of view and values. In a project committed to individual and community empowerment and community-based human service initiatives, it is essential that course instructors utilize a teaching approach that builds on student and community strengths, knowledge, and traditions, and which respectfully views students as partners in learning.

Dr Elizabeth Jones, a member of the project's advisory committee (see Appendix A) and a faculty member of Pacific Oaks College in California, provides a model for teaching early childhood educators that seems congruent with and complementary to the

generative curriculum model. Jones (1986) uses the term 'emergent' in her instructional approach, largely relying on students to bring forward issues that are critical to them and which, in turn, can be used to address core content issues. She uses activities, such as games, role-playing and small group work, that help students to learn course content through action, interaction, and reflection on experience. Jones notes that in using this approach she is able to reduce students' anxieties about learning and create an atmosphere based on trust, building the self-esteem of future caregivers.

Two members of the SCYC curriculum development team developed and piloted a short (40 hour) Family Day Care Home Provider course at the Meadow Lake communities using many of Jones' methods (see Greenwood-Church, 1991). At this point, three groups of students have completed the course, and the course is undergoing revision based on the accumulative experience of presenting the course in various time-intensive formats (i.e. a 6 day intensive course, a 2 week less intensive, etc.). More typical university term-based courses (3 in-class hours for 15 weeks) in early childhood care and education, guiding children's behaviour, and a field practicum are presently being piloted.

The curriculum development team routinely re-examines coursework in light of the project's foundation elements. The students in each course, the elders who share their knowledge, the instructors who accept the challenge of teaching generatively, and the broader MLTC–SCYC team are all working together to cooperatively develop a curriculum that has meaning and relevance for child and youth care workers in the Meadow Lake Tribal Council communities.

THE EVOLUTION AND EVALUATION OF A GENERATIVE CURRICULUM MODEL

The MLTC–SCYC curriculum development and career ladder project is currently at the mid-point of a 3 year funding commitment. The first several months of the project were largely devoted to a consideration of other First Nations projects, co-operative team discussions, and to the identification of the projects' foundation elements. The components of the foundation emerged through a series of meetings that involved MLTC, SCYC and advisory team members. The components of the generative spiral process have become more specifically defined and elaborated over time as the MLTC and SCYC team have had to problem-solve a range of issues that have emerged in the operationalization of the model. Examples of these issues include:

● The availability of elders on a once every 2–3 week basis, rather than on a daily or weekly basis as originally anticipated.
Response:
Elders now 'kick-off' sections of courses with over-arching comments that are recorded and then incorporated back in at appropriate points during the content section by the instructor or by students.

● A degree of discomfort for students in being asked to identify 'Cree or Dene' ways as opposed to addressing their own personal experience or perspective.
Response:
Course materials have shifted away from asking students what Cree and Dene approaches are to a given topic and moved towards asking about personal experiences and impressions relevant to a topic.

● A range of interpretations of the generative curriculum approach by various course writers.
Response:
The development of a curriculum writer's 'handbook' of materials describing the origins of the project, key documents and the guidelines, and an increasing number of examples of course materials is under re-development.

● Variability in the generation of MLTC Cree and Dene material across courses and instructors.
Response:
(i) establishment of clearer generative expectations of the project for course instructors;
(ii) inclusion of 'generative feedback sheets' in instructor curriculum materials;
(iii) continuing refinement of generative

questions, activities, and assignments for students;

(iv) identification of an MLTC child care team member responsible for community consultation and the generation of parallel information on traditions and customs directly from communities and their members.

Issues, such as those noted above, represent a range of problems to be expected in undertaking an innovative education project — elements of the unknown on the 'path less travelled'. The key to the successful resolution of emergent problems has been a shared base of commitment and trust between the MLTC and SCYC. The project has experienced its most difficult periods at transition points when new participants/staff have been brought on, or experienced participants have left. It is at these points that the project, thus far, has been most vulnerable; for a sense of shared vision, understanding and mutual respect and support have constituted the most critical ingredients in assuring the ultimate success of this initiative.

The evaluation of the project has thus far been formative, proceeding alongside its development. To this end the collection of student performance indicators (14) students completed second term work), course evaluation forms, the conducting of instructor feedback sessions, and the collection of generated materials have, over time, become increasingly routinized. In addition, all team meetings, correspondence, and decisions have been well documented. As the project moves into its latter stages, a summative evaluation will incorporate a more holistic and ecological perspective. That evaluation, in keeping with the foundation elements of the project, will assess not only the specific curriculum materials developed, as well as student and instructor performance, but it will also look more broadly to the goals of community initiative and empowerment, and seek to assess the impact of the project overall. The summative evaluation will be undertaken jointly by the MLTC and SCYC.

BROADER CROSS-CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS

The generative model is heavily rooted in the bicultural element of the project's founda-

tion. While the Cree and Dene peoples of the Meadow Lake Tribal Council are the initiators and partners in the pilot work of the project, from the beginning both MLTC and SCYC have been committed to the development of a model that would be relevant and useful to other First Nations communities. Indeed, a stated objective of the initial proposal was to address the model's portability to other First Nations. With such a multi-cultural capacity, in theory the model could be applied to post-secondary education with non-First Nations cultural groups as well, although a pilot for such an application is well beyond the scope of the present project.

While the curriculum materials produced using the generative spiral model would be different across First Nations and broader cross-cultural settings, the underlying iterative, developmental process would be similar. The generative model is intended to be an empowering approach to education, based on respectful and helpful relationships across cultures and the belief that differing cultural orientations can be a source of enrichment rather than divisiveness among peoples. For the sake of the children who stand at the center of this project, it is critical that an attitude of respect and caring between peoples permeate all facets of the structure and the process of the generative model.

For the children stand to gain the most from the project's efforts — today's children and those to come. The generative curriculum model, within a community-based educational approach, built on an empowerment model of strengths rather than weaknesses, and with a view of children in the culturally relevant contexts of family and community, provides MLFN's children with educated caregivers who can meet their needs in the most developmentally and culturally appropriate ways. For example, community-based education facilitates the important involvement of community elders in making cultural and historical contributions to students' learning and to children's caregiving environments and socialization. The empowerment principle assumes that all children and families, even those with great psychological, emotional, social or other challenges, have strengths from which change and optimal development can emanate. And the view of children as developing within contexts commands a holistic view of each

child and the emphasis on MLTC's family and community resources in caregiving. Taken together, this is clearly an innovative approach to meeting the educational and caregiving needs of First Nations children, youth and families.

CONCLUSION

The Meadow Lake Tribal Council–School of Child and Youth Care generative curriculum model is still in its developmental stages. The team members, both at MLTC and SCYC, continue to learn about and refine the model, and gain new insights from working together co-operatively. While a summative evaluation is still a number of months in the future, our formative information indicates that the model is well worth the leap of faith required to launch it. Indeed, the experience of the project would suggest that it is only through such good faith efforts and a co-operative willingness to explore 'paths less taken' that the educational needs and desires of First Nations Peoples will be adequately met.

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APPENDIX A

MLTC/SCYC CURRICULUM ADVISORY GROUP

Rita Jack
Curriculum Consultant
Kamloops, British Columbia

Christiann Dean
Cornell Empowerment Project Associate
Cornell University
Ithaca, NY

Cassie Landers
Consultative Group on Early Child Care and Development
UNICEF House
New York, NY

Larissa Tarwick
Northwest Community College
Terrace, British Columbia

Malcolm Read
Red Deer College
Red Deer, Alberta

Joan Frances
Consultant
Calgary, Alberta

Elizabeth Jones
Pacific Oaks College
Pasadena, California