

# **Best Practices using Indigenous Knowledge**

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(editors)

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**Title**

The Generative Curriculum Model: A bicultural, community-based approach to building capacity for Early Childhood Care and Development in indigenous communities in Canada

**Themes**

Child development, community development, community participation, consciousness raising, cultural identity, curriculum development, early childhood, education, educational innovations, educational policy, ethnic groups, learning, teaching

**Introducing the practice**

Between 1989 and the present, the Generative Curriculum Model has been demonstrated in eight rural locations in western Canada, on lands reserved for First Nations. Members of 55 First Nations communities have been involved. There are approximately 540 First Nation bands or tribal organizations registered in Canada, each with its own culture, dialect, and traditional territories.

The practice consists of a two-year training programme. The first of eight programmes to date was developed and delivered from 1989 to 1992. Since that time, the programme has been delivered in seven other locations, including three programmes delivered simultaneously from 1997 to 1999 and one programme that is currently underway.

In all eight partnership programmes completed to date, the Generative Curriculum Model has provided university-accredited training in students' own communities leading to unprecedented educational outcomes, vocational outcomes, and capacity-building, as well as personal and community transformations that reach far beyond the classroom.

*The practice*

First Nations Partnership Programs ([www.fnpp.org](http://www.fnpp.org)) is the context in which First Nations communities and members of a university-based team have worked together over the past 12 years to deliver an innovative programme of post-secondary training for community members in Early Childhood Care

and Development (ECCD). The content and outcomes of the training are derived from a socially inclusive process of dialogue, study, self-reflection, and exploration through practice. Community members consider community-specific indigenous knowledge and cultural practices as well as euro-western research, theory, and practice models. This ‘best practice’ is called the ‘Generative Curriculum Model.’ The curriculum and its outcomes are not pre-determined, but rather are ‘generated’ each time the programme is delivered, in order to reflect the unique indigenous knowledge and the particular needs, goals, and circumstances of the communities participating in the programme.

This is a method of training specialists in Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) as well as an approach to community development and cultural sustainability. Key features of the Generative Curriculum Model of training that make it at the same time a community-development approach are that it is community-based, community-paced, community-driven, multi-generational, and focused on a socially inclusive dialogue about indigenous knowledge.

There is one two-year programme being delivered in a tribal organization, as well as extensions of four former programmes with participating communities. An adaptation of the Generative Curriculum Model is also currently being piloted programme in Africa.

The Generative Curriculum Model effectively enables communities to further four inter-related objectives:

- To improve conditions for development of the youngest generation through organized Early Childhood Care and Development initiatives.
- To build the community’s capacity for filling paid jobs as providers of care and other development services for young children and families.
- To support the pursuit of income-generating employment and training among adults by providing accessible, safe, and culturally consistent child care.
- To sustain indigenous culture and traditional language by ensuring that training for community members includes an enhancement of their knowledge of, and facility with, their own cultural practices and language.

## **Content and approach**

Many indigenous community members in Canada have sought training and development through monocultural approaches, either exclusively ‘mainstream’ western training or exclusively indigenous training. Many reports indicate that neither of these singular approaches have successfully met the communities’ need to sustain indigenous practices while ensuring that community members benefit from euro-western research and experiences and are prepared to ‘live and work in both worlds.’ The Generative Curriculum Model provides an effective framework for incorporating local knowledge into ECCD policy, programmes, and research in order to sustain culture and promote community development.

### *The origins of the practice*

The practice originated in the community. In 1989, Tribal Council representatives of five Cree and four Dene communities in central Canada contacted the University of Victoria in search of collaborators who would be willing to enter into a creative partnership with them. Their aim was to develop the capacity of community members to enhance provisions for young children’s care and development and for parent’s employment and training, while also ensuring the sustainability of the Cree and Dene cultures and languages. The original collaborators recognized that in each community the richest source of indigenous knowledge were the Elders. Elders were therefore invited to become co-constructors of the training curriculum and, in some cases, co-instructors in the training programme. The Generative Curriculum Model originated through this initial partnership, and it has been elaborated and evaluated in the context of subsequent community-initiated programmes.

Each training programme using the Generative Curriculum Model has been in some ways ‘original.’ For each programme delivery, a new curriculum is constructed through the participation of community members, especially Elders, who articulate, teach, and demonstrate culturally important ideas and practices.

From the point of view of indigenous communities, the purpose of the practice is to provide geographically and socially accessible training in ECCD in ways that are culturally congruent and culturally sustaining. Community objectives for providing the training are to strengthen the

capacity of the community: (a) to support the optimal development of children 0 to 6 years through culturally consistent, quality child care; (b) to support the employment and training of adults by providing safe, accessible, culturally consistent child care; and (c) to ensure the preservation and revitalized use of indigenous knowledge through inter-generational participation in constructing training curricula, policies and practices pertaining to child care and development.

From the point of view of the university-based partners who help to conceptualize, deliver and evaluate the programmes, an additional objective is to pilot and document an effective approach to capacity-building that successfully incorporates indigenous knowledge and is socially inclusive. This demonstration work is intended to stimulate discussion and re-thinking among the various parties involved in capacity-building and development initiatives.

#### *Parties involved in the practice*

The First Nations Partnership Programs are the vehicle for utilizing and evaluating the Generative Curriculum Model. These programmes are delivered through partnerships between a team based at the University of Victoria, and representatives of First Nations communities. These partners come together to plan and deliver the programme in an indigenous community setting. Four of the eight programme deliveries to date have also involved an additional post-secondary institution that has facilitated aspects of training.

A project office at the University of Victoria houses the team members who respond to requests from First Nations communities to deliver the programme. Such requests are initiated by the First Nations community, and asks the University to develop a partnership through which the programme can be delivered. The First Nations community is responsible for raising funds, usually from federal and provincial sources, for delivering the programme. The community ensures that all the necessary components will be available: facilities for housing the programme, instructors and Elders to teach in it, and community members to be enrolled as trainees.



### *Beneficiaries*

Many groups of individuals in the participating communities and training institutions have been shown to benefit from the programme.

Community members who become trainees/students in the programme are the most immediate beneficiaries. After successfully completing the two-year programme, they receive university transcripts and a two-year university diploma in Child and Youth Care. This makes them eligible for provincial/state certification in the profession of Early Childhood Education. They are well qualified to seek and accept employment within and beyond their community, in indigenous and non-indigenous settings.

The children of trainees have also been shown to benefit as a result of their parents' training. Their knowledge and skills regarding child care have been enhanced, as have their knowledge and sense of pride regarding their own culture and language.

Parents and other primary care-givers in the communities benefit from organized child care and other support services that help them to care for their children and that ensure their children's exposure to indigenous culture and language. Parents are able to continue their own education and training as well as to seek employment as a result of having accessible child care. By increasing the community's capacity for child care, the programme results in income-generating activities and poverty reduction.

Elders in the participating communities benefit from: (a) having a valued role in the training program; (b) having a forum for sharing their wisdom, experience, and skills; and (c) having more opportunities to forge new relationships with the younger generations in their community.

Community administrators/organizers benefit from the experience of partnership with a mainstream institution and from enhanced social cohesion within their communities.

University-based team members and affiliated individuals outside of the indigenous communities benefit from opportunities: (a) to build bridges between often disenfranchised indigenous communities and themselves; (b) to engage in dialogue and to learn about indigenous constructions of

childhood, care, and development; and (c) to explore new ways of making post-secondary education and training relevant, accessible, and sustaining of indigenous cultures.

#### *Other participants*

Instructors and Practical Training Supervisors are recruited and hired by the community, generally from outside both the First Nations community and the university. For many instructors, especially those who are not members of an indigenous population, their experience with the Generative Curriculum Model contributes to their cross-cultural understanding and competence, and to their willingness to adapt their professional practice to meet indigenous peoples' needs.

To date, 136 indigenous community members have taken part in the two-year, full-time training programme:

- 98% of the community members who have taken the programme have been members of First Nations (aboriginal).
- 98% have been women, ranging in age from 21 to 50.
- 11% have had an indigenous language as their first language; the remainder have had English as their first language.
- Nearly half have completed secondary school education before beginning the programme.

#### *The method*

The Generative Curriculum Model is used as a set of guiding principles for planning, co-constructing, delivering, and evaluating a curriculum for two years of full-time training in Early Childhood Care and Development. The vehicle through which the Generative Curriculum Model evolved and has been demonstrated to date (although it is applicable to other types of programmes) is called the First Nations Partnership Programs. It consists of a series of community-university partnerships for delivery in indigenous communities of 20 university-accredited courses. The courses cover the subjects common to most programmes of training for early childhood educators, including: (a) child development; (b) Early Childhood Education programme development and delivery; (c) communications and professional ethics; and (d) practicals. All of the students are recruited by the partner First Nations community and most are members of indigenous communities in a particular region. At the conclusion of the programme, students receive a

two-year diploma in Aboriginal Community-based Child and Youth Care from the University of Victoria, as well as provincial/state certification as Early Childhood Educators.

*Community-based delivery.* No one needs to leave their community in order to access the training programme. Indigenous students' success has been attributed in part to high levels of social support and practical help from family and friends. Students do not experience the family disruptions and 'culture shock' that often deters indigenous students from seeking or completing post-secondary education. Many community members besides the registered students can participate in programme delivery processes. This results in an enduring, mutually supportive 'community of learners.' Because the community is actively involved in the programme, it is supportive of the projects for children and families that are initiated by programme graduates.

*Co-construction of training curricula through dialogue.* Throughout the 20 courses delivered in a host community, locally recruited instructors and indigenous Elders engage in dialogue about their own culturally-based child care practices and about euro-western research and practices for promoting optimal child development.

*Social inclusion.* Evaluation of the First Nations Partnership Programs shows that the Generative Curriculum Model responds effectively to the search of First Nations for a culturally specific alternative to the prevailing 'pan-indigenous' training programmes and the cultural additions that are tacked onto mainstream training programmes. Elders' involvement in co-constructing the curriculum results in a good fit between the attitudes and skills reinforced through the training programme and the specific goals, needs, and circumstances of the children and families in the particular cultural community.

*Preparing to walk 'in both worlds'.* At the request of First Nations community leaders who initiated partnerships for programme delivery, part of the training involves supervised practicals in a wide range of settings so that the community's trainees learn to work in a broad range of jobs involving child and youth care in both aboriginal and non-aboriginal settings, both within and outside their own communities.

*Career laddering.* The programme is fully coordinated with a four-year university degree programme in Child and Youth Care. Up to now 11% of programme participants have gone on to the third year of university studies and beyond.

### **The role of indigenous knowledge**

The evolution of the Generative Curriculum Model has been based on the premise that we need to recognize and accept responsibility for the potentially acculturative effects of mainstream curricula upon the development and delivery of programmes for children. We need to explore new ways of being responsive and accountable to the cultural communities whose children come to us for care and education.

Far from being culturally neutral, curricula for training early childhood educators are cultural constructions grounded in the world views, beliefs, and norms of those who conceptualize and teach the curricula. The training experiences that shape the care-giving practices of early childhood educators and other out-of-home caregivers can exert a major influence upon which culture, and which aspects of that culture, are sustained. Children reproduce the culture of their primary caregivers, peers, and the media with which they interact from their earliest years. Caregivers and teachers continuously perpetuate their own culture by encouraging particular response styles, forms of interaction, ways of understanding events, and enactments of implicit beliefs. When a 'one size fits all' approach is taken to training, all too often the result is a homogenizing, monocultural, colonizing approach to caring for children in ways that are inappropriate to the social ecologies of which children may be a part.

The reproduction and modification of culture through educational curricula and human service programming has been cited as a problem by many aboriginal community representatives in Canada. Most aboriginal peoples in Canada have experienced seven generations of cultural holocaust. One of the main avenues for subjugating aboriginal peoples to colonial culture and governance has been through the imposition of child care and education that has denied the legitimacy of thought, lifestyles, religions, and languages of First Nations people. Most First Nations communities in Canada are now actively engaged in multi-faceted efforts to revitalize their cultures, to assert the legitimacy of their culturally based values and practices as integral to the

fabric of Canadian society as a whole, and to foster among First Nations children positive identities with their aboriginal cultures of origin.

This is the stance that has been taken by the First Nations representatives who have initiated partnerships for the delivery of ECCD training using the Generative Curriculum Model. As university-based partners in these programmes, we accept as a starting point that non-native educators based in universities and colleges are simply not in a position to be solely responsible for making valid and useful decisions about how to extend the reach, relevance, or appropriateness of early childhood education training and programme development in aboriginal communities. Although the Generative Curriculum Model was not conceived within the crucible of scholarly post-modernist discourse, the First Nations partners and we share a 'post-modernist' valuing of multiple voices and an insistence upon situating alternative constructions of experiences with reference to the historical, cultural, political, and personal contexts in which these constructions were generated.

*Re-conceptualizing 'success' when indigenous knowledge is key to programme delivery.* Evidence from the evaluations of demonstrations of the Generative Curriculum Model shows that the positive impacts of this approach to ECCD training include, but also go far beyond, the benchmark credentials that students receive. These 'value-added' outcomes result from the elevation of indigenous knowledge to a core place in the curriculum, from the reinstatement of Elders' traditional roles in teaching about the language and culture of the community, and from the creation of a self-sustaining, inter-generational community of learners. Community members who have been trainees in the programmes most often measure their 'success' in terms of: (a) discovering their own ability to create and share knowledge; (b) learning to critically evaluate alternative conceptual frameworks, alternative forms of interacting with children and families, and alternative human service models; (c) learning to synthesize knowledge and experience from a variety of sources within and outside their own cultural communities; (d) becoming better parents; and (e) articulating their own goals for children in terms of their own culture as well as in terms of the larger social ecology in which they are embedded.

First Nations partners have said that one of the keys elements of the ECCD programme is that it fosters community healing through cultural re-connection.

*Co-creating culturally situated understandings of early childhood.* The Generative Curriculum Model shifts away from a determined search for universals to a celebration of the reality and richness of diversity. By bringing together the two worlds of western academia and aboriginal communities, this form of capacity-building opens a door to developing culturally specific understandings of children, their families, and their ECCD programme needs in varying eco-cultural contexts.

*Socio-cultural values, meanings and spirituality of the community.* By involving the community, the Generative Curriculum Model has the potential to uncover and focus on elements of the social ecology of the First Nations community, how community members construe those elements, and their perceptions of the implications of these elements for child care and development. Elements of the social ecology of the community that are typically the subject of extensive debate in the training programme include: roles of parents, siblings, other children, grandparents and other elders; historical experiences with school; literacy; culturally influenced learning styles; culturally appropriate instructional processes; traditional language; approaches to problem-solving; impact of social relationships on cognitive performance; indigenous definitions of intelligence; cultural goals of maturity and their influence on guided participation; communication with children; interaction between children and adults; and children's social partners. Cultural activities led by the Elders during the training programme often include traditional ceremonies and practices, and the collection of items and documents of cultural importance.

#### *The transfer of knowledge*

Using the Generative Curriculum Model, indigenous experience and culturally-valued knowledge are articulated primarily by tribal Elders and other well-informed community members who can describe, explain, and/or demonstrate indigenous concepts and practices related to child care and development in a community context. In addition, trainees themselves are often asked to reflect on their own experiences growing up in their culture and their community, or returning to it after a period of absence. They are

encouraged to discern the ways in which indigenous knowledge and practices have been embodied in their own life stories.

Payment of those who transmit IK or participate in reconstructing the community's culture is handled in various ways by the host community which has raised and is managing the funds for the training programme. Typically, Elders are paid in money (approximately CAD 50 for a 1-2 hour session with a group of trainees) and/or gifts. Gifts can include the traditional gifts of tobacco and seasonal cloth, or useful items made or prepared by the trainees (e.g., baskets, preserved fruit, fish).

The Generative Curriculum Model leads to the evolution of a socially inclusive, multi-generational 'community of learners.' In these communities, the roles of teacher and learner are somewhat fluid. Each course in the training programme is structured using an 'open architecture', leaving room for students and the community to enter into a generative teaching and learning process. Throughout the two years of the programme, a community member in the role of 'Intergenerational Facilitator' organizes the participation of Elders and other respected community members in regular meetings with students and instructors. These knowledgeable persons share what they know of cultural traditions and community history pertaining to the aspects of child care and development covered in each course unit. This generates the community-specific part of the curriculum. Trainees are then invited to discuss historical, political, and cultural factors affecting children with individuals who best understand these contexts.

The Generative Curriculum Model facilitates the reconstruction and reorganization of traditional knowledge, as well as an original application of existing knowledge to new endeavours in community/child development, and the syncretic combining of indigenous and imported knowledge in order to pursue community/child development objectives.

*Generated concepts of child care.* Community members who are active in the training programme, as students or otherwise, work together to explore various possibilities for interpreting the meanings and practical implications of 'child development,' 'quality care,' and 'family life' in the context of their own culture and community. Guidelines for culturally desirable child-care practices emerge through dialogue in class about: (a) cultural reconstructions

and experiences elaborated by Elders; (b) contemporary social conditions and goals for children; and (c) ideas and research found in mainstream texts and curricula.

For example, a salient feature of most indigenous cultures in Canada is their extensive use of stories rather than direct instruction or explicit feedback. Stories are the preferred medium for teaching children the norms, moral values, and behavioural expectations of their community.

#### *Documentation of IK*

All First Nations that have been involved in programmes using the Generative Curriculum Model have preserved the ‘words’ or ‘teachings’ of the Elders and, in most cases, the creative generation of new knowledge that incorporates the wisdom of the Elders. Recording has taken various forms, including self-published books, unpublished collections, and video and audio recordings. Trainees have made extensive use of the teachings of the Elders in preparing materials and activities for children and families. Most importantly, indigenous knowledge has been preserved through the personal transformation of individuals involved as trainees and supporters of the programmes. Their identity and pride as members of their culture of origin has been enhanced along with their knowledge of the values and forms of representation of that culture. The cultural character of the participating communities has been enhanced and sustained as a result of renewed valuing of indigenous knowledge and forms of interaction, particularly the central role of Elders as guides in the community.

#### **Achievements and results**

A comprehensive programme evaluation completed in June 2000, documented the multi-dimensional success of the Generative Curriculum Model in the First Nations Partnership Programs. In each of 47 First Nations communities involved, the programme has promoted academic achievement, achievement of vocational goals, career-laddering, improved parenting, and personal healing among adult community members. Community-wide development is evident in the increased availability of quality day care and school readiness programmes for young children, in after-school programmes and learning assistance for school-age children, and in innovative programmes for youth.



Educational and vocational outcomes:

- 86.4% of the trainees completed one year of full-time, university-accredited study. For students in British Columbia, this resulted in eligibility for the Ministry of Health's basic certification in Early Childhood Education (ECE).
- 77.3% completed a full two years to obtain a Diploma in Child and Youth Care. This compares favourably with the performance of First Nations students in other post-secondary programmes, where national completion rates average 40% or less.
- 95% of programme graduates (students completing one or more years) remained in their own communities.
- 65% of programme graduates introduced new programmes for children, youth and families.
- 13% of graduates joined the staff of existing services.
- 11% of graduates continued on the education ladder towards a university degree.

*Evidence of real improvement or development*

Initiatives produce sustainable results when there is growth in capacity (or 'social capital') and where a broad representation of community interests (or 'stakeholders') have been mobilized to work effectively toward a common set of goals. In the First Nations Partnership Programs, administrators and other members of the participating First Nations communities have pointed to the community-wide impacts of the programme. They attribute these largely to the socially inclusive nature of the curriculum development and delivery. The following impacts were cited:

- Cultural healing, continuity, and pride.
- Increased parenting effectiveness.
- Community-wide advocacy for child well-being initiatives.
- Networking between the community and other groups.
- Development of a cohort of skilled community leaders.
- Enhanced social cohesion.

*The results are cost-effective.* In each partnership, at least 80% of the money paid for the programme has remained in the community, unlike the many development and training initiatives which are funded and managed financially from outside the target community. The communities have delivered the programme in their own facilities, they have provided their own

administrative and support services, and they have contracted instructors. Approximately 20% of the expenditure has been for university-based liaison, record-keeping, and provision of the euro-western portion of each course.

In evaluation research, members of the indigenous community have underscored the benefits of the way the programme was conceived and delivered to the community as a whole. In contrast, they reported that their investments and involvements in mainstream, institution-driven training programmes have sometimes benefited individual community members, but have not had widespread ripple effects. This is because: (a) the individual had to leave the community to receive training; and/or (b) training may have taken place in the community but did not actively involve the community.

Community participants have identified the following features as distinctive for the Generative Curriculum Model:

- The unprecedented high rates of student retention and completion of the programme because students ‘resonated’ with what they were learning.
- The application of culturally consistent training to the development of community services.
- The far-reaching ripple effects on the community as a whole.

Community-based administrators have reported high levels of satisfaction with the returns on their investment in the First Nations Partnership Programme in terms of the extent to which the programme has furthered the community’s social and economic goals.

The programme evaluation research yielded largely anecdotal evidence of how the First Nations Partnership Programs compared with other programmes of post-secondary training in Early Childhood Care and Education in terms of costs and benefits. The results of comparison can be summarized as follows:

- The First Nations Partnership Programs are unique in enabling students to earn university credits for courses culminating in a two-year diploma which can then be applied to a degree programme.
- The First Nations Partnership Programs are unique in Canada with regard to the extent of community involvement in programme delivery.
- No other programmes provide opportunities to develop capacity through a generated curriculum in which cultural knowledge, community

conditions, and locally articulated goals for children's development figure centrally in what students learn and how they are prepared to take on professional roles as leaders in their own communities.

- The First Nations Partnership Programs are slightly more costly and lengthy than other programmes.
- First Nations Partnership Program outcomes run against the tide of programmes that foster 'brain drain' because students are required to leave their communities, or to study in isolation from them. When students are removed from their communities, either geographically or socially or both, they rarely return to work in their own communities. By contrast, 95% of the students who completed one or two years in the First Nations Partnership Programs remained in their communities after the programme, and most assumed roles in community-based child and family services.

With the exception of community members trained under the Generative Curriculum Model, there is a visible and well-documented lack of First Nations people practising in the field of Early Childhood Care and Development, or—for that matter—in any other field of human services in Canada. This suggests that mainstream post-secondary training programmes have been largely inaccessible or ineffective in supporting the growth of capacity in First Nations, a conclusion that supports the view of the Generative Curriculum Model as a 'Best Practice.'

A recurrent theme emerging from the programme evaluation was the congruence that programme graduates experienced in a training programme that focused on their own community and on its goals for the well-being of children and families, its socio-economic circumstances, and its readiness and strategies for responding to the needs of children and youth. Many students contrasted this with previous experiences in mainstream educational institutions, which they described variously as 'totally white,' 'impractical,' 'culturally contradictory,' 'spiritually bankrupt' and 'foreign.' Because the Generative Curriculum Model adopts a 'both/and' approach that presents euro-western theories and research alongside indigenous traditions, values and practices, the curriculum resonated with the realities of the daily lives of community members.

*The results can be managed locally.* Partner indigenous communities have mounted an array of programmes that meet the needs of young children, generate employment, and enable parents to pursue employment and training. Children's programmes initiated or staffed by programme graduates include:

- Out of home, centre based day-care.
- In home family day-care.
- Aboriginal 'head-start'.
- Cultural programmes.
- Infant development programmes.
- Individualized, supported child care for special needs.
- Indigenous language enhancement programmes.
- Children's programmes in women's safe houses.
- School-based teacher assistance/learning support.
- After-school care programmes.

*Actual and potential advantages of the practice*

The Generative Curriculum Model has had widespread effects on community development through: (a) the focus on children's well-being; (b) the involvement of a broad representation of the community in programme planning and delivery; and (c) revitalization of indigenous knowledge and social forms. The 'ripple effects' of the training programmes are, indeed, the most unique and powerful advantage of Generative Curriculum Model, and have been identified by First Nations participants as, in fact, the 'main effects.'

The use of the Generative Curriculum Model in the First Nations Partnership Programmes demonstrates the increase in cultural pride, social cohesion, and income-generating potential that can be achieved when we open up the way that capacity-building initiatives are conceived and delivered. The Generative Curriculum Model demonstrates one way to honour the knowledge and traditional ways of teaching, learning, and care-giving within indigenous communities, and to combine the strengths of communities and mainstream training institutions.

*Actual or potential negative effects*

Negative effects have not been noted or documented. There are a number of challenges to implementing the model, however. Most importantly, it has been difficult for indigenous communities to raise the funding needed for a

full two-year training programme. Another challenge has been the need for groups of trainees large enough to make programme delivery cost-effective. Communities that have successfully mounted the programme have built bridges with neighbouring indigenous communities to form a consortium, with each community essentially sponsoring places for their community members to enrol in the programme. This consortium approach has had many advantages, especially building social bridges and sharing indigenous knowledge across contiguous cultural groups.

Another challenge to funding has been the preference among many government funding programmes for short-term training ranging from two weeks to six months, rather than the two years of full-time involvement required in the First Nations Partnership Programs. Variations in the use of the Generative Curriculum Model are possible, including shorter training. However, the First Nations partners who have initiated programmes have specifically sought training that is comprehensive, university-accredited, 'career-laddered', and spread over a sufficient time period for trainees and other participating community members to undergo significant personal change.

*How the practice could be developed or improved*

The programme is already built upon the principle of giving simultaneous consideration to indigenous and euro-western knowledge. Improvements do not appear to be called for in the Generative Curriculum Model itself. Its application in various delivery modes and settings should be explored and documented, however. This could involve a series of workshops, courses on the Internet, or perhaps a master's degree programme to develop leadership capacities among aboriginal community members.

**Source of inspiration**

The practice would be rather easy to transfer to other places although some adaptations might be necessary. Throughout the world, cultural groups are seeking ways to ensure the survival, revival, or re-envisioning of their cultural beliefs, values, and practices, while at the same time ensuring that their community members have access to and are prepared to work in the dominant culture settings. The Generative Curriculum Model is an approach to building on indigenous knowledge to create capacity in a variety of settings around the world across a range of subjects, especially in areas of social/human service and education.

A key prerequisite for use of the model is that the community itself initiate the programme delivery and select the trainees. This provides a foundation for social inclusion in the teaching and learning process, and the likelihood that sources of indigenous knowledge can be tapped for the co-construction of culturally sustaining, community-appropriate models for social policy and human service practices.

In many settings, especially outside North America, there is not the same strong desire for university-accredited training or for professional career-laddering. This is not a requirement of the Generative Curriculum Model, but it would be a change from the demonstration projects conducted with First Nations partners in Canada to date.

An adaptation of the Generative Curriculum Model is currently being piloted in an innovative programme in Sub-Saharan Africa. Called the Early Childhood Development Virtual University (ECDVU), this is capacity-building designed to help meet the urgent need for ECCD leadership and ECCD development in Africa ([www.ecdvu.org](http://www.ecdvu.org)). The programme retains the Generative Curriculum Model's focus on the co-construction of concepts and practices relevant to child well-being in local cultural ecologies through the consideration of both indigenous and euro-western knowledge sources. Similarly, it is assumed that everyone has knowledge and experience that embodies their culture of origin and contemporary cultural identity, and that this knowledge is important for informing dialogue and decision-making pertaining to policies and programmes for children. Participants are both learners and teachers. Participants also consult with holders of indigenous knowledge in their own communities, and bring this information to the cohort of programme participants. The ECDVU differs from the use of the Generative Curriculum Model in First Nations in Canada in that the ECDVU combines distributed learning methods, including face-to-face seminars, web-based study and cohort interaction, CD-Rom and video-conferencing.

Some evidence of the impacts of the Generative Curriculum Model is apparent in recent changes that certain Canadian post-secondary institutions have made in their approach to meeting the training needs of indigenous community members. In fields ranging from community health to forest resource management, there have been significant increases in the community-based delivery of programmes, in flexible admissions policies,

and in willingness to consider indigenous knowledge. Although less common, there have also been a few recent examples of successful inter-generational participation and incorporation of indigenous languages.

If you think that this case could be useful in a different context than the one described here, please get in touch first with the contact person listed below (Administrative data). Intellectual property rights could be an issue.

### **Additional remarks and information**

Culture is not static. Therefore the incorporation of IK into policies and programmes should not be construed merely as a process of ‘transmission.’ Rather, culture is embodied in processes of communication, and the meaning and value of cultural knowledge and practices are always being reinterpreted within cultural communities, implicitly and explicitly, individually and in dialogue. Thus, encouraging a recognition of the value of indigenous knowledge should be understood as valuing the social process of knowledge transmission and the ongoing social construction of individual and group identities. Individuals creatively and selectively recall, use, and shape both the accumulated wisdom and traditions of their culture of origin and the process of their own enculturation (i.e., of their own valuing, learning about, interpreting, and reproduction of that culture perhaps in traditional or in new, hybridised forms). For this reason—in strategies of poverty alleviation, income generation, and other social development initiatives—encouragement should be given to emphasizing the ‘generation of indigenous knowledge’ or the ‘social reconstruction of indigenous knowledge,’ rather than the ‘transmission of indigenous knowledge.’

Additional documentation about the practice:

- Booklet of research findings: First Nations Partnership Programs: Generative Curriculum Model.
- Short evaluation research report: Program Evaluation Summary.
- Booklet of short programme examples: Children are our Future.
- Article expanding on implementation: Two sides of an eagle’s feathers.
- Article expanding on partnership processes: It takes a village...and new roads to get there.

## **Administrative data**

### *Organizations involved*

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### *Contact person*

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### *First Nations partners in Canada*

Cowichan Tribes  
Little Shuswap Indian Band  
Meadow Lake Tribal Council  
Mount Currie First Nation  
Nzen'man' Child and Family Services  
Onion Lake First Nation  
Tl'azt'en Nation  
Treaty 8 Tribal Association

### *Partner training institutions in Canada*

Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology  
Nicola Valley Institute of Technology  
Malaspina University College



### *Funding*

The average cost of delivering a two-year, full-time programme in a community has been CAD 500,000. The programme consists of two years of full-time course work plus one year of pre-programme preparation and six months of post-programme follow-up.

The sources of funding are variable. First Nations communities typically receive funds for post-secondary education from provincial governments, funds for special projects targeting child health and well-being, and for aboriginal employment and training from the federal government, and funds from charitable foundations.

The university-based project team has received funding for course development and programme evaluation from:

- Human Resources Development Canada, Employability and Social Partnerships Branch.
- The Lawson Foundation.
- The Vancouver Foundation.

### *Person(s) who have described this Best Practice*

Jessica Ball, Co-Coordinator, First Nations Partnership Programs (as above)