

# Indigenous ways of knowing: The early learning perspective <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

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## Excerpt from Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Frameworks

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

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

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

Flights idea/concept of places of vitality, "when you engage in a practice of relationships, you create places of vitality. . . with children as mighty learners and citizens—and their families. . . Places of vitality are strong, active, and energetic communities" (Makovichuk, et al., 2014, p. 50). It is also important to remember what Indigenous families look like, as they may not be your typical nuclear family. "For Indigenous people, family includes the most immediate members of the child's environment—mothers, fathers, and siblings—but equally includes aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, family established by kinship systems and other members of the community with whom the child is in contact" (Guilfoyle et al., 2010, p. 69).

Within Flight's well-being and belonging section "children and their families have the right to experience social recognition and

acceptance, and to see themselves reflected in their learning communities. Learning requires secure and consistent relationships, the affirmation of social and cultural practices, and opportunities to form connections with new people and places” (Makovichuk, et al., 2014, p. 50). In connection to Flight’s belonging is The Winnipeg Boldness Project’s belonging (2017), which states “Belonging is a feeling that one is connected to and supported by a community and knowing one’s place within the community. Belonging is feeling loved and being accepted for who you are. . . Belonging is a feeling of reciprocity and responsibility within a community. For many, connection to culture and land are a critical sense of belonging” (p. 7). When comparing Flight, Alberta’s Early Learning and Child Care Framework and Indigenous ways of knowing and being, the similarities are abundant. The holistic child, the practice of relationships, and the sense of belonging are all connected and can be accomplished with the same practices. Learning requires that adults treat children with respect, show compassion, and honour established relationships while encouraging new ones (Makovichuk, et al., 2014, p. 93). In Indigenous culture a strong identity is crucial for all children to help them build that strong, capable, sense of self and to be proud of who they are and where they come from. While child development refers to the whole child, including their health, education and culture, the most important aspect of development for Indigenous children is their identity. “Secure identity formation, which contributes to the child’s overall wellbeing, is dependent on the inclusion of culture and tradition, as well as the inclusion of the development of their spiritual, emotional, social and physical aspect” (Guilfoyle et al., 2010, p. 69). The IELCCF (2018) “provides a guide for communities, program administrators, service providers, policy makers and governments to work towards achieving a shared vision that all Indigenous children have the opportunity to experience high quality, culturally strong ELCC”. Flight (2014), talks about cultural, economic and gender diversity. “When inclusiveness and equity are practiced, children come to appreciate their physical characteristics and their gendered, racialized, linguistic and cultural identities. They become sensitive to the effects of poverty and begin to contribute to local and global initiatives that address it” (Makovichuk, 2014, p. 111). This is speaking for all cultures and ethnicities and can be relevant for Indigenous communities as well. They also give suggestions on how to be inclusive and equitable and their suggestions are “local museums, places of worship, soup kitchens, shelters, small business, farms, small factories” (Makovichuk, 2014, p. 111). In Alberta there are many museums that tell the history of First Nations people such as The Glenbow Museum and the Tsuu T’ina Culture Museum. Books are also another great way to learn about history.

**Region:** Alberta <sup>[4]</sup>

**Tags:** Indigenous <sup>[5]</sup>

curriculum and pedagogy <sup>[6]</sup>

culture <sup>[7]</sup>

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