

DEVELOPING CULTURALLY SPECIFIC CURRICULUM:  
SUPPORTING ABORIGINAL EARLY LEARNERS

by

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### **Abstract**

This graduating paper explores a selection of scholarly articles about Aboriginal early childhood education in Canada with specific focus made on enriching ecological systems theory with Aboriginal epistemological concepts of Spirit, Heart, Mind, and Body as a foundation for the construction of a culturally specific early learning curriculum. The specific themes encountered are: Eurocentric education and assessment used as cultural suppression, the need for early childhood education to support Aboriginal children in both dominant and traditional contexts (Spirit), local community driven curriculum development and Heritage language instruction and support (Heart), and the importance of a culturally based Indigenous pedagogy and epistemology (Mind/Body). The author concludes that based upon this review it is vitally important for the success of Aboriginal children and communities that individual Aboriginal communities and Nations develop a culturally specific early learning curriculum.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this capstone project is to peruse the relevant literature with the aim of developing guidelines for creating culturally specific curricula that would link theory and practice in ways that support Aboriginal early learners, their families, and their communities. Greenwood, de Leeuw, & Fraser (2007) suggest that “Aboriginal early learning is a site of politicized potential for transformative change that may benefit communities and Nations” (p. 5). When Aboriginal communities develop their own early learning curriculum using the Indigenous concepts of Spirit, Heart, Mind, and Body, they will be continuing down the path of transformative change to empower and support their community.

In this paper, *Aboriginal early learners* refers to children from birth through age 8 who have First Nation, Métis, or Inuit heritage (National Aboriginal Health Organization, n.d.). *Early learning curriculum* refers to all aspects of programming, environment, and philosophy of an early learning centre (Shipley, 2013).

My motivation to embark on this project is related to the fact that I have been teaching a cohort of First Nation students in the Early Childhood Education (ECE) diploma program at Bow Valley College in Calgary, Alberta. The students have experience working at, and intend to return to work in, the early learning centres on their reserve when they have completed the ECE diploma program. The students identified that the early learning centres on the Nations’ territory did not have a specific curriculum that they followed and there was very little of the Nations’ traditional culture practiced in the centres. Another aspect of the personal connection to this project is the information shared by my maternal grandfather, that I have an undocumented Métis

background. This knowledge has been a powerful tool for change in my own professional, personal, and academic path.

As an educator of adult Aboriginal students in the field of ECE, I centred my capstone project on the following research question: In what way can post secondary institutions best support and prepare Aboriginal students to work in the early learning centres on their Nations and support Aboriginal children to be successful in both their own cultural context and the dominant cultural context?

### **Theoretical framework**

Bronfenbrenner's *ecological systems theory* is a framework for describing how the interactions and relationships between individuals, others, and the different contexts that they operate in affect human development. This theory advances the notion that children operate and learn in many interconnected contexts and that learning is socially and culturally mediated (Barab & Wolff, 2006; Bowler, Annan, & Mentis, 2007; Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Swick & Williams, 2006). While ecological systems theory is valuable for my project because of its focus on relationality, I recognize that it is a Western-European construct, and therefore, is less attentive to Aboriginal cultural-contextual elements, such as spirituality. In this paper, I argue that Bronfenbrenner's theory can be enriched by incorporating the Aboriginal concepts of Spirit, Mind, Heart, and Body, and that the combined worldviews of Indigenous and dominant culture can inform curriculum development to support Aboriginal early learners. Infusing ecological systems theory with Aboriginal epistemology provides a useful holistic framework for use when approaching the development of a culturally specific Aboriginal early learning curriculum.

## **Aboriginal Worldview**

Aboriginal worldview is circular, holistic and child-centred. There is great respect for the interrelatedness of all things and this affects everything else (Ledoux, 2006). Traditional Aboriginal teaching is informal with children observing, interacting and learning from the adults, particularly, the Elders of their community, in their natural environment (Ledoux, 2006). As noted by Preston, Cottrell, Pelletier, and Pearce (2012), “a child’s healthy development is dependent upon multiple intersecting and overlapping influences of families, peers, schools, and neighbourhoods” (p. 6). Therefore, when developing curriculum to support Aboriginal early learners, all cultural, and I would add spiritual, contexts need to be considered.

*Aboriginal epistemology* is the ways of understanding and knowing from an Indigenous perspective and an Aboriginal pedagogy would be the art and science of teaching from an Indigenous perspective (Anuik, Battiste, & George, 2010). In an Aboriginal worldview everything is interrelated. Traditional Aboriginal epistemology emphasizes holistic views of knowledge and learning incorporating the Spirit, Heart, Mind, and Body. We are connected with each other and everything around us through circular, holistic, and relationship-based connections (Curwen Doige, 2003; Hare, 2012; Preston et al., 2012; Munroe, Borden, Orr, Toney, & Meader, 2013; Rowan, 2009).

I will use this holistic framework as a foundation for developing guidelines that would link theory and practice in ways that support Aboriginal early learners, their families, and their communities.

### **Overview of Chapters**

In Chapter One, I explained the purpose, rationale, and theoretical framework of this capstone project. In Chapter two, I will further expand on ecological systems theory and how it relates to an Aboriginal epistemology of Spirit, Mind, Heart, and Body through an examination of research in these areas. In Chapter Three, I will explore the implications from the research literature and suggest guidelines to utilize when developing a curriculum framework that supports Aboriginal early learners. In Chapter Four, I will summarize the findings of this research project.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this chapter, I present the theories and scholarly resources that ground my study of developing culturally specific curriculum for Aboriginal early learners. I begin with discussing the connections between Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and an Aboriginal worldview, and I continue by exploring Aboriginal epistemology and pedagogy as a foundation for curriculum that supports the learning of young Aboriginal children.

When viewed from an Indigenous perspective, Ecological Systems theory is a framework that aligns and supports an Aboriginal worldview of connectedness and collectivism based on the Spirit, Heart, Mind, and Body (Ball & Pence, 2006; George, 2003). Aboriginal epistemology enriches ecological systems theory and these worldviews are a strong foundation from which to engage a community to ensure that curriculum development is supporting and engaging all of the contexts of community, family, and individuals (Ball & Pence, 2006). This connection is prefaced with the understanding that ecological systems theory is a Western-European education theory; and that there is no universal Aboriginal epistemology or pedagogy, but rather a focus on viewing knowledges and learning from a holistic place (Curwen Doige, 2003; Gamlin, 2003; Hart, 2010; Munroe et al., 2013; Preston et al., 2012).

### **Ecological Systems Theory**

According to Bronfenbrenner (1977), child development is a phenomenon that occurs within a matrix of interrelated contexts. In his ecological systems theory he posited that the child's ecology is made up of five interrelated systems or contexts. The microsystem consists of the immediate environment surrounding the child, such as their family. The exosystem is the specific psychological system that includes the child's close relationships. The macrosystem is

the larger system of beliefs and values that are held by the community and that support the family and individual. The mesosystem is the network of relationships that exist between individuals and the varied contexts they live within. The chronosystem is the historical framing of the relationships and contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Swick & Williams, 2006). Children learn from their sociocultural experiences and interactions with others, therefore, viewing curriculum from a sociocultural systems approach, such as ecological systems theory, is a sound approach (Ball & Pence, 2006). However, ecological systems theory does not explicitly incorporate aspects of Aboriginal epistemology such as Spirit, Heart, Mind, and Body. This chapter elaborates on the idea of enriching ecological systems theory with Aboriginal epistemology.

In the following sections, I infuse Bronfenbrenner's aforementioned five interrelated contexts with meanings that are relevant to Indigenous perspectives. This reconfiguration of the ecological systems theory will support me in creating guidelines for curriculum development that are supportive of an Indigenous worldview.

### **A Background of Residential Schooling as the Chronosystem**

From an Indigenous perspective, the chronosystem represents the influence of the oppressive history of the residential school system in Canada. As Greenwood et al. (2007) suggest, "The lives of Indigenous children in Canada are guided and formed in many ways by historic colonial factors, by intergenerational traits, and by current socioeconomic and demographic elements experienced by Aboriginal peoples" (p. 5). The recent history of education for Aboriginal people in Canada has seen Western-European educational theory and practice being imposed on Aboriginal people. The oppressive history of the residential school

system in Canada has been well documented by government records, scholars, and residential school survivors (Antone, 2003; Anuik et al., 2010; Curwin Doige, 2003; Greenwood et al., 2007; Hatcher, 2012; Ledoux, 2006; Nguyen, 2011; Preston et al., 2012). Preston et al. (2012) indicate that Western-European constructs are still the primary format for education instruction in Canada. Despite numerous Canadian provinces developing early learning curriculum frameworks, an early learning framework developed from an Indigenous perspective is missing from the Canadian landscape (Anuik et. al, 2010; Preston et. al, 2012). A number of scholars who have studied Indigenous education in Canada indicate that the current educational system does not always respect the cultural, value, historical, language, or knowledge differences between Western-European thought and Aboriginal ways of being and knowing (Anuik et al., 2010; Cooke-Dallin, Rosborough, & Underwood, 2000; Hart, 2010; Hatcher, 2012; Hongyan, 2012; Ledoux, 2006). Scholars studying the history of education in Canada for Aboriginal students believe that the mainstream education system in Canada represents the dominant societal assumption that their education models and knowledge are superior to Aboriginal education models and knowledge, when in fact, they are just one of many ways of knowing (Cooke-Dallin et al., 2000; Hart, 2010; Hatcher, 2012; Ledoux, 2006; Preston et al., 2012; Rowan, 2009; Stairs & Bernhard, 2002).

The prevalence of dominant culture curriculum practices being used in Indigenous settings represents individuals assigning subjective value to a particular cultural practice. This value is formed by an individual's cultural context and therefore does not indicate best practice for all cultures (Matusov, DePalma, & Drye, 2007). Many scholars indicate that contemporary Canadian educational practice frequently pushes aside traditional Aboriginal child rearing practices and Aboriginal ways of knowing, as well as interaction with the physical and spiritual

world, continuing the history of cultural suppression (Cooke-Dallin et al., 2000; Greenwood et al., 2007; Ledoux, 2006; Matusov et al., 2007; Nguyen, 2011). Matusov et al. highlight the problematic contemporary education situation when they state: “Educational stakeholders are involved in a dialogue about what constitute educational values and priorities that in their own turn define development. This dialogue may take the form of ‘cultural wars’ about values or the form of collaboration...” (2007, p. 418).

Indigenous scholars indicate that Western-European curriculum and the associated teaching styles are relevant to Aboriginal students and communities as far as they will support these communities to be successful in the dominant societal context (Ball & Pence, 2006). However, Ball and Pence’s (2006) research in early childhood education in Aboriginal communities, indicate that contemporary educational practices do not always support Aboriginal communities in their efforts to be successful in their own cultural contexts. Recognition of the harmful past and current colonial aspects of public education demonstrates that there is a need for the development of a uniquely Aboriginal curriculum (Anuik et al., 2010; Ball, 2009; Cooke-Dallin et al., 2000; Hatcher, 2012) - a curriculum that respects and honours Aboriginal ways of knowing and being. The chronosystem from an Indigenous perspective, then, represents the historical influences on the education of Aboriginal children in Canada. Hatcher (2012) indicates that this educational system has had the effect of suppressing Aboriginal ways of being and knowing when she states: “it is time to honour Indigenous knowledge which is unfiltered through the Western lens” (p. 347).

### **Context-Specific Education: Spirit as the Macrosystem.**

When viewed from an Indigenous perspective, the macrosystem or larger system of cultural beliefs of a society, can be framed as the context-specific education of Spirit. The definition of Spirit as it relates to an Aboriginal theory of knowledge is defined by Lynda Curwen Doige (2003) as "...refer(ing) to the immaterial aspect of one's personhood that connects with *otherness*, including for some a life force or immanence, especially the Creator, or God" (p. 144). Curwen Doige elaborates further by explaining that spirituality is a way of considering and connecting with the human part of all of us and what guides our choices and decision making (see also Antone, 2000; and Anuik et al., 2010).

Aboriginal scholars indicate that Spirit is that which connects us to all else in our world, both material and immaterial. Spirit guides us to make ethical choices and decisions based on the interconnectedness of everything and the relationships that we have with all things (Antone, 2000; Anuik et al., 2010; Curwen Doige, 2003; George, 2003). Spirit is a connection between "morals, values, and learning (which is) fundamental to Aboriginal identity" (Curwen Doige, 2003, p. 146). The role of early learning programs is to support children, families, and communities as they operate in the world around them. Indigenous children live in multiple cultural contexts, and for these children, Spirit is the connection amongst and between these worlds (Greenwood, 2006; Hongyan, 2012; Preston et al., 2012).

Cooke-Dallin et al. (2000) and Hatcher (2012) have shown that Aboriginal children have a unique challenge as they live in two frequently overlapping worlds, the dominant (Western-European) culture and their own (traditional) culture. Each of these cultures have their own required contextual learning. Sociocultural scholars Barab and Wolff (2006) and Munroe et al.

(2013) demonstrate that all of these varied contextual paths are necessary for the sociocultural success of the child. The macrosystem for Aboriginal learners is made up of the cultural, political, and societal values held by the dominant culture as well as their own community culture (Spirit), two frequently divergent contexts. Scholars of both Indigenous education and sociocultural theory believe that in order to support Aboriginal learners, curriculum development must engage both contexts and support the values necessary to live in both worlds (Greenwood, 2006; Hatcher, 2012; Munroe et al., 2013; Preston et al., 2012; Swick & Williams, 2006).

### **Curriculum: Heart as the Mesosystem.**

When viewed from an Indigenous perspective, Heart and the mesosystem are about being in relationship with others; the power held by communities working together (Anuik et al, 2010). Scholars of Indigenous early learning propose that when we recognize the multiple contexts that Aboriginal children must operate within, we see that for Aboriginal children, families, and communities, Aboriginal knowledge is equally important as Western-European knowledge (Anuik et al., 2010; Cooke-Dallin et al., 2000; Hatcher, 2012; Hongyan, 2012; Munroe et al., 2013; Preston et al., 2012; Rowan, 2009). The traditional holders of Aboriginal knowledge are the Elders and respected family members of the individual communities. When we frame this view of knowledge and teaching within ecological systems theory, we see the importance of these respected Elders and community members in helping to design the curriculum (Anuik et al., 2010; Cooke-Dallin et al., 2000; Greenwood, 2006; Hatcher, 2012; Munroe et al., 2013; Preston et al., 2012; Rowan, 2009).

Antone (2003), Curwen Doige (2003), Munroe et al. (2013), and George (2003) see Heart from an Aboriginal epistemological perspective as relating to the emotional aspect of perception

and action -- making connections. Aboriginal knowledge is not about individuals, instead it is about relationships. Therefore, I frame the community development of the curriculum as Heart and see it as the mesosystem. Antone (2000) indicates that when thinking about Heart and the connection to social awareness and relationship skills, we recognize "... the importance of (Aboriginal students) having a positive self-identity in (their) own traditions to be able to exercise (their) voice in the concerns of (their) people" (p. 95). For children to be able to have social awareness it is necessary that they understand who they are in their community. This knowledge helps them build and exercise the relationship skills necessary to function successfully within their community.

Anuik et al. (2010) demonstrate the importance for Aboriginal children to listen to the Elders, family, and community members as they operate "...within a network of social relations where all are connected by mutual respect" (p. 67), as this connection and understanding is the essence of Heart. Scholars of Aboriginal early learning indicate that when children develop their connection to Heart, they are developing social awareness and learning the relationship skills necessary to operate in both cultural worlds. Furthering the idea of interconnected systems and a holistic perspective to learning, we understand that emotions give power to children and sustain the relationships which support them (Anuik et al., 2010; Curwen Doige, 2003; Munroe et al., 2013). Anuik et al. (2010), Baydala, Rasmussen, Birch, Sherman, Wikman, Charchun, Kennedy, and Bisanz (2009) as well as Curwen Doige (2003), suggest that supporting the Heart by embedding learning in individual Aboriginal culture builds respect for that culture and a sense of belonging. This furthers the goals of building social awareness and relationship as children learn culturally relevant leadership and communication skills from the adults in their community and then become role models for each other.

**Indigenous Pedagogy and Epistemology: Mind/Body as the Microsystem/Exosystem.**

The microsystem is a person's most immediate environment, often the family. The exosystem is defined as the psychological systems that we experience in our lives in relation to others (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Swick & Williams, 2006). Curwen Doige (2003), Hart (2010), and Munroe et al. (2013) demonstrate that the definition of Mind from an Aboriginal epistemological perspective relates to children being able to connect their skills and knowledge to their values and experiences. Thereby creating understanding about their thoughts, attitudes and beliefs. I frame the microsystem/exosystem from Indigenous pedagogy and Aboriginal ways of knowing as Mind/Body. Anuik et al. (2010) and Baydala et al. (2009) find that the definition of Body from an Aboriginal epistemological perspective relates to confidence and self-efficacy, an understanding of who you are and how you behave, which is grounded in your culture and community. The need for children to know themselves underscores the value of "instill(ing) a sense of pride in learners' heritage, language, kinship ties, and nation" (Anuik et al., 2010, p. 78). Antone (2000) believes that without a strong cultural and community foundation, and a strong sense of self, there cannot be confidence and self-efficacy. As Antone states, "The Aboriginal voice is lifted up when traditional knowledge and values are incorporated into the education of the Native students in the school system. To be in balance one must have a positive self-identity" (p. 99). In other words, children need to connect their learning in a holistic way in order to manage their thoughts, and themselves. Children need to be fully connected to who they are in order to make informed choices about how they will live.

Indigenous scholars speak of the Mind as the arena in which we take all of our perceptions and observations, the connections we have experienced and think about and how they fit with each other. The Mind is where we make conscious decisions about how we are

going to act based on the experiences we have had, the connections that we feel, and the cultural arena that we are operating in (Anuik et al., 2010; Cooke-Dallin et al, 2000; Hatcher, 2012; Munroe et al., 2013; Preston et. al., 2012). Aboriginal ways of knowing are "...acquired through a creative, participatory involvement with Mother Earth. There is an inherent trust in the learner and an intimate relationship between the learner and the knowledge" (Hatcher, 2012, p. 346). In Aboriginal culture there is a strong storytelling tradition. Knowledge is transmitted orally and this is how Elders and families guide children. Traditionally, information, stories, and cultural teachings are transmitted by Elders across generations through storytelling and the demonstration of actions or ways of being in a particular context (Anuik et al., 2010; Cooke-Dallin et al, 2000; Hatcher, 2012; Munroe et al., 2013; Preston et. al., 2012). Cooke-Dallin et al. (2000) argue that, "Valuing traditional knowledge by making it central to the educational program is valuing the students' life experiences" (p. 88). Valuing life experiences is giving value to the microsystem – the family (Body), and the exosystem – the relationality (Mind) central to Aboriginal children.

### **Summary of Chapter Two**

In this chapter, I illustrated through a literature review how ecological systems theory enriched with Aboriginal epistemology of Spirit, Heart, Mind, and Body creates a framework that provides a strong foundation from which to engage a community in developing early learning curriculum in support of, and in the contexts of history, relationship, values, community, family, and children. In the next chapter, I will explore the implications from the research literature and suggest guidelines to utilize when developing a curriculum framework that supports Aboriginal early learners.

### **CHAPTER THREE: CONNECTIONS TO PRACTICE**

The review of the research literature has demonstrated that there are concrete steps that can be undertaken by an Indigenous community as they work to develop a culturally specific early learning curriculum to be used in their early learning centres. This chapter will include the suggested guidelines for consideration by Aboriginal communities and post-secondary institutions in partnership with Aboriginal communities, when developing a curriculum framework to support Aboriginal early learners as they navigate both the dominant culture and their own culture.

As argued throughout this paper, Western-European education models and theory have been and continue to be the main framework upon which public education is based in Canada. This framework is in place for most public education including the education and assessment of young Aboriginal children in Canada (Anuik et al., 2010; Preston et al., 2012; Stairs & Bernhard, 2002). The Western-European education system does not take into account the cultural, historical, lingual, and epistemological differences between Western-European thought and traditional Aboriginal ways of being and knowing (Ledoux, 2006). Recent efforts to modify curriculum by adding Aboriginal content to educational programs has not altered the pedagogical and epistemological system upon which the curriculum is based (Preston et. al, 2012). Thus, the resulting curriculum and the inherent teaching styles and assessment methods are not relevant to Aboriginal students and it is very difficult to thrive in a system in which one cannot see oneself and one's worldview reflected (Ball, 2009; Ledoux, 2006; Stairs & Bernhard, 2002).

Considering the conclusions drawn from the literature review, as well as the experiences of the Aboriginal students in the diploma Early Childhood Education program, it is critical that

Indigenous communities develop their own culturally specific early learning curriculum to be used in their early learning centres.

### **Guidelines for Early Learning Programs that Support Aboriginal Early Learners**

The following are implications from my study that will provide the foundation for a presentation that will be shared with my colleagues at Bow Valley College and the Stoney Nakoda First Nations with the purpose of supporting efforts to co-construct curriculum for use in Aboriginal early learning centres. I propose that these guidelines could also be used to develop post-secondary curriculum for adult Aboriginal students. The presentation (see Appendix A) will outline the main areas for consideration when developing an early learning curriculum that supports Aboriginal learners, families, and communities as it is framed upon Indigenous concepts of Spirit, Heart, Mind and Body.

#### **Guideline 1 – supporting Spirit: curriculum to support Aboriginal children in dominant culture and traditional culture contexts**

As a Western-European educated post-secondary instructor, I found myself wondering how I could connect with the students whom I was going to be teaching. I am a “subject matter expert” in the field of early childhood education practices as understood from the dominant culture perspective. My students are “subject matter experts” in Stoney Nakoda culture. Together we began to develop guiding questions that would support the students and I as we travelled our two-year educational journey at Nakoda College. The students in the ECE diploma program in which I taught, expressed a desire for their children to be knowledgeable and successful in working both on and off Reserve. Success was defined by this group as the ability to live and work as they chose in the dominant culture arena as well as to sustain traditional

culture in their own community. They expressed their desire that their Nation's children be able to find a job in the city, but also to participate in traditional cultural events and speak their traditional language as the language of communication in their community. The students viewed the education of their children as an opportunity to support them in their understanding and acquisition of the skills necessary to operate in both dominant Western-European and traditional Stoney Nakoda culture.

*Acquiring the cultural, political, and social concepts, or the Spirit* (as discussed in Chapter Two) from the communities and families of the children we are teaching and supporting as well as an understanding of the cultural, political, and social concepts of the dominant culture will facilitate the children's ability to operate in both cultural contexts (Ball & Pence, 2006; Greenwood, 2006; Hongyan, 2012; Preston et al., 2012). Spirit connects us to our worlds and guides us in our actions (Antone, 200; Anuik et al., 2010; Curwen Doige, 2003; George, 2003). By involving the community in curriculum development and inviting Elders and community members who have experience and knowledge of both dominant culture and traditional culture into the classroom we are ensuring that early learning curriculum supports community cultural practices and supports Aboriginal children in both dominant culture and their own traditional culture, thus supporting Spirit.

The reflection questions that the ECE diploma cohort used to explore and support this guideline were to ask themselves, "What is it about our beliefs, values, traditions, *our culture* that we would like to pass along to our children?" "What is important for our children to know, to be able to do, to experience?" "*What is Spirit?*" When we actually looked at the answers to these questions that we had discussed and documented, we were able to begin to explore ways in which we could include all of our answers in the curriculum we were creating and learning

together. Lessons for this guideline can be drawn from the research project of a partnership between the University of Victoria, Malaspina University-College, and the Cowichan Tribes as they worked collaboratively to develop a child and youth care training program that would “...ensure that [Cowichan] culture would be reflected in the structure of children’s services...” (Ball & Pence, 2006, p. 28).

Indigenous children should be supported to function as they choose in the world in which they live. Spirit, the system of cultural beliefs of a society, would be infused throughout all of the contexts that Aboriginal early learners operate within. Curriculum developers ensure that they are supporting Spirit across contexts as they create curriculum. The role of early learning programs is to participate in the healthy development of children and families and to support them in their efforts to reach their potential. For Aboriginal children and families, this involves supporting and teaching their cultural beliefs and traditions (Ball & Pence, 2006; Preston et. al., 2012). The education of Aboriginal children cannot be approached by a focus on preparing them solely from a Western-European perspective or solely from an Aboriginal perspective. Curriculum developers can ensure that we are merging the two worlds in our curriculum design, supporting the cultural and political knowledge necessary for Aboriginal children to live as they choose in both worlds (Ledoux, 2006). When developing an Aboriginal early learning curriculum, Aboriginal communities and post-secondary institutions can ensure that we are acquiring the cultural practices or Spirit from the communities and families of the children we are going to be teaching (Ball, 2009). Placing Aboriginal heritage and ways of knowing and learning as the foundation for building an Aboriginal early learning curriculum “...should help young Aboriginal students emerge as confident individuals who recognize that they are valued” (Hongyan, 2012, p. 54).

## **Guideline 2 - supporting Heart: local, community driven curriculum development**

Indigenous students and community members that I spoke with talked about how the most useful and well-attended community programs were the ones that the community members decided upon and designed for themselves. They know what their community wants and needs. The holders of Aboriginal knowledge are likely not university researchers and Boards of Education, but rather they are the Elders and family members of the communities the programs are being designed to serve. As discussed in Chapter Two, *the network of relationships amongst Elders and community members is Heart*. Guided by the 2006 study by Ball and Pence, I worked together with the diploma cohort that I instructed to co-create the curriculum that we used for the two-year early childhood education program. I brought my knowledge of Western-European early childhood education practices and theory, while the students, Elders, and community members brought their knowledge and theory of traditional Stoney Nakoda childhood education practices. We blended these cultural practices in order to find an interwoven practice for our ECE diploma group.

The questions for reflection for this guideline flow directly from the experiences the class had with the previous reflection questions about including valued elements from both Stoney Nakoda and dominant culture. Questions asked during the exploration of this guideline were: “What are the relationships that are important to you, to your culture?” “Who carries knowledge in your community?” “*What is Heart?*” These questions flowed naturally from the group. As we explored the answers we found that we needed to expand our knowledge pool to include experts from the community. At this point we began to invite respected Elders and Nation members as well as subject matter experts from the dominant culture in to our space to share their expertise. The possibilities of working with the local community in such a way is exemplified in Caroline

Rowan's research that involved the community of Inukjuak, Nunavik as they co-developed with her a curriculum for Inuit children that draws its knowledge and experience from the Elders and community members (Rowan, 2009).

Taking the importance of a culturally relevant early learning curriculum and grounding it in ecological systems theory viewed from an Aboriginal perspective, we see the importance of community driven curriculum development. Heart from an Aboriginal perspective is about being in relationship with others, with your community, with your family, with the land (Anuik et al., 2010; Ledoux, 2006). It is critical that an Aboriginal early learning curriculum be designed by the Aboriginal community whose children will be attending the child care centres (Ledoux, 2006; Hongyan, 2012; Stairs & Bernhard, 2002). Further to this thought, the evaluation of any early learning programming must also be designed by the community to further their own understanding and to ensure that it is culturally relevant and sustainable (Stairs & Bernhard, 2002). Having the community develop culturally relevant early learning curriculum will support and strengthen community and family relationships, supporting Heart.

### **Guideline 3 - supporting Heart: heritage language as oral tradition**

Communication on the Nation is in Stoney Nakoda, the Nations' traditional heritage language. My students stressed the importance of learning from their Elders and other respected community members. The teachings in their culture are passed on through the generations orally. This ability to communicate amongst generation and community members support the relationship - it supports Heart. When Elders JR and Pauline came into the classroom, the smudge, blessing, and teaching was in Stoney Nakoda. One of the successes of the child care programs on the Nation is that the educators are all Nation members and they speak Stoney

Nakoda to the children. A thoughtful and culturally relevant early learning curriculum will support the retention and transmission of traditional culture through the use of traditional heritage language. Aboriginal tradition is an oral tradition. Information, stories, and cultural teachings are transmitted across generations through oral language. This means children need to know their heritage language in order to learn their community's beliefs, values, and culture. Supporting children in the acquisition of their traditional, historic language will support communication across generations and the formation of a positive cultural identity. This will help prepare children to be successful and literate in both of their worlds (Anuik et al, 2010; Ball, 2009; Curwen Doige, 2003; Gamlin, 2003).

The questions for reflection for this guideline further explored Heart: the relationship between language, communication, and students' experiences with their own Stoney Nakoda culture and dominant culture. We asked ourselves: "What languages do you want your children to communicate in? Why?" "What special ways of knowing and being are shared through the Stoney Nakoda language?" "What special ways of knowing and being are shared through the English language?" "How is language tied to relationships, history, culture, and place?" "*How is language Heart?*" The answers to these questions clearly demonstrated the need for a strong Heritage language program. There are no Stoney Nakoda books in the library and none in the child care centres on the Nation. After exploring our guiding questions, the students decided to create children's books in Stoney Nakoda. This became a major undertaking in our literacy course as students focused their attention on sharing traditional Stoney Nakoda stories and knowledge in their own language. We ended the course with nineteen Stoney Nakoda children's books.

Heritage language instruction and support is essential to Heart (Anuik et al., 2010; Curwen Doige, 2003; Munroe et al., 2013). It will help prepare children to be literate in both of their worlds. It is also important to note that approaches to assessment should develop from the learning and teaching traditions of Aboriginal peoples with a strong oral tradition. With this in mind, assessment should rely heavily on an anecdotal or storytelling approach (Stairs & Bernhard, 2002). “Being literate is about sustaining a particular world view and about the survival of a distinct and vital culture” (Gamlin, 2003, p. 16). It is important to design a curriculum that supports Heritage language acquisition because this is how culture is transmitted and sustained. Indigenous children’s identity is found in Aboriginal epistemology, culturally relevant early learning curriculum will support the retention and transmission of traditional culture and support Indigenous children’s notion of self (Greenwood, 2006). Including Heritage language instruction in early learning curriculum design supports Heart.

#### **Guideline 4 - supporting Mind/Body: culturally based Indigenous pedagogy and epistemology**

The students in the ECE diploma program expressed concern that the children are losing the traditional knowledge and cultural practices. They worry that their culture and language is disappearing because the traditional practices and language are not being consistently passed along. Curriculum can develop from the learning and teaching traditions (pedagogy) and the ways of being and knowing (epistemology) of the community - this is Mind and Body (Gamlin, 2003, Greenwood, 2006; Nguyen, 2011). In my students’ opinion, a successful early learning curriculum that supports Stoney Nakoda learners would be based upon an Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy.

The questions for reflection that were used as the class navigated this guideline were by far the most challenging part of the process as we had to reflect deeply on our own personal experiences with our cultures. We asked ourselves: “How do you learn in your culture?” “What are the ways that you demonstrate knowledge in your culture?” “Who transmits or teaches in your culture?” “How do these teachers, teach?” “*What is Mind and Body from your cultural perspective?*” This generated rich discussion and we were able to generate many different ways of teaching and learning and being and knowing that were specific to both Stoney Nakoda culture (such as teaching transmitted by Elders through storytelling) and dominant culture (such as asking questions of a teacher). This guideline connects with Ningwakwe Priscilla George and her work with the Rainbow/Holistic approach to Indigenous education that frames teaching and knowing from an Aboriginal perspective that includes Spirit, Heart, Mind, and Body. In her work, different ways of teaching focus on using literacy as a way to transmit Indigenous ways of knowing, and building a positive cultural identity (George, 2003).

Indigenous pedagogy and epistemology are holistic, representing the Aboriginal concept of Mind and Body (Curwen Doige, 2003; Hart, 2010; Munroe et al., 2013). Mind is the thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs of an individual and community. Body is the understanding, action, and connection to culture, community, and the land (Anuik et al., 2010; Baydala et al., 2009). There is a strong oral tradition of consulting respected Elders and community members for guidance and teaching (Ledoux, 2006). Drawing on these same respected Elders and community members when developing specific pedagogical strategies for use in the early learning setting will support an Indigenous pedagogy that involves interpreting past and present experiences from an Aboriginal perspective. This approach honours traditional values while living these values in contemporary times (Gamlin, 2003; Nguyen, 2011). An Indigenous

pedagogy is crucial for the ongoing preservation and continued growth of Aboriginal educators and children's cultural identity because children need to understand and be connected to their culture, community, and land (Greenwood, 2006). Grounding curriculum development in Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy will support Mind/Body.

### **Summary of Chapter Three**

In this chapter, I have used the information gathered from the literature review to create guidelines that can be used by Aboriginal communities and post-secondary institutions to develop culturally specific early learning curriculum grounded in the Indigenous concepts of Spirit, Heart, Mind, and Body. I argue that it is the Aboriginal communities that have the history, context, language, traditions, and knowledge required to design and administer early learning programs that support Aboriginal children and youth in both their own culture and the dominant culture. To this end, culturally specific curriculum needs to be community-driven, developed and managed by the community; include Heritage language instruction and support; and be guided by Indigenous pedagogy and epistemology.

In the next chapter, I will present my conclusions, recommendations for future research, the project limitations, and next steps.

## CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSIONS

In this capstone project, I explored possible guidelines for developing culturally specific early learning curricula for Aboriginal early learners for a community to follow when they develop their own early learning curriculum. Based on current research in the field of Aboriginal education and early childhood education, I grounded these guidelines in ecological systems theory enriched with the Indigenous epistemological concepts of Spirit, Heart, Mind, and Body. Overwhelmingly, it has become apparent that the development of Aboriginal early learning curriculum must come from within the community itself. As the Assembly of First Nations (1998) states,

Education is one of the most important issues in the struggle for self-government and must contribute towards the objective of self-government. First Nations' governments have the right to exercise their authority in all areas of First Nations education. Until First Nations' education institutions are recognized and controlled by First Nations' governments, no real First Nation education exists. The essential principles are that each First Nation government should make its own decisions and arguments and apply its own values and standards rather than having them imposed from outside.

Aboriginal children live in two worlds, the dominant culture and their own culture. We can ensure that we are supporting these children to participate as they choose in both cultural worlds by following the guidelines of supporting Spirit, Heart, Mind, and Body (Ball & Pence, 2006; George, 2003; Ledoux, 2006). When enriched with Indigenous concepts, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory presents a model that is well suited to support the co-construction of a culturally specific early learning curriculum.

## **Reflections**

I no longer teach the cohort of Aboriginal students that were the impetus for this paper and presentation, they graduated with their ECE diploma and have moved out into their community to support their Nation's children. I have moved into a new role at the College and will be using the information gathered from this project to present recommendations to the College as we move forward and deliver education services to Indigenous students and communities. It is my hope that we will use the guidelines contained within this project to begin to co-create curriculum with the students in the ECE programs at the main campus as well as using the guidelines in our regional site-specific delivery.

As I reflect on my experiences teaching this cohort of students and the process of creating this capstone project, I find that I have a much greater ability and desire to think critically and to challenge the dominant discourse of Western European early childhood education practices being the best practices for all people and cultures. I now approach early childhood education practices and discussions I encounter with the questions "What would I change? And Why?" "How does this practice support this child, this community, this family?" I hope that the research and guidelines found within this graduating paper will provide an opportunity for educators and administrators in the field of early childhood education to effect positive change in the field in both practice and theory.

## **Future Research**

Due to the end of the program delivery, the students and I were unable to put our guidelines into practice in the early learning centres. While these guidelines were very supportive for our own co-construction of curriculum, a further study would involve a

## Supporting Aboriginal Early Learners

partnership between the College, early childhood educators, Elders, and community members experimenting with the guidelines in the development of early learning curriculum for Indigenous children in early learning centres. I hope to share this research paper with the community of Morley, Alberta as a step in the direction of creating a culturally-specific early learning curriculum for and by the community.

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## Appendix A



School of Health, Justice,  
and Human Services

### CONSENT FOR USE OF PERSONAL IMAGE, COMMENTS & RELATED INFORMATION

This form is designed for you to give authorization to the Early Learning and Child Care Program at Bow Valley College to use your (or your child's) personal image, comments and other related information for educational purposes. Your (or your child's) personal image, comments and related information will be used in a manner consistent with the privacy provisions of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Your consent is voluntary and can be revoked at any time. If you have any questions regarding the use of this personal information, please contact the practicum placement assistant for the Early Learning and Child Care Program at 403 410-1777.

**I authorize Bow Valley College to use:**

- my personal image / my child's personal image**
- my comments / my child's comments and other related information for educational purposes.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Child's Name (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian's Name (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Do you give permission for your name (or your child's name) to accompany your personal image, comments or other related information?      Yes       No

## Appendix B

### Slide 1



Hello and thank you for inviting me to speak today. My name is Cheryl Kinzel and I am the Program Coordinator of Early Learning and Child Care and Education Assistant in the School of Health, Justice, and Human Services at Bow Valley College in Calgary, Alberta.

I was invited here today to present about a paper that I wrote as part of the requirements for my Master's degree in Early Childhood Education through the University of British Columbia.

I have an English, Irish, Swiss, French, and Métis ancestry, knowledge of which was shared with me by my maternal grandfather Victor Monette. This knowledge has significantly impacted the direction and focus of my professional, personal, and academic career.

## Supporting Aboriginal Early Learners

I have spent the past two years teaching the Early Learning and Child Care diploma program to a cohort of 20 First Nation students on their land. This experience has prompted me along with the students I was teaching to wonder about early learning curriculum and more specifically about early learning curriculum development for Aboriginal learners, both adults and children, although this presentation will focus specifically on curriculum development for Aboriginal early learners.

This presentation represents a distilled version of my efforts at researching, from an Aboriginal perspective, supportive practices in the development of Aboriginal early childhood programming embedded in ecological systems theory enriched by the Indigenous concepts of Spirit, Heart, Mind, and Body.

I will briefly outline the theoretical framing of my work, then present the recent Canadian background of education development for Aboriginal learners, discuss the importance of the early years to Indigenous people of Canada, then move into a description of the 4 main guidelines when developing culturally specific early learning curriculum for Aboriginal children, and finally, bring together the considerations in my conclusion.

So, here we go: Supporting Aboriginal Early Learners

**Slide 2**

**Ecological Systems Theory enriched with  
Indigenous Epistemology**

Chronosystem = Background of  
Residential Schooling System

Macrosystem = Spirit

Mesosystem = Heart

Microsystem and Exosystem =  
Mind and Body

EST and Spirit, Heart, Mind, and Body

Bronfenbrenner's *ecological systems theory* is a framework for describing how the interactions and relationships between individuals, others, and the different contexts that they operate in affect human development. This theory advances the notion that children operate and learn in many interconnected contexts and that learning is socially and culturally mediated (Barab & Wolff, 2006; Bowler, Annan, & Mentis, 2007; Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Swick & Williams, 2006). While ecological systems theory is valuable for my project because of its focus on relationality, I recognize that it is a Western-European construct, and therefore, is less attentive to Aboriginal cultural-contextual elements, such as spirituality.

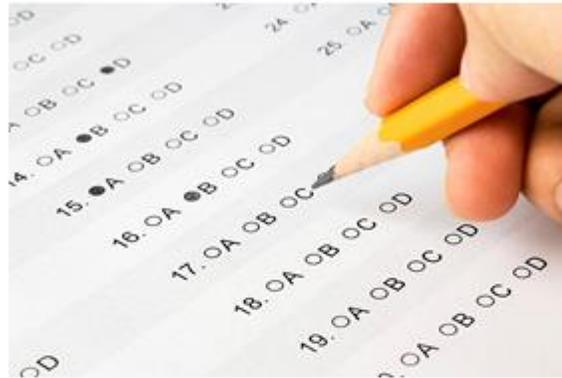
In Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory he posited that the child's ecology is made up of five interrelated systems or contexts. The microsystem consists of the immediate environment

surrounding the child, such as their family. The exosystem is the specific psychological system that includes the child's close relationships. The macrosystem is the larger system of beliefs and values that are held by the community and that support the family and individual. The mesosystem is the network of relationships that exist between individuals and the varied contexts they live within. The chronosystem is the historical framing of the relationships and contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Swick & Williams, 2006).

*Aboriginal epistemology* is the ways of understanding and knowing from an Indigenous perspective (Anuik, Battiste, & George, 2010). In an Aboriginal worldview everything is interrelated. Traditional Aboriginal epistemology emphasizes holistic views of knowledge and learning incorporating the Spirit, Heart, Mind, and Body.

When viewed from an Indigenous perspective, Ecological Systems theory is a framework which aligns and supports an Aboriginal worldview of connectedness and collectivism based on the Spirit, Heart, Mind, and Body (Ball & Pence, 2006; George, 2003). Aboriginal epistemology enriches Ecological Systems theory and these worldviews are a strong foundation from which to engage a community to ensure that curriculum development is supporting and engaging all of the contexts of community, family, and individuals (Ball & Pence, 2006).

**Slide 3**



**A history of Eurocentric education  
and assessment methods**

The Chronosystem or the background or framing for these recommendations has been a history of Eurocentric education and assessment methods for Aboriginal people in Canada.

The recent history of education for Aboriginal people in Canada has seen Western-European educational theory and practice being imposed on Aboriginal people. The oppressive history of the residential school system in Canada has been well documented by government records, scholars, and residential school survivors (Antone, 2003; Anuik et al., 2010; Curwin Doige, 2003; Greenwood, de Leeuw, & Ngaroimata 2007; Hatcher, 2012; Ledoux, 2006; Nguyen, 2011; Preston, Cottrell, Pelletier, & Pearce, 2012). Preston et al. (2012) indicate that Western-European constructs are still the primary format for education instruction in Canada. Despite numerous Canadian provinces developing early learning curriculum frameworks, an early

learning framework developed from an Indigenous perspective is missing from the Canadian landscape (Anuik et. al, 2010; Preston et. al, 2012).

The chonosystem from an Indigenous perspective, then, represents the historical influences on the education of Aboriginal children in Canada. Hatcher (2012) indicates that this educational system has had the effect of suppressing Aboriginal ways of being and knowing when she states: “it is time to honour Indigenous knowledge which is unfiltered through the Western lens” (p. 347).

Drawing on an example from my experiences on the Stoney Nakoda Nation I noted that many of the students in the Diploma ECE program that I instructed, had very negative school experiences, whether on Reserve or off Reserve. Some of the students in the program had attended residential schools as children. The students voiced their desire to see the education for their own children be different than they experienced.

So that’s the background. Let’s look at what we can do moving forward.

**Slide 4**

**“Aboriginal early learning is a site  
of politicized potential for  
transformative change that may  
benefit communities and Nations”  
(Greenwood, de Leeuw & Fraser,  
2007, p. 5).**

As noted by Preston et al. (2012), “a child’s healthy development is dependent upon multiple intersecting and overlapping influences of families, peers, schools, and neighbourhoods” (p. 6). Therefore, when developing curriculum to support Aboriginal early learners, all cultural, and I would add spiritual, contexts need to be considered.

When Aboriginal communities develop their own early learning curriculum using the Indigenous concepts of Spirit, Heart, Mind, and Body, they will be continuing down the path of transformative change, empowering and supporting their community, their families, and their children.

Slide 5

Supporting Spirit  
Curriculum that supports Aboriginal children in both the  
Dominant and their own cultural context



Image source: "NewZealand" License: "Public Domain" via Wikimedia Commons - <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:NewZealand.jpg>



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Now we move into the 4 main guidelines based on my research.

These are two images I have chosen to represent children's notions of success in both cultures; a soccer game and Pow Wow dancing.

Guideline1 – The Macrosystem - Supporting Spirit

When viewed from an Indigenous perspective, the macrosystem or larger system of cultural beliefs of a society, can be framed as the context-specific education of Spirit. The definition of Spirit as it relates to an Aboriginal theory of knowledge is defined by Lynda Curwen Doige (2003) as "...refer(ing) to the immaterial aspect of one's personhood that connects with *otherness*, including for some a life force or immanence, especially the Creator, or God" (p. 144). Curwen Doige elaborates further by explaining that spirituality is a way of considering and

## Supporting Aboriginal Early Learners

connecting with the human part of all of us and what guides our choices and decision making (see also Antone, 2000; and Anuik et al., 2010).

Using an example from my experiences teaching the cohort of Indigenous students: The students in the Diploma ECE program that I taught, expressed a desire for their children to be knowledgeable and able to work both on and off Reserve. They expressed the desire that their children be able to find a job in the city but also to participate in traditional cultural events and speak their traditional language as this is the language of communication in their community. The students and I took my knowledge of Western-European early childhood practices and theory and their traditional Stoney Nakoda child reading traditions and theory and blended the two as we navigated a way to support the children of the Nation in both cultural contexts.

The role of early learning programs is to support children, families, and communities as they operate in the world around them. Indigenous children live in multiple cultural contexts, and for Indigenous children, Spirit is the connection amongst and between these worlds (Greenwood, 2006; Hongyan, 2012; Preston et al., 2012).

**Slide 6**



Stoney Nakoda KCE Class  
Photos by Cheryl Kinzel

**Supporting Heart**  
**Local, community-developed**  
**curriculum and administration**

This image is a picture of some of the graduates from all 3 Nations (Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wesley) that make up the Stoney Nakoda First Nations.

**Guideline 2 – The Mesosystem - Supporting Heart**

When viewed from an Indigenous perspective, Heart and the mesosystem are about being in relationship with others; the power held by communities working together (Anuik et al, 2010).

When we consider that the traditional holders of Aboriginal knowledge are the Elders and respected family members of the individual communities and framing this view of knowledge and teaching within ecological systems theory, we see the importance of these respected Elders and community members helping to design the curriculum (Anuik et al., 2010; Cooke-Dallin, Rosborough, & Underwood, 2000; Greenwood, 2006; Hatcher, 2012; Munroe, Orr, Toney, Meader, & Borden, 2013; Preston et al., 2012; Rowan, 2009).

## Supporting Aboriginal Early Learners

When speaking with my students and other community members, they spoke about how the most useful and well-attended community programs were the ones that the community members decided upon and designed for themselves, such as youth programming. Community members best know what their community wants and needs.

Anuik et al. (2010) demonstrate the importance for Aboriginal children to listen to the Elders, family, and community members as they operate "...within a network of social relations where all are connected by mutual respect" (p. 67), as this connection and understanding is the essence of Heart.

**Slide 7**



Image courtesy of By Pedro Nao [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

**Supporting Heart**  
**Heritage language as transmitter of**  
**culture**

I have chosen this image to represent the roots of culture, heritage language. Our class was fortunate to have JR Two Young Man, an Elder from Wesley Nation, come with his wife Pauline and speak to our early learning and child care class to share traditional child rearing practices.

**Guideline 3 – The Mesosystem - Supporting Heart**

Aboriginal tradition is an oral tradition. Information, stories, and cultural teachings are transmitted across generations through oral language. This means children need to know their heritage language in order to support their community's beliefs, values, and culture. Supporting children in the acquisition of their traditional, historic language will support communication across generations and the formation of a positive cultural identity. This will help prepare children to be successful and literate in both of their worlds (Anuik et al, 2010; Ball, 2009; Curwen Doige, 2003; Gamlin, 2003).

## Supporting Aboriginal Early Learners

As an example from the experience in Morley Alberta: Most of the communication on the Reserve I taught on is in the Nations' traditional heritage language. When Elders JR and Pauline came into the classroom, the smudge, blessing, and teaching was in Stoney Nakoda. One of the successes of the child care programs on the Nation are that the educators are all Nation members and they speak Stoney Nakoda to the children.

Heart is about being in relationship with others, your community, your family. Supporting the Heart of the children, families, and community would mean that curriculum developers include Heritage language as an integral part of the curriculum as it is a transmitter of culture and the foundation of communication.

**Slide 8**



Supporting Mind/Body  
Culturally-based Indigenous  
Pedagogy and Epistemology

Guideline 4 – The Microsystem and Exosystem - Supporting Mind and Body

Curwen Doige (2003), Hart (2010), and Munroe et al. (2013) demonstrate that the definition of Mind from an Aboriginal epistemological perspective relates to children being able to connect their skills and knowledge to their values and experiences. Thereby creating understanding about their thoughts, attitudes and beliefs.

Anuik et al. (2010) and Baydala, Rasmussen, Birch, Sherman, Wikman, Charchun, Kennedy, & Bisanz, (2009) find that the definition of Body from an Aboriginal epistemological perspective relates to confidence and self-efficacy, an understanding of who you are and how you behave, which is grounded in your culture and community. The need for children to know themselves underscores the value of “instill(ing) a sense of pride in learners’ heritage, language, kinship ties, and nation” (Anuik et al., 2010, p. 78).

## Supporting Aboriginal Early Learners

Drawing on the experiences from the Early Learning and Child Care diploma program: The students in the ECE program expressed concern that their children are losing the traditional knowledge and cultural practices. They worried that their culture and language is disappearing because the traditional practices and language are not being consistently passed along.

Cooke-Dallin et al. (2000) argue that, “Valuing traditional knowledge by making it central to the educational program is valuing the students’ life experiences” (p. 88). Valuing life experiences is giving value to the microsystem – the family (Body), and the exosystem – the relationality (Mind) central to Aboriginal children.

Included in this curriculum would be the knowledge, culture, values, characteristics, and traditions of the community.

**Slide 9**

## Recommendations

- Curriculum that supports success in dominant and traditional cultural contexts
- Local, community-driven curriculum development and management
- Heritage language instruction and support
- Culturally-based Indigenous pedagogy and epistemology

Concluding thoughts:

Based on my research, these are the 4 main guidelines for developing culturally specific early learning curriculum to support Aboriginal early learners.

Guideline 1 - Curriculum that supports success in dominant and traditional contexts. Acquiring the ideas from the communities and families of the children we are going to be teaching will support the students' success in both cultural contexts.

Guideline 2 - Local, community-driven curriculum development and management. It is critical that an Aboriginal early learning curriculum be designed and administered by the Aboriginal community whose children will be attending it.

## Supporting Aboriginal Early Learners

Guideline 3 - Heritage language instruction and support. A thoughtful and culturally relevant early learning curriculum will support the retention and transmission of traditional culture through the use of traditional heritage language.

Guideline 4 - Culturally-based Indigenous pedagogy and epistemology. Aboriginal knowledge and ways of knowing are as important if not more important than Western-European knowledge and ways of knowing when looking at the design and implementation of an education system for Aboriginal children.

Slide 10

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