Summary of Conference Paper: Ball 2002

Title: **The challenge of creating an optimal learning environment in child care: Cross-cultural perspectives**

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Source: Available on the website of Early Childhood Development Intercultural Partnerships.
http://www.ecdip.org/docs/pdf/crosscultpers.pdf

Main questions:

- How can we create and provide culturally suitable, quality programs for First Nations preschool children?
- How can we train and support First Nations caregivers who want to reflect and reproduce their own culture in preschool programs?
- How do we define and measure quality preschool programs for First Nations children?
- How can parents, child care workers, and specialists that belong to different cultures work together to create the quality programs that First Nations children need for positive outcomes?

Background:

- Quality child care programs contribute positively to children's development.
- Many First Nations children do not have access to preschool programs. Many preschool programs do not offer the quality that First Nations children need for positive outcomes.
- All children need access to conditions that support and provide for their best possible development.

Main comments and conclusions:

✓ Parenting and preschool programs, and training for child care providers can conflict with and even undermine parenting approaches and goals for First Nations children.

- ✓ Different families within a culture and different caregivers within a family may want different things for their children. Individual goals and methods within a cultural community can be diverse and complex.

- ✓ Each culture has their own approach to how parents teach their children to speak. They have their own beliefs about how parents communicate with children to learn language. For example, cultures where people believe children 'grow up' tend to encourage children to learn by doing; people don't actively encourage very young children to speak. In contrast, cultures where people believe they 'raise or bring up' children tend to actively encourage them to respond and to talk lots, and in specific ways.

- ✓ Early childhood educators and speech language therapists need cross-cultural skills to help children learn language and literacy skills. They need to be flexible and creative.

- ✓ Guiding principles to create positive, cross-cultural preschool programs based on partnerships with First Nations communities.

  1. Follow the caregiver or community's initiative and form partners for training, assessment, intervention, or research. "It's important to be community-paced as well as community based."

  2. Build and maintain trusting relationships with First Nations community members.

     "We need to begin with establishing a trustable presence, however many weeks or months it takes, and to use that time to observe and listen to the natural flow of interactions in order to pick out some of the features and some of the strengths, of language socialization in the setting or in the community."

Recognize the values of the family and community. Appreciate how people lost their culture, social structure, and self-esteem during colonization; and recognize their ongoing experiences with self-degradation and oppression.

3. Begin with the community and cultures of the children and families, and First Nations child care workers. Use local knowledge and ask the whole community to participate.

   "We can consider what mainstream theories say and, if we choose to believe them and use them in our work, that doesn't make us less Indian. And if we choose to assert the importance of our cultural traditions and ways of raising children, that doesn't make us wrong. This program recognizes and encourages this give and take, pick and choose. It doesn't cage us and expect us to act like Europeans."

4. Focus on strengths. Build on what parents are doing and can do, and what children can do, to support language development.

5. Strengthen existing capacity. Work with parents and child care providers in the home and at centre-based programs. Ensure long-term support, help people rely on themselves and each other, and help protect and maintain the culture.

6. Use a holistic approach. Cultural practices, values, and beliefs about how children develop language are part of the whole.

7. Collaborate - with parents, preschool teachers, other caregivers and services providers to provide culturally appropriate, effective training and early childhood programs. Everyone benefits.

8. Begin with where the caregiver or community is, and where they want to go. This helps service providers, trainers, and researchers to facilitate and assess language and other aspects of children's development.