CHAPTER 3

PROMOTING CAPACITY IN ECD: LEARNING FROM COMMUNITIES

In the first pages of this volume we briefly introduced the First Nations Partnership Programs (FNPP). Indeed, this book and the ideas it explores began with the FNPP. The FNPP was a face-to-face, in-community undergraduate education program that originated through partnerships with Indigenous communities in western Canada. Much of the Early Childhood Development Virtual University (ECDVU) philosophy, approach to curriculum, and emphasis on education in support of promoting community capacity first evolved through partnerships with First Nations. The community development approach of the FNPP proved to be very effective in addressing the broader, country-level initiatives undertaken in the African ECDVU and related activities discussed in subsequent chapters.

First Nations Partnership Programs (1989-2006)

The FNPP originated in 1989, when the Meadow Lake Tribal Council (MLTC) of northern Saskatchewan contacted Alan Pence with a request to partner with the Council in developing a culturally appropriate approach to early years training in their nine communities. That invitation ultimately resulted in 10 partnerships with First Nations organizations between 1990 and 2006, whose successes have been well documented over the years (Pence, Kuehne, Greenwood & Opekokew, 1993; Pence & McCallum, 1994; Ball & Pence, 2002, 2006; see www.fnpp.org for additional references[3]).

The invitation from Meadow Lake followed the Tribal Council's conviction that if they were to develop socially and economically strong communities, they must address the need for child care services "developed, administered, and operated by

[our] own people" (Meadow Lake Tribal Council, 1989). Over the years, the Council had worked with various post-secondary institutions and wished to avoid repeating certain negative experiences, such as 'dead end' certificate and diploma programs that did not ladder into degree programs, culturally inappropriate or insensitive content, and programs that pulled strong community members away from their homes, many of them never to return. While the Council had earlier approached several institutions closer to them, some of which had advertised the availability of an Indigenous early childhood education program, most of these programs had, at their core, very Western construction and content, with a "salting" or veneer of Aboriginal content that typically represented bits of various Aboriginal cultures. None of the programs provided Cree or Dene content that was specific to the Meadow Lake communities, so the Council continued its search.

That search brought them to Pence at the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria, an institution over 2500 kilometres from their communities. In the late 1980s, Pence had been serving as the Canadian representative on a European-based 'reconceptualizing childhood' initiative (Qvortrup et. al., 1987) that had led him to question some of the dominant Western discourses concerning early childhood education (ECE) (see Moss & Pence, 1994). This interest in 'rethinking' ECE made him an 'academic of interest' for MLTC. Pence's initial reaction was that the University of Victoria was an unlikely choice, given the distances involved, the lack of any Indigenous-focused course work at the department at that time, and the more than 13 years that had passed since he had been involved in working with Indigenous communities. But the Executive Director was insistent and felt that funding could be secured, so they agreed to partner in developing the proposal and in creating a different approach than what the Council had initially encountered in their search.

Through a series of meetings in 1990 that included community representatives, university project staff, and several international advisors who were themselves exploring innovative possibilities at the nexus of practice and theory, a respectful and creative approach to partnership and program possibilities evolved. Partners

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[3] The FNPP, like the ECDVU and other initiatives discussed later in the volume, were made possible through small teams of committed individuals working together, both at partner sites and at UVic. For the MLTC Project team based at UVic the commitment of Lynette Jackson and Margo Greenwood at UVic were central to successes achieved. Jessica Ball joined the FNPP in 2004 with the 3rd program delivery and remained to become first the Co-Director, then, for the final several programs, the Director of the FNPP after Pence's work began to focus increasingly on Africa in 2000/2001.

at these meetings decided that the program would be guided not by a detailed blueprint, but by a number of key principles, which included:

- Ongoing community engagement and community initiation;
- An educational and career ladder orientation;
- Appreciation of the need for a broad scope of child and youth services within the communities;
- An 'all-ways' respectful approach to diverse knowledges;
- Adherence to principles of empowerment; and
- An understanding of the child within an ecological context.

The program that evolved was called a "generative curriculum," highlighting the fact that the actual curriculum experienced by the learners would be generated through a process of interaction in which participants engaged dialogically with diverse sources of knowledge, including local knowledge (primarily communicated by Elders), Western knowledge (conveyed mostly through books, course materials, and instructor presentations), and the students' own knowledge and experiences (Pence, Kuehne, Greenwood, & Opekokew, 1993; Pence & McCallum, 1994). Unlike most post-secondary education curriculum, including the course work at the University of Victoria, the FNPP content was neither predetermined nor static, but was instead indeterminate and dynamic. Generative curriculum focuses on stimulating an ever-expanding learning process, rather than the transfer of a pre-formed educational product.

The implementation of the generative curriculum was achieved through an "open architecture," a structure that not only allowed for, but actually required the presence of information and knowledge beyond the typical Western-based ECE curriculum found in most early childhood post-secondary programs. That knowledge was not found in the established texts, nor was it a part of non-community instructors' knowledge base—it came to the students through individuals the community identified as being appropriate knowledge holders. The great majority of these knowledge holders did not have university degrees—indeed, most did not have high school graduation certificates. But what they did have was knowledge gained through experiences in the communities and the respect of community members.

The approach taken was consistent with the wishes of the community to prepare their community members for employment both on and off-reserve. However, its 'outside the box' approach both to what would be deemed suitable knowledge and the range of individuals who would provide that knowledge—

from university-approved instructors to local Elders—was one that Pence wished to pilot before proposing that the program be added to the university calendar. The development process—promoting a non-traditional approach to post-secondary education while embedded within a traditional institution—was a considerable challenge, especially in the academic climate of the time. Years later, as part of a study of an Australian Indigenous post-secondary initiative, Pence had an opportunity to reflect on that process with a senior university administrator and an on-campus Indigenous leader (see Pence, Anglin, & Hunt-Jinnouchi, 2010). Through that work, it was clear that the FNPP was well ahead of its time in addressing Indigenous education, at both pre-primary and post-secondary levels.

The Generative Curriculum Model was piloted at the Meadow Lake Tribal Council from 1990 to 1993 and externally evaluated both by an academically based team (Cook, Marfo, & Tharp, 1993) and an Elder-led evaluation organized by the Council (Jette, 1993). Both evaluations were very positive in their assessments of the program. However, the Elder-led evaluation produced valuable insights into the model's broader impacts on community development. Jette noted that ripple effects resulted from the inclusion of key community members in the generation of the curriculum: "The involvement of the Elders in the Indian Child Care Program ... led to a revitalization of cultural pride and traditional value systems ... It is obvious that their involvement is changing the First Nations communities and the positive impacts being experienced now will continue to benefit the people ..." (1993, p. 59, 60).

The insights gleaned from the two sets of evaluations of the Meadow Lake pilot were critically important when Pence and colleagues responded to subsequent requests from nine other aboriginal communities in western Canada to provide a similar ECD education/training program (these, collectively, are the FNPP). For example, the evaluations showed that the strength and sustainability of the Meadow Lake pilot lay partly in the prior work, analysis, and decision-making that had been undertaken by the Meadow Lake Tribal Council before they contacted the University of Victoria. The roles of this partnership were clear from the beginning. The University was to be a supportive partner in realizing a dream that had come from the Council and the Council would be in the driver's seat in coordinating the initiative, an approach that benefited the community in ways that would not have been possible had the university led the process. Following the Meadow Lake pilot, the FNPP strived to carry this learning into its other partnerships.

For instance, one Indigenous community approached the program in the mid-1990s and indicated that while they would like to provide the courses in their community, they could not identify any Elders who could play a role in providing traditional knowledge. FNPP leaders communicated to the community that this particular educational program did not rely on one "battery" (the university) to power learning, but two: the community with the university. Six months later, the community came forward with two Elders and the program was able to commence. At the graduation event three years later, not only were the students' accomplishments celebrated, so too was the work of the *five* Elders who had shared their knowledge with students during the program delivery period.

The participation of Elders and respected others as knowledge holders and knowledge sharers within the FNPP programs was a key dynamic within the programs. In some communities few of the young people spoke their Indigenous language, so the Elders' words would need to be translated. This situation led some communities to then launch a local language program for the students and for other community members. The challenge of translation was evident at one session attended by Pence, where students asked the Elder to say the mother-tongue word for caregiver. He responded by noting that there was no generic counterpart term—the role of caregiver depended on the relationship between the one receiving and the one providing care. Once the Elder knew that kinship relationship, he could provide the term and also describe what the caregiving could include. Such discussions broadened the knowledge bases of the students, the instructors, the authors, and the broader corpus of ECE knowledge. A graduate of the FNPP captured very well a key part of the philosophy and inspiration for the program when she noted: "Being in this program is like having the best of both worlds. We love to learn what researchers have found out about child development … and we love to learn more about our own culture and how we can use it to help the children of our community." (Lil'wat student evaluation comment).

In the late 1990s, an evaluation of the first seven deliveries of the FNPP revealed that the diploma-level (two-year) completion rates were more than double those of other Indigenous-focused programs offered during the same timeframe: 77% for the FNPP deliveries, versus 40% across all Indigenous post-secondary programs in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2001). In addition, 95% of diploma graduates still lived in their home communities, addressing community retention issues, and approximately 90% had either created a new child program, were serving as staff in an existing program, or were pursuing further education (Ball & Pence, 2001).

The fact that leadership and knowledge generation were rooted in the participating communities was integral to the unprecedented success of the FNPP deliveries. The FNPP programs delivered results at the individual and at the community level. In the words of Marie McCallum, Indian Child Care Program Director: "Because the community was invited into the classroom and the students' learning extended into the community, the impacts of the training were not limited to the student cohort. There was a ripple effect that reached out to all aspects of the way we as a community think and act with respect to young children and families. Everyone was transformed." (McCallum as cited in Jette, 1993)

The FNPP generated positive, transformative experiences for program participants, community members, and the wider socio-cultural ecosystem. The evaluation showed that across FNPP deliveries, the Generative Curriculum Model led to unprecedented educational and vocational outcomes and to personal and community transformations that reached far beyond the classroom. The partnerships created new interpersonal relationships, new ways of relating between cultural communities and mainstream institutions, new ways of teaching and learning, new knowledge, and new or syncretic models for supporting children and families. These outcomes would not have been possible within a mainstream, externally-driven, pre-determined program delivery framework. Across programs, graduates viewed their success not only in terms of their academic achievements, but also in terms of their emerging roles as community advocates and respected resources for their family members and friends.

The evaluation identified the following beneficiaries of the program:

- Community members who become trainees/students in the program were the most immediate beneficiaries.
- Children of the trainees were shown to benefit as a result of their parents' training.
- Parents benefited from organized child care and other support services that helped them to care for their children and that exposed their children to Indigenous culture and language.
- Elders in the communities benefited from having a valued role in the training program, a forum to share their wisdom and experience, and opportunities to forge new relationships with the younger generations in their community.
- Community administrators/organizers benefited from the experience of partnership and the addition of skilled professionals to their community.
- University-based team members benefited from opportunities to build bridges with Indigenous communities, to learn about Indigenous

constructions of childhood, care and development, and to explore new ways of making post-secondary education and training relevant, accessible, and sustaining of Indigenous cultures.

The evaluation also identified five antecedent conditions that enabled the teaching and learning processes that led to these successful outcomes:

- Partnership, especially the reciprocal guided participation of willing community and institutional partners;
- Community-based delivery that enabled community inclusion in all phases of program planning, delivery, and refinement;
- Student cohort involvement in their own professional development;
- Open architecture of curriculum that required community input ("two batteries"); and
- Community facilitation of cultural input in curriculum (typically through Elders and other respected instructors, some teaching in the Indigenous language).

Participant accounts suggested that the combined effects of these conditions accounted for the partnerships' success. Together, these conditions enabled the cultural fit and social inclusiveness of the training process and curriculum content. In turn, the training program resulted in outcomes that were consistent with community goals. In contrast to the colonial presumption of knowing what is best for Indigenous people, the FNPP model assumed that First Nations communities themselves were in the best position to define their communities' goals for their children and families.

The First Nations communities' enthusiasm for the generative approach led to partnerships not only with the tribal communities (over 50 communities and 10 tribal organizations), but also with three colleges that were geographically closer to the communities. Two of the three colleges continue to offer the two-year program, now decades beyond the initial partnership, with the colleges having had full access to the curriculum, philosophy and implementation dynamics that lay behind it. The Saskatchewan Indian Institute for Technology (SIIT) reached an additional five tribal councils in that province, in some cases with multiple deliveries, and Malaspina College (now Vancouver Island University) has a similar long-term record of deliveries in British Columbia. In brief, the FNPP offered an alternative to mainstream post-secondary education and development assistance that could be adapted to other education programs and capacity-promoting initiatives in many human services settings in Canada—and, as will be seen in the following chapters, in other parts of the world as well.

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