



ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

Early Childhood Education in First Nations Communities The Impact of UNDRIP

"We believe that Aboriginal parents and Aboriginal communities must have the opportunity to implement their vision of education. Aboriginal children are entitled to learn and achieve in an environment that supports their development as whole individuals. They need to value their heritage and identity in planning for the future. Education programs, carefully designed and implemented with parental involvement, can prepare Aboriginal children to participate in two worlds with a choice of futures. Aboriginal people should expect equity of results from education in Canada. This will not happen if the education system continues unchanged. For significant change to occur, Aboriginal people must have the authority to organize their own education and to influence how their children are educated."
- Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Volume 3, Chapter 5, 1.5

The first four years of life are the most sensitive periods of brain development and the time in which foundations for cognitive, physical, emotional, social, and language development are solidified.

Investments in ECE generate long-term, positive returns. The benefits include: social and economic benefits, enhanced well-being, enhanced learning outcomes, poverty reduction, increased intergenerational social mobility, higher female labour market participation and gender equality, reduced costs for social services and opportunities for social and economic development. If properly supported, they are an excellent avenue to teach and reinforce First Nations languages, customs, traditions, heritage and protocols.

It is our vision that all First Nations infants, children, and their families have full access to safe, quality, community-controlled, culturally-based and language enriching comprehensive seamless Early Childhood Development (ECD) programs within an integrated First Nations ECD system, that supports families, ensures the holistic development of children, reduces disparities, improves developmental outcomes and helps all First Nations children to have the strongest possible start in life.



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UNRIP "represents, for all First Nations in the world, the results of more than 20 years of effort with the objective of specifying and enforcing their rights, including rights in education."

Chief Picard, AFNQL

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)

HISTORY

- Began work by the UN in 1985
- The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was adopted by the General Assembly on Thursday, 13 September 2007, by a majority of 144 states in favour, 4 votes against (Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States)
- In May 2016 Canada officially removed its objector status to UNDRIP, almost a decade after it was adopted by the General Assembly.

WHAT IS UNDRIP?

- The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People is the result of long struggles of Indigenous peoples for the recognition of their rights.
- The Declaration sets out the individual and collective rights of indigenous peoples, as well as their rights to culture, identity, language, employment, health, education and other issues.
- It also "emphasizes the rights of indigenous peoples to maintain and strengthen their own institutions, cultures and traditions, and to pursue their development in keeping with their own needs and aspirations".[6]
- It "prohibits discrimination against indigenous peoples", and it "promotes their full and effective participation in all matters that concern them and their right to remain distinct and to pursue their own visions of economic and social development".[6][7]
- The goal of the Declaration is to encourage countries to work alongside indigenous peoples to solve global issues, like development, multicultural democracy and decentralization.[8]



ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

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- According to Article 31, there is a major emphasis that the indigenous peoples will be able to protect their cultural heritage and other aspects of their culture and tradition, which is extremely important in preserving their heritage.

WHAT HAS UNDRIP DONE FOR OUR PEOPLE?

- These efforts have resulted in a monumental shift in the global will to protect the rights, culture, language, dignity and well-being of Indigenous people worldwide.
- "No relationship is more important to me and to Canada than the one with Indigenous peoples. It is time for a renewed relationship with Indigenous peoples based on recognition of rights, respect, cooperation and partnership." (Justin Trudeau speaking to Assembly of First Nations Dec 2015)
- Justin Trudeau wrote to Minister Bennette stating: "To support the work of reconciliation, and continue the necessary process of truth telling and healing, work with provinces and territories, and with First Nations, the Métis Nation, and Inuit, to implement recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, starting with the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples."
- Justin Trudeau also instructed Minister Bennette to "Work with the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development to launch consultations with provinces and territories and Indigenous Peoples on a National Early Learning and Childcare Framework as a first step towards delivering affordable, high-quality, flexible and fully inclusive child care".

UNDRIP ARTICLES

- 46 Articles in UNDRIP – describes Indigenous rights and actions that 'States' must take to protect these rights
- EDUCATION Articles 11(1)(2), 12(1), 13(1), 14(1)(2)(3), 21(1)(2), 31(1)

The Need for Services

- The First Nation population in Canada (53.2% of the total Indigenous population) is young with a median age of 25 years
- Young Indigenous women are over 4 times more likely to be teenage mothers than non-Indigenous women and Indigenous children and more than



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twice as likely to live in a lone-parent family as compared to non-Indigenous Canadians

- 67% (of 430) First Nations communities reported having licensed child care within their communitiesⁱ
- 78% of the total proportion of children aged 0 to 5 years do not have access to licensed child care services in First Nations communitiesⁱⁱ
- ECE opportunities are critical for providing a strong foundation on which to build healthy and confident First Nations individuals that succeed in life

Program Support

Early childhood education initiatives are supported by First Nations' inherent and treaty rights, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Currently ECE initiatives are supported by: Health Canada, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC), INAC and the Public Health Agency of Canada. Some child care programs are provincially licensed

Adequate support for the delivery of quality ECE programs in First Nations communities, require, at minimum, the following components:

- program design and delivery to train early childhood professionals,
- development of standards and regulations,
- funding for students to obtain early childhood credentials,
- infrastructure, operation and maintenance for the provision of licensed services in all First Nations communities,
- family and home support services,
- wages and benefit packages comparable to ECE professionals off reserve with annual cost of living increments,
- support for curriculum development in which language and culture is embedded,
- support for integrated service delivery models i.e. schools, health, family services,
- support for the design and implementation of cultural relevant assessment tools, and



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- on-going professional learning opportunities to address the unique needs of First Nations children and their families.

Models that facilitate a holistic approach to education i.e. First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model (CCL, 2007) are essential. Accessible, adequately funded, culturally specific, collaborative models will obtain optimum results.

First Nations face challenges not only securing adequate support for ECE but responding to regional variations in approaches.

Recognition of the right of First Nations to design, develop and deliver in early childhood education, along with adequate and sustainable funding is necessary to support access by all First Nations children to linguistic and culturally relevant early childhood education programs. Access to ECE programs will help close the gap in educational attainment between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples and to support success later in life.

Sources, References, and Further Readings

1. *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, 1996
2. *Honouring the Truth and Reconciliation for the Future*, 2015
3. *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, 2008
4. *First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model*, Canadian Council on Learning, 2007
5. *Code of Ethics*, College of Early Childhood Educators, Ontario, 2011
6. *Standards of Practice*, College of Early Childhood Educators, Ontario, 2011