

Indigenous and International Inspirations:

Understanding the Needs of Indigenous Children and Parents/Caregivers in Amiskwaciy Waskahikanis (Edmonton)

Introduction:

Tibetha Kemble (Stonechild) is the Senior Manager, Indigenous Relations and Supports at NorQuest College in Edmonton, Alberta. In her presentation, [available here](#), Kemble discusses an important research project she undertook for the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care titled [Indigenous Early Learning and Care in the City of Edmonton: Articulating the experiences, perspectives and needs of Indigenous parents/caregivers](#). The project was sparked by the Edmonton Mayor's Task Force on Poverty declaring affordable and quality child care as one of six "[game changers](#)" for the role it can play in redressing the vast overrepresentation of Indigenous families and children who live in poverty. It is well known and understood that intentional, well-funded, and well-designed early childhood education and care (ECEC) programs can have a positive impact on the life trajectories of excluded and marginalized populations. The research project was informed by principles of social accountability, the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) and the right to self-determination and autonomy of Indigenous peoples. The intent was to amplify the needs and experiences of the families and children most impacted by ECEC policy, along with a desire to enact systemic change.

Overview of project:

Edmonton/Amiskwaciy Waskahikanis is located on the prairie lands of Treaty 6 Territory, a traditional gathering place of many Indigenous peoples. To honour and respect Indigenous ways of sharing knowledge, a Talking Circle approach was adopted once a blessing and guidance for the project had been received from Elders from the [EndPovertyEdmonton](#) Indigenous Circle. The Talking Circles included Indigenous parents and caregivers as well as non-Indigenous ECEC staff and administrators. Efforts were made to ensure that the project followed the 4 R's of Indigenous Engaged Research: respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility ([Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991/2001](#)).

Ten themes emerged from the six Talking Circles that were held between late winter 2018 and early spring 2019. Kemble highlighted three of the themes in her presentation:

1) The findings from the project present considerable hope and opportunity for creating systemic change, but also remind us that the Indigenous families who participated experienced the ever-present risk of child welfare involvement. This indicates the need to examine the ways, knowingly or unknowingly, that the ECEC sector is complicit in ongoing cycles of oppression and dispossession. Specifically, **the perception and reporting of "neglect" by ECEC educators to child welfare authorities is a practice that needs troubling.**

2) **Families also desired more Indigenous ECEC educators to act as cultural brokers**, both to share Indigenous ways of knowing and being with their children, and as a protective factor. Participants believed that Indigenous educators' understanding of the legacy of colonialism and the lived experience of families would help reduce the likelihood of child welfare intervention and shape culturally safe care and relationships for themselves and their children. They noted the need for more in-service and pre-service educational opportunities for educators as well.

3) An ECEC model that included a service delivery hub was recommended. Participants wanted more than a transactional exchange. Rather, they envisioned **a whole community approach with wrap-around services including food, housing, and mental health supports, so family needs could be addressed holistically.**

Narratives: Considerations for system building

- **Relationality and commitment:** commit to effect change in your own sphere of influence, continue to do this work “in a good way”, and in a way that respects the mantra “nothing about us without us”.
- **Situatedness and contextuality:** adopt localized and community driven approaches that are imbued in awareness of the historical context of residential schools, 60’s scoop, millennial scoop, and their lingering impacts and legacy and take into account the lived realities of Indigenous children and families.
- **A future dream:** Self-determined system change that includes adequate funding and culturally grounded service delivery models can help redress the ongoing impacts of colonization and faithfully address the recommendations from the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada](#), including Indigenous workforce development to increase representation and provide culturally safe relationships and curriculum.

Inspirations for Pan-Canadian ECEC systems:

There is a long history in Canada of research *on* Indigenous peoples that has resulted in inaccurate conclusions and inferences, leading to largely symbolic responses to the pre-supposed needs of Indigenous peoples. These responses have failed to address systemic issues like access, affordability, or the impacts of colonization in ECEC. Therefore, caution is urged in creating a new “system” so that it does not perpetuate and mimic the flaws in the current colonial approach that relies on the oppression of others, for example, by being unresponsive and out of reach for many Indigenous families.

While many recommendations in the [full report](#) have wide pan-Canadian applicability, in this brief we highlight the first goal: to “indigenize early childhood spaces and places.” This will entail “creating spaces that are culturally safe, culturally responsive, and trauma-informed to better meet the needs of Indigenous parents and their children.” ECEC spaces will also have to be adapted “to be reflective of Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and to create a daily curriculum that weaves in Indigenous culture, traditions, and perspectives.” This is only a start to building a system of ECEC that is responsive to the needs of Indigenous children and their families.

Kemble's work connects to the [Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework](#), which is a co-developed distinction based framework that outlines values, principles and priorities that could act as a foundation for the creation of a universal system of ECEC in Canada that is high quality and culturally rooted.

“To raise a generation of children that never have to recover from their childhoods again”
- Cindy Blackstock

[Access all references](#)

[Learn more about the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada.](#)

Prepared from Tibetha Kemble’s presentation by Tricia Lirette and Laura Doan for

SKETCHING NARRATIVES OF MOVEMENT TOWARDS COMPREHENSIVE AND COMPETENT EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS ACROSS CANADA.

[View presentation](#)

To cite research brief: Kemble, T., Lirette, T., & Doan, L. (2021). *Indigenous and international inspirations: Understanding the needs of Indigenous children and parents/caregivers in Amiskwaciy Waskahikanis (Edmonton)*.

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