



Fast

FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES – MANITOBA

Sept 17, 2018

Indigenous language revitalization and child care

First published on CBC online September 8, 2018

Indigenous peoples have a troubled relationship with the systems that have been imposed by settler colonial populations. The imposition of education through the residential school system was devastating to Indigenous peoples, with the legacy living on in Canada's child welfare system. Part of ending this cycle of the removal of children means providing culturally relevant and quality child care. Quality, affordable, accessible and culturally relevant publicly-funded child care would provide Indigenous families with additional supports while parents advance their educations and obtain meaningful employment.

An innovative way to support Indigenous people's language revitalization movement would be through Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) programs. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) 12th Call to Action directly addresses the need for relevant ELCC programs for Indigenous children. The right to have language-based education programs for Indigenous children is also protected in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous (UNDRIP) People article 14, section 3. It is important to view ELCC programs as a significant part of a child's education and integral to their development.

The federal government is responsible for maintaining a working relationship with Indigenous people in Canada. The federal government is required to fund on-reserve

projects/initiatives/services as many on-reserve families lack licensed child care. Indigenous children experience a gap in access to culturally relevant Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs off-reserve as well. UNDRIP and the TRC's 12th Call to Action mandates the expansion of Indigenous ECE programs as a responsibility of the federal, provincial, and territorial governments wherever there is an Indigenous population in need of child care.

Indigenous languages in Canada have been endangered for decades. Residential schools prevented their students from speaking their native language. 25 Indigenous languages in Canada have less than 500 fluent speakers .

It is important to give children the opportunity to learn another language while in ELCC programming. This is especially important for Indigenous children, as many of their families and those in their community had their languages and cultural practices suppressed by the government, and by extension the education system. Incorporating Indigenous language programming within a child care setting and funding the creation of new programs is an act of reconciliation, offering both children and their families the opportunity to heal.

there is an alternative.

CCPA-MB
205-765 Main St.
Winnipeg, MB
R2W 3N5

phone

(204) 927-3200

email

ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca

website

[www.policyalternatives.ca/
manitoba](http://www.policyalternatives.ca/manitoba)

blog

www.policyfix.ca

twitter

@ccpamb

continued..

Language gives speakers knowledge about their culture, which helps children to develop a sense of belonging through their cultural identity. Children who learn a second language develop better problem-solving skills and better critical thinking skills. The most important way to keep a language alive is teaching younger generations.

In response to aging populations of language speakers, Indigenous peoples in different parts of the world developed 'Language Nests' as their response to the crisis. Language Nests are child care programs where children are exposed to an Indigenous language extensively to create a new generation of fluent speakers to keep the language alive. Language Nests also encourage children's parents to learn the language and use it at home.

There are Indigenous Language Nests around the world and they have been very effective in helping Indigenous peoples to maintain their language(s). In New Zealand in 1982 they began 'Te Kohanga Reo', a child care program geared towards teaching children the Maori language. This program was extremely successful and today there are more than 460 programs in New Zealand. In 1984, Hawaiians began their process of opening up Language Nests, with the first Punana Leo opening up in Kekaha, Kaua'I. In 1983, the number of speakers of Hawaiian was estimated at 1,500. In 2016, 18,400 people older than five spoke Hawaiian at home, the State of Hawaii says. In Canada, there are numerous examples of Indigenous communities implementing full immersion language programming. British Columbia, Ontario, and Mohawk communities within Canada have been very active in developing and providing immersive language-based early childhood education.

While there are Indigenous led child care centres and licensed ELCC programs in Manitoba both on and off-reserve, there are no fully funded language specific programs modeled like the Language Nests being run as an option for parents seeking child care.

Encouraging the federal government to begin offering education incentives to support Indigenous people to work in early childhood education would be a step in the right direction. Offering language-based programs at colleges and universities for free in order to further equip the Indigenous population with the tools they need to run language-based culturally relevant Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) programs would be an act of reconciliation. Providing adequate funding for communities both on and off-reserve to manage Indigenous language-based ELCC programming is important as well. These steps, along with increasing the number of publicly-funded child care spaces to meet the significant demand for child care, would help revitalize Indigenous languages and be a meaningful step towards reconciliation.

***Binesi Boulanger** is a law student at the University of Manitoba and was the summer Childcare Research and Engagement Coordinator at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Manitoba and the Child Care Coalition of Manitoba.*

CCPA-MB
205-765 Main St.
Winnipeg, MB
R2W 3N5

phone
(204) 927-3200

email
ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca

website
www.policyalternatives.ca/
manitoba

blog
www.policyfix.ca

twitter
@ccpamb

References available upon request.