

Integration of Indigenous Culture

January Focus

Elders as Knowledge Keepers and Cultural Advisors

What is Indigenous Pedagogy?

It is a holistic practice of teaching that incorporates Indigenous worldviews throughout all components of our learning environments, including how we interact with children and families, how we develop our daily routines, how we set up our physical spaces, and how we intentionally engage children in learning opportunities. Educators are viewed as active learners and researchers alongside children, and role model looking and listening as part of the learning process.

The world views we will introduce as we proceed through our integration of Indigenous culture include the respect for the environment, animals, and each other, the interconnectedness of all living things, oral traditions, land-based teaching, the appreciation for the wisdom provided by Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Cultural Advisors, and spiritual wellbeing.

Elders as Knowledge Keepers and Cultural Advisors

“In many First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities, Elders keep people connected to each other, their lineage and histories. As Knowledge Keepers, Elders transmit customs and traditional practices that reveal a living culture and help individuals embody a sense of identity.”

https://www.learnalberta.ca/content/aswt/elders/documents/elders_and_the_oral_tradition.pdf



Elders are individuals who have been recognized by their community to hold meaningful and authentic sets of experiences reflective of their Indigenous culture. Their responsibility they proudly uphold is

sharing this traditional knowledge with their community, linking the past to the present, in meaningful ways. Elders are very respected due to their knowledge, their experiences, and their ability to teach. They maintain many titles, including teachers, advisors, counsellors, and healers. While often the case, Elders are not always elderly; they are identified as an Elder based on the traditional knowledge they maintain, how they have shaped their lives in meaningful ways using traditional knowledge, and their ability to be both a good listener and communicator.

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/indigenous-elders-in-canada#:~:text=Elders%20are%20respected%20individuals%20who,%2C%20healers%2C%20advisors%20and%20counsellors>

Activities:

1. Recognizing important “Elders” in my family

- a) Print the word “Elder” on a white board and display to the children. Explain that an “Elder” is a very special person who has learned many important lessons passed down to them from their family and community members and passes these lessons on to others. Elders are also very special because they are great teachers and help others understand the meaning of these lessons. Explain to children that Elders in many Indigenous cultures are referred to as “aunties”, “uncles”, or “grandparents”. Challenge the children to think about their own family members or other important people in their lives. Draw from your own experience to get the discussion started. Ask questions such as:

- Who do you like to spend time with and why?
- What activities have you shared together?
- Have you heard stories about your parents/family members from when they were little?
- Include other questions you may develop.*



- b) Invite children to draw or paint a picture of the person they have identified. Prepare a template ahead of time with a box for the picture, and the following statements below:

- You are important to me because _____.
- I have learned how to _____ from you.
- Help children reflect on these statements and assist in filling in the blanks.*

- c) As an enhanced step, ask family members to provide you with appropriate addresses, and involve the children in mailing these important messages to showcase the value of these important people.

2. Inviting Family Members to Share Experiences

- Set up times for family members to come into your program and share an experience or story with the group, promoting family connections and helping children to recognize the knowledge and wisdom that can be passed down through generations in their own homes.
- If possible, ask family members to provide favourite family recipes and celebrations that feature special food preparations.

Book Suggestion:

"The Sharing Circle" by Theresa "Corky" Larsen-Jonasson



When two red foxes have an argument which breaks apart their community, a gentle buffalo decides to take a braid of sweetgrass to a local Elder and asks her to help with a sharing circle for all the animals. This book introduces the concept of "Elder", while reinforcing the strong communication and teaching skills of these very respected members of the community.