

# **Developing Culturally Sensitive Evaluation and Assessment Tools for Early Childhood Programs**



**Research Report to the  
Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network (2015–2016)**

**Author:**

Linda McDonell

**Researchers:**

Linda McDonell, Danielle Alphonse, and Caitlin Johnston

Vancouver Island University, July 2016

**Acknowledgements**

The Qeq College partners (Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre, School District 68, and the BC Regional Innovation Chair for Aboriginal Early Childhood Development research team at Vancouver Island University) would like to acknowledge the many parents, Elders, community members, early childhood educators, kindergarten teachers, and support workers that contributed to the Qeq College Transition Year program and to the research undertaken for this important project.

Huy ch' qa

Partially Funded by Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network  
and Vancouver Island University Research Grant



# Contents

<b>Background</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Research goals</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Research methods</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Feedback on the evaluation and assessment tools for Qeq College Transition Year</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Summary and reflections</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>22</b>





## Background

Vancouver Island University's BC Regional Innovation Chair for Aboriginal Early Childhood Development (VIU's Chair for AECD), Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre (TLAFC), and School District 68 have collaborated since 2011 to develop and deliver the Qeq College Transition Year, a supportive program for young children and their families who are transitioning from early childhood settings to kindergarten. During the first phase of the project, the focus was on developing a curriculum framework for the Qeq College Transition Year. The curriculum framework was completed in April 2014. The next phase of the project, led by the VIU research team, is to collaboratively develop culturally appropriate, strengths-based child development assessment and program evaluation tools. Eventually, these tools will be shared with other academic and education organizations provincially, nationally, and internationally.

From the beginning, TLAFC recognized the importance of comprehensive and rigorous child assessment and evaluation programs to validate the efficiency and effectiveness of Qeq College. This is to ensure that the curriculum framework aligns well with the cultural values and Aboriginal ways of knowing that are relevant to both the local First Nation communities and the TLAFC community.<sup>1</sup> Aligning content, teaching methods, and assessment tools with cultural values is well supported in Aboriginal Early Child Development literature. For example, it is widely known that:

- Aboriginal children do better when educational environments are rich in the culture and language of their home community (Hare & Anderson, 2010; Nguyen, 2011; Richards, 2008).
- Providing strong connections between the classroom to the child's home, community, and cultural life helps to facilitate a sense of belonging and results in higher school achievement (Tsuruda et al., 2012).

---

<sup>1</sup> All Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre programs are mandated to reflect and respond to a wide range of Aboriginal cultures and traditions from the Vancouver Island communities as well as both provincial and national regions.

- Tools and processes used to assess Aboriginal child development must be culturally appropriate and must involve family and community members, such as Elders, throughout planning, implementation, analysis, and sharing of assessment data (McDonnell & Beaulieu, 2013).

Concerns have been well documented in the research literature about the “goodness of fit” between typical evaluation and child development assessment tools and processes used for mainstream early childhood education programs and those for Aboriginal Early Childhood

Development organizations and First Nations communities (Ball, 2007; McDonnell & Beaulieu, 2013). The project partners have committed to developing evaluation and child development tools and processes that are more reflective of and responsive to the values and traditional ways of knowing of the First Nations/Aboriginal communities. It follows that the partners will share their learning about how to build cultural and traditional practices into their evaluation and child assessment methods with the academic and early childhood development community.

### **Sum'shathut illustration showing the Qeq College Transition Year values**



Illustration by Danielle Alphonse





# Research goals

**The goals of developing culturally sensitive evaluation and assessment tools for the Qeq College Transition Year program (as stated in the proposal) include:**

1. Culturally and community appropriate and validated child assessment strategies and tools for the Qeq College Transition Year program.
2. Culturally and community appropriate and validated program evaluation strategies and tools for the Qeq College Transition Year program.
3. Strengthened community relationships and Aboriginal Early Childhood Development networks across the academic and First Nation/Aboriginal communities.
4. Strengthened First Nations/Aboriginal student research capacity (including both undergraduate and graduate students) in the area of Aboriginal Early Childhood Development research and community development.
5. Increased opportunities for Elders and other First Nations/Aboriginal agencies to work with VIU faculty in areas critical to local First Nation communities.
6. Strengthened opportunities for VIU's Chair for AECD and TLAFC to network and share with VIU faculty, other post secondary institutions in BC (and elsewhere), and First Nations communities and Aboriginal organizations regarding project learnings, research outcomes, community development, and culturally appropriate assessment and evaluation templates for use by a variety of constituent groups.



## Research methods

All methods used in this study were action-oriented, participatory, strengths-focused, and collaborative to ensure research data are used to create and inform innovative and responsive solutions to build high quality and culturally and community-responsive programs. Aboriginal families, Elders, and other community members are a central part of the research process and are involved in research planning, tool development, and analysis and evaluation.

Qualitative methods used include both unstructured and structured interviews and focus group discussions. We used quantitative strategies including survey tools developed specifically for the various stakeholders: parents and families, professional staff (early childhood educators, kindergarten teachers, support workers, and administrators of the three partner organizations (VIU, TLAFC, School District 68)). Participants either answered surveys independently or in a researcher-facilitated interview, depending on the wishes of participants.

We developed survey questions that sought anecdotal and qualitative responses that reflect upon the real life experience of all participants in the program. To help streamline some of the responses and to quantify them, we used Likert scales to provide options for possible responses. In addition, we asked participants to provide explanations to their answers to help us more fully understand their experiences in the program.

All family and Elder participants met with a researcher individually and responded to the survey questions verbally while a researcher input the data. We believed this method would enhance the input of family members and provide a more respectful way (and one which better reflected cultural protocol) to gather perspectives from the Elders.

The administrators met with the researchers as a group twice (once in November 2015 and once in March 2016) to answer questions and provide feedback orally.

### Sample focus group agendas

Focus groups with parents, professional staff, and administrators was a key part of the research. Below are two sample focus group agendas that show the types of questions discussed at focus group sessions.

#### **Qeq College – Creating High Quality Transitions**

##### **Professional & Administrator Focus Group Session July 2015, 2:00–4:00**

###### **1. Introductions**

- a. Name
- b. Your role with the Qeq College project

###### **2. Welcome & overview of session**

- a. What is the Creating High Quality Transitions project?
- b. Who is involved?
- c. What are the hoped for outcomes?
- d. Questions?

###### **3. What you told us in the surveys**

- a. Areas of inquiry for professional & feedback summary
- b. Areas of inquiry for administrators & feedback summary

###### **4. Discussion—Qeq College program**

- a. What stands out for you about the Qeq College Program so far?
- b. What do you want us to do more of?
- c. What do you want us to do less of?
- d. What is missing?
- e. Questions & issues

###### **5. Discussion—Qeq College Evaluation—forms & discussions**

- a. What works?
- b. How can we improve?
- c. Questions & issues

#### **Creating Effective, High Quality Transition Experiences For Young Aboriginal Children & Their Families**

##### **Administrator Focus Group Session November 30, 2015, 3:00–5:00**

###### **1. Elder welcome**

###### **2. Introductions**

###### **3. Welcome & overview of session**

- a. Review a summary of the data collected thus far from both parents and professionals involved with the program
- b. Provide opportunity for you to share some of your perspectives about how the program is going so far and thoughts you may have about some of the ways the program could be improved
- c. Provide opportunity for you to give input regarding the plans for next year related to the program and/or the program evaluation

###### **4. Survey questions**

- a. What jumped out for you about strengths of the Qeq College program?
- b. What jumped out about how the Qeq College program could be improved?
- c. Do you have any recommendations for change based on your feedback?

###### **5. Overview of parent & professional data—Qeq College program**

- a. Summary of professional & parent data
- b. Differences between 2014 & 2015
- c. Recommendations based on parent & professional data

###### **6. Discussion—Qeq College evaluation—forms & discussions**

- a. What are your reactions to the data & recommendations?
- b. What are your thoughts about what is working and potential for improvement?
- c. Questions & issues



## Assessment for learning

The Qeq College survey data are a central part of the efforts to create culturally relevant assessment for learning methods. Assessment for learning was identified as a key approach in the Qeq College curriculum framework as it “offers a tool for continuous reflection while making the learning process visible to teachers, parents, and members of the community” (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998 as quoted in Macdonald, 2006). We believe that this approach can provide strengths-based and holistic ways to guide the evaluation and child development assessment processes as children and families move from early childhood settings into kindergarten and primary programs.

The assessment for learning approach in this study was focused on two aspects:

- 1) The learning that was experienced by the children in the program and how that learning was described, explained, and transmitted to families and kindergarten teachers by the professional staff in the Qeq College summer program.
- 2) The learning from the planning and delivery of the program including:
  - Family outreach.
  - Planning and coordination of the summer program.
  - Training and orientation of professional staff with regard to the Qeq College curriculum.
  - The relationships formed between families, kindergarten teachers, the Qeq College coordinator, and Qeq College Elders—and the ongoing support those relationships provided to children and families.

The assessment for learning approach is expected to provide many opportunities to ensure children, families, and professionals can contribute to advancing the cultural relevance of all aspects of the Qeq College program and inform the

development of the program in ways that are inclusive and meet the needs of the children and families.

## Implications of the evaluation data

The evaluation process played an essential role in gathering feedback from families, Elders, early childhood professionals, support workers, and administrators about the ways in which the program could reflect the family, community, and cultural experiences of the children. It also provided guidance about the ways in which the Qeq College administrators and staff could ensure child assessment processes that were both comfortable and informative for families, Qeq College Elders, professional early childhood staff, and kindergarten teachers. The full evaluation report, *Qeq College Transition Year: Final Evaluation Report (2015–2016)*, reflects on all aspects of the Qeq College program for Year II (2015–2016) of the Creating Quality Transitions for Aboriginal Children and their Families project. The Evaluation Report is available online at [viu.ca/chairaecd](http://viu.ca/chairaecd) in summer 2016.)





## Feedback on the evaluation and assessment tools for Qeq College Transition Year

This research report *Developing Culturally Sensitive Evaluation and Assessment Tools for Early Childhood Programs* focuses on what we learned from the evaluation process and how this has influenced the development of evaluation and assessment tools. It also examines how we have met the research goals described on page 6.

**The work of the project is summarized by the six research goals on the following pages.**

### 1. Culturally and community appropriate and validated child assessment strategies and tools for the Qeq College Transition Year program.

**T**he Qeq College curriculum framework (2014) outlined child assessment for learning strategies and methods, which were developed in collaboration with the community advisory committee. The advisory committee included a First Nation Elder, the TLAFC executive director (also a First Nation Elder), School District 68 director of Aboriginal Education Instruction, kindergarten teachers, early childhood educators, the VIU's Chair for

AECD (a First Nation member of Cowichan Tribes), and members of TLAFC staff.

The intention of the curriculum framework was for teachers/early childhood educators to create a portfolio for each child comprised of photographs and narratives about the child's experiences and related learning during the Qeq College Transition Year program. It was intended that the portfolios would then be shared regularly with the child

and the child's family, Qeq College Elders, and others (as selected by the child's family). Families and others would then share their perspectives about the child's experience or other related home experiences. Instead, the method used was one learning story each week completed for each child by the teachers (in collaboration with children) and presented to parents when they attended the program.

While the curriculum framework outlined the assessment processes in some detail, it became clear during the evaluation process that staff were not provided with sufficient orientation to the Qeq curriculum framework, specifically aspects of the framework that related to the child development assessment for learning processes. While learning stories, which are a key method used in assessment for learning, were used to document child learning and development, they were not used in the comprehensive way the Qeq curriculum framework developers had intended.

### **Comments about the child development assessment**

Some of the key comments about the child development assessment methods that were shared during the evaluation are below.

#### **Parents**

During interviews in August 2015, parents made the following comments:

*"I don't know about the portfolio and haven't seen anything about it (Parent interview, August 2015)."*

*"I haven't seen his portfolio yet. I am looking forward to it."*

*"Maybe the children could bring the portfolio/ scrapbook home each day so even though we're not involved directly we could feel more involved."*

*"[My child] is learning about himself and his portfolio is helping to show how he is doing and*

*what he knows. This will help his teacher know his skills entering kindergarten."*

#### **Elders**

During interviews in September 2015, Elders made the following comment:

*"More regular debriefing [about the children and the program] would help to improve the experience for everyone. We could share the guidance time and consider why did people do what they did and help to fit traditional ways with the staff methods."*

#### **Professional staff**

During the professional staff focus group on August 19, 2015, professional staff made the following comments:

*"Having the portfolio piece [assessment for learning] at the beginning would be helpful so we can start thinking about it before the program. Formalizing the portfolio is important. When we know what to do...well, we can move forward with what needs to be [done]."*

*"It would be good to meet before the program started to get familiar with the higher levels of the program. We could expand what we could do if we had more information up front—be more structured and formalized. If grounded in what the objectives of the program/research are we could do a better job of meeting the objectives and of evaluating the program."*

*"It would be good to meet with the researchers in the training week so we can have an overview of the [larger] project and the objectives for the research aspect of the project."*

*"How can we include children in the research? Parents could be a part of that as well."*

*"Using the portfolio will help to keep parents connected as well...using photos of what is happening and sending them home so children can tell their story about what happened."*



*"If we have a framework ahead of time, we would be able to put information into it in more effective/efficient way. For example learning stories, etc. Have activities planned ahead. Could add new activities to the plan as needed. This way we can build on what kids are doing and learning. We will know what works so can plan better."*

*"Maybe our (staff) debrief can focus more on the individual child and their progress. What happened this year was necessary/helpful but with what we know can strengthen program with regard to individual child development. We could change focus and spend more time on the development so have more information for the receiving teacher."*

### Administrators

During the November 2015 administrator focus group, administrators made the following comments:

*"People did not really seem to understand what The Qeq assessment for learning process was. Training around the assessment for learning portfolios would be helpful. Also being consistent with the language we use would be better. For example, parents seemed unclear about the language used to describe the portfolio and used terms like scrapbook."*

*"The team really needs to formalize and focus on how the children learned, what they learned, and how staff and children were able to showcase the learning to parents. Developing an assessment for learning process that can serve as an ongoing format for evaluation is important."*

*"We could strengthen the process of the assessment portfolio and take a leadership role around integrating portfolio into the program."*

## Ways the VIU research team is improving the assessment for learning process

To ensure the child assessment for learning process is more inclusive and complete, we are planning training sessions as part of the professional orientation prior to the start of school for the Qeq College program in summer 2016. The VIU researchers along with the Qeq College coordinator worked closely with the Qeq College curriculum framework developer to create a two-day training session for all staff, Elders, and researchers. The training will provide opportunities for everyone involved to become more familiar with the Qeq College values, curriculum framework, and the child assessment for learning processes. In keeping with the participatory-action approach, we will ask participants for feedback about the training after they have completed it. We will also give them the opportunity to suggest ways to improve the orientation to the Qeq College curriculum framework.

We also began work in May 2016 to develop child development assessment templates to provide user-friendly approaches to undertake child assessment for learning and to streamline processes for teachers completing the assessment for learning activities. Following the July 2016 training session, the researchers and curriculum developer will work with staff to gather input to ensure these templates are a good fit with both the program and Qeq College teaching objectives. Additionally, in the 2015–2016 evaluation process, we asked for parents' input on the child development methods used. All parents interviewed indicated they were not aware of this aspect of the program and the intent for teachers and other staff to use assessment for learning techniques. As a result, we developed the booklet for families, *Qeq College Transition Year Program*:

*Families, Teachers, and Researchers Supporting Children's Transition to Kindergarten (2016).* We believe this information will accomplish three things:

- Provide a family-friendly introduction to the idea that research is contributing positively to their child's Qeq College experiences.
- Provide parents with information about what they can expect from the child assessment for learning processes.
- Emphasize the importance of family contributions to teachers' understandings about their child's learning and development.



## 2. Culturally and community appropriate and validated program evaluation strategies and tools for the Qeq College Transition Year program.

In addition to gathering information about the Qeq College program and feedback related to the assessment for learning approaches, the evaluation also addressed questions about evaluation strengths and suggestions about ways to improve the evaluation processes. The parent, professional, and administrator focus groups were planned to incorporate feedback on the evaluation process.

### Comments about the evaluation process

Comments from parents, Elders, professional staff, and administrators about the evaluation process are below.

#### Parents

Parents were not asked specific questions about the evaluation process during their interview. While we intended that those questions would be asked as part of the parent focus group session, only two parents attended the focus group session and time was limited. However, parents made comments that were indirectly related to the evaluation process in both the interviews and focus group discussion. These comments were valuable to help us understand how the evaluation approaches could be adjusted. Parents seemed eager to talk about their Qeq College experiences and were forthcoming with both strengths and how things could be

improved with regard to the program. During the interview, parents shared openly that the evaluation process felt repetitive, particularly the questions where a Likert scale was used. In the focus group discussions, we asked parents to comment on the suggestions made by other parents both in terms of what worked for them in the program and what they believed could be improved. Additionally, they were given opportunities to make their own suggestions for improvement. Parents in the focus group session offered no voluntary comments about the evaluation process when asked for suggestions for improvement.

During discussions with the research team, it was decided that it was necessary to formulate specific questions about the evaluation methods in the interview process with parents. This has been done for 2016–2017. Additionally, specific questions about evaluation methods have been added to the parent focus group format.

The Qeq College coordinator (occasionally accompanied by an Elder) made regular visits throughout the 2015–2016 school year to the kindergarten classrooms that have received Qeq College Transition Year children. The evaluation did not extend to conversations with the kindergarten teachers (except those in the Qeq College summer program) in the 2015–2016. The evaluation process will be extended to the kindergarten teachers willing to participate in 2016–2017.

### Elders

Because of time considerations, we didn't ask Elders specific questions about the evaluation during their interview. Rather, one of the two Qeq College Elders met with a researcher to talk about the usefulness of the evaluation forms and processes in May 2016.



During an interview on May 11, 2016, an Elder made the following comments:

*"It felt good to be asked in person. I liked the open questions and that we could give comments and opinions."*

*"It is good to know we can make changes as we go along."*

*"I liked the option for including a 'story'. This allows for reflection of feelings and provides the researchers to link to real experiences."*

*"It felt good that you came back and reviewed with Elders what has been done—it helps us to feel more connected. We weren't limited [to just answering] questions. It allowed time to use 'oral history' and to reflect."*

*"I think it would be good to have the evaluation questions at the end of the focus group session. This would allow us to answer some questions earlier in the day and then come back to talk about what needs to change with the evaluation later in the day."*

### Professional staff

During the professional staff focus group on August 19, 2015, we asked specific questions about the evaluation process. Professional staff were eager to answer questions and to discuss what worked and what could be improved. They made the following comments about the strengths of the evaluation process:

*"The [focus group] discussion was helpful to understand more fully the context and objectives of the Qeq College program and to provide feedback to potentially improve it."*

*"It felt good to be able to put things out [in the focus group discussion]—to reflect and remember. It is all so positive. Seeking information and asking questions in different ways is helpful to our reflections."*

*"I like that I was asked for anecdotal responses in the survey—it works to have space and room to record our own thoughts."*



During the same focus group, professional staff made the following comments about ways to improve:

*"Survey was lengthy and time consuming/ cumbersome to complete."*

*"Maybe we could use Survey Monkey for the survey part, it might make it easier to input and analyze."*

*"It would be helpful to keep the survey shorter (not so many questions) but do it more often – it would ease the time commitment."*

### Administrators

Except for one administrator, this group did not respond to the survey. After several weeks of encouraging responses, we decided to use the focus group discussions as the primary source of data. It seemed clear that the administrators were very busy and taking time out to complete the survey was not easy for them to do.

Two administrator focus group discussions were held: one in November 2015 and one in March 2016. The process used for those meetings was likened to a circle discussion, where each person in the circle had an opportunity to speak to a question without interruption before others responded. This method worked well to ensure everyone had an opportunity to speak about each topic and to respond to other people's comments. This strategy also allowed a process more in keeping with cultural protocols. Administrators were very engaged in the discussion and made several comments related to the evaluation process.

During the focus groups in November 2015 and March 2016, administrators said:

*"Including research staff early in program to improve relationships between them and parents/children and increase the likelihood that parents will share more openly during the evaluation processes."*



*"There is a need to increase the voices of both parents and the children."*

*"We must create more opportunities to connect with the families to strengthen and build relationships—this is critical to both hearing about what is working and what isn't. It is empowering for parents to be asked to contribute and to see themselves as critical voices in the evaluation process."*

*"Timing and space are critical—we need to support parents and build comfort and trust. These families are 'researched to death' and questioned by many government systems. This has happened for years; it is a part of the culture and the time."*

*"We could strengthen the [evaluation] process [by using] the assessment portfolio approach... We could take a leadership role [and integrate] the portfolio as part of the evaluation process—VIU research staff could support the development and use of the 'portfolio' as a central mode of evaluation for all groups."*

- 3. Strengthened community relationships and AECD networks across the academic and First Nation/Aboriginal communities**
- 5. Increased opportunities for Elders and other First Nations/Aboriginal agencies to work with VIU faculty in areas critical to local First Nation communities.**
- 6. Strengthened opportunities for VIU's Chair for AECD and TLAFC to network and share with VIU faculty, other post secondary institutions in BC (and elsewhere) and First Nations communities and Aboriginal organizations regarding project learnings, research outcomes, community development and culturally appropriate assessment and evaluation templates for use by a variety of constituent groups.**

**Goals 3, 5, and 6 were consolidated as all of the outcomes noted below are relevant to one or more of the listed goals.**

**T**he Qeq College Transition Year project has provided many opportunities to strengthen community relationships and Aboriginal Early Childhood Development networks. The partnership itself has initiated working relationships between the three partner organizations: School District 68 (SD 68), VIU, and TLAFC. While there are many challenges for the representatives of each organization in terms of availability to engage in many necessary discussions, all partners have made good effort to ensure representatives are available to attend meetings and to contribute in a variety of meaningful ways. For example, the SD 68 representative has the responsibility to request space for the Qeq College program, help the program to address janitorial issues when SD 68 buildings are being used, help to ensure interest and cooperation among the SD 68 kindergarten teachers, and consider contract issues for these teachers, among many other issues that come up from time to time. Similarly, all of the partner groups must grapple with funding issues and ensuring that institutional and regulatory

requirements related to such things as professional ethics, policies and procedures, and licensing are met. Engaging in these conversations helps all the partners to more fully understand the issues experienced in the larger institutional milieu and how we can work together to resolve issues that arise.

The VIU research team also have been fielding interest about the Qeq College Transition Year program from other early childhood organizations including Kwumut Lelum's Four Season's program, Aboriginal Head Start, Success By Six (Central Island Region), Coast Salish Employment and Training Society, and the BC Aboriginal Child Care Society (BCACCS). As well, the VIU Chair for AECD has presented at numerous conferences including the Early Years Forum (March 2016) at Qualicum First Nation, the BCACCS conference (November 2015 in Richmond, BC), the Early Years Conference (February 2016 in Vancouver, BC), and the Canadian Indigenous Native Studies Association conference in Regina, Saskatchewan (June 2016). Information has also been shared

through committee work such as the BCRIC for AECD Advisory Committee, the BC Occupational Standards Committee with the Ministry of Children and Family Development and Ministry of Education, and discussions with other academic institutions such as the University of Victoria.

In 2016, the VIU research team joined a research advisory committee that includes BC Aboriginal Child Care Society, VIU, and the Centre for Early Childhood Research and Policy at University of Victoria, National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health at University of the North, First Nations Health Authority, United Way of the Lower Mainland, and the Carrier-Sekani Family Services. The first order of action for this research advisory committee was to develop a joint proposal to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). The group was not successful in this first attempt for a SSHRC grant; however the group has continued to discuss ways to work together and have plans to resubmit a proposal to SSHRC in the near future.

Recently, the Qeq College coordinator received an invitation to discuss relationship potential with the Nurturing Capacity: Building Community Success, a national initiative created to “improve educational outcomes through the documentation and evaluation of their innovative practices” (<http://indspire.ca/for-educators/nurturing-capacity/>). The VIU research team has had preliminary conversations with the Nurturing Capacity principals about ways the two groups might work together. Future meeting plans to bring the partners together for further discussion are in process.

Relationships between TLAFC and the Snuneymux'w and Stzu'minus have been strengthened through efforts to undertake joint early childhood initiatives. As well, Elders from the First Nations communities of Snuneymux'w and Penelakut work closely with the TLAFC, the Qeq College coordinator, and the VIU research team.

The Elders are involved with the Qeq College Transition Year program as well as assisting with the research and curriculum framework planning. One of the Elders has also visited (with the Qeq College coordinator) the School District 68 kindergarten classrooms in which Qeq College children are students. This has provided cultural and relationship continuity for the children and has also provided cultural support to kindergarten teachers as requested.

As noted previously, the VIU Chair for AECD has joined the advisory committee for Four Seasons, a Kwumut Lelum Child and Family Services (Snuneymux'w First Nation) project. The Four Seasons' project goal to “enhance early childhood development, school readiness, and overall family health and wellness for First Nations preschool children...” (<http://www.kwumut.org/#!four-seasons-service/c2dq>) is aligned closely with Qeq College's goals and provides many opportunities to share information and project learnings. The VIU Chair for AECD has also worked closely with BC Aboriginal Head Start developing evaluation and assessment tools and processes for AECD practitioners. This work has also allowed reciprocal sharing of learning about each project's development.





#### 4. Strengthened First Nations/Aboriginal student research capacity (including both undergraduate and graduate) in the area of Aboriginal Early Childhood Development research and community development.

The VIU Chair for AECD has involved numerous students from diverse areas of the university to work with her on the VIU research team for the Qeq College Transition Year program. Students hired for this work have included both undergraduate and graduate students from program areas in education, business and management, and First Nations studies. Most of the students applying to work with the AECD Chair have been non-Aboriginal students. To date, of the three students hired, one was Aboriginal and was attending the Business

and Management program. All students have been eager to learn about Aboriginal Early Childhood Development, the Qeq Transition Year program, and the broader work of the VIU Chair for AECD. These students have contributed in important ways to the project work by conducting literature reviews, supporting the VIU Chair for AECD to complete particular aspects of her work such as assisting with proposal development, reporting, researching, interviewing project participants, and collating and analyzing data.





## Summary and reflections

**D**eveloping *Culturally Sensitive Evaluation and Assessment Tools for Early Childhood Programs* has provided important opportunities for VIU faculty and student researchers along with the School District 68 and TLAFC partners to work closely together in many different ways. In keeping with participatory action research, the VIU research team and partners have collaborated to develop survey questions, interview processes, and focus group discussion formats. Through these cooperative activities, the partners will provide further guidance to the curriculum framework development, in particular the assessment for learning strategies and tools. The partners have collaboratively reviewed and analyzed the data collected for the Qeq College evaluation. They have discussed the ways to interpret the data and how what we learn can transform the Qeq College program in ways that strengthen relationships among Aboriginal children and families, Aboriginal communities, and educators and their schools. To this end, the VIU research team has worked with other Qeq College

Transition Year administrators to create assessment for learning tools that will both streamline the assessment and evaluation processes and promote increased cultural relevance and sensitivity.

In this project year (2015–2016), the evaluation and child assessment tools and strategies have evolved to be more reflective of the assessment for learning methods developed for the Qeq College program. Using this method supports a more holistic and positive approach to evaluation and assessment and involves all partners and participants in all aspects of the research process.

The relationships and processes have been challenging at times as the project is large and complex and involves many partners and participants. The families and communities must be carefully considered as we undertake each part of the project to promote cultural relevance and sensitivity with regard to both the family's experiences and the assessment for learning materials. The children and families transitioning



from early childhood settings to kindergarten are at a potentially vulnerable time, and the project partners have wanted from the beginning to be sure that the children's and families' best interests and well-being are foremost. The partners want to ensure that all Qeq College experiences promote building more positive, long-term relationships with the school system and ultimately increase opportunities for the children's healthy, holistic growth, development, and learning. This is a tall order but also one that has provided a central focus to our work together. As we move into the next project year, this will continue to guide all aspects of our collaborative efforts.

### Guiding future Qeq College Transition Year research

The suggestions made by all participants to guide the research aspect in 2016–2017 were categorized into four areas: parent outreach and orientation, staff orientation and training, creating additional space and time for cultural input and feedback, and project administration and management.

#### Parent outreach and orientation

- ☐ Ensure collaborative planning well in advance of Qeq College program start up so that the VIU research team has adequate opportunity to meet with parents/families so that they can begin to build comfortable working relationships with them and familiarize them with the assessment for learning methods—in particular the learning portfolios that will be shared regularly with them.
- ☐ Ensure parents are fully orientated to both the Qeq College program, its related values and curriculum framework, and the research aspects of the Qeq College Transition Year program using a variety of tools such as producing information booklets and posters about the program and verbally

communicating with parents to explain Qeq College evaluation and child assessment processes and how families can contribute to these processes (for example through regular sharing of child learning portfolios between staff and families).

- ☐ Give families lots of notice about interviews and focus group sessions to ensure they can attend, and schedule these sessions for times that are convenient for families. Also provide a comfortable and private space to meet that is conveniently located.
- ☐ Discuss with families ways to ensure that their voices and their child's voice are included in the evaluation and assessment practices and the methods used to collect information about the evaluation. Also ensure their child's learning and development are family, community, and culturally relevant and that their family cultural practices and traditions are fully considered in the collection, interpretation, and reporting of the research data.
- ☐ Look for ways to strengthen relationships between Qeq College families and educators and school district teachers by expanding the assessment for learning processes to include the school district kindergarten teachers. In this way, they can also inform the development of assessment for learning tools and strategies.

#### Elder/professional staff orientation and training

- ☐ Ensure collaborative planning well in advance of the Qeq College program start-up so that the research team has adequate opportunity to meet with Elders, educators (early childhood educators and teachers), and volunteer staff so that they can begin to build comfortable working relationships with them and familiarize them with the assessment for learning methods—in particular the learning portfolios that will be shared regularly with families.



- ☐ Ensure the educators and Elders are fully orientated to both the Qeq College program, its values and curriculum framework, and the research aspects of the Qeq College Transition Year program by using a variety of strategies: meetings, workshop sessions, and written information such as reports and other documents that describe the Qeq College program; the Qeq College values and curriculum; and the research goals, objectives, and methods.
- ☐ Include Elders and professionals in the professional focus group sessions to ensure sharing of information with these groups.
- ☐ Expand information sharing related to the Qeq College program and related research (assessment for learning) to school district teachers once children transition to the kindergarten program.

### **Creating additional space and time for cultural input and feedback**

- ☐ Adjust the evaluation tools to encourage greater input by parents and Elders to the development of culturally sensitive and responsive research tools and processes.
- ☐ Create more diverse opportunities for families, Elders, and professional staff to examine assessment for learning tools and publications and provide increased feedback—particularly with regard to cultural relevance and responsiveness.
- ☐ Ensure the VIU research team is involved with Qeq College cultural events and activities to increase exposure to community and cultural traditions, practices, and ways of knowing.

### **Project administration and management**

- ☐ Include research staff early in the Qeq College program to improve relationships between them and parents/children and the likelihood that parents will share more openly during the evaluation processes.
- ☐ Continue to create more opportunities to connect with the families to strengthen and build relationships and provide support and trust building opportunities among Qeq College Transition Year staff, Elders and kindergarten teachers.
- ☐ Strengthen the assessment for learning approach so it's used more fully in the evaluation and reporting processes.
- ☐ Improve coordination and planning so that all partners are involved in all relevant aspects of the project. For example, plan regular, more frequent, and shorter meetings to share information and use technology to increase opportunities to share as applicable.
- ☐ Revisit the Qeq College values from time to time to ensure all decisions are considered within the context of those values and that the values remain current.
- ☐ Include Elders in all Qeq College partner meetings.
- ☐ Strengthen the partnership by ensuring inclusive processes and decision-making.
- ☐ Strengthen equity across the partners by ensuring all partners are visible to all Qeq College participants and the public more generally.



## References

- Ball, J. (2007). *Screening and assessment practices in Aboriginal early childhood programs in British Columbia*. Victoria, BC: Early Childhood Development Intercultural Partnerships, School of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria.
- Hare, J. & Anderson, J. (2010). Transitions to early childhood education and care for Indigenous children and families in Canada: Historical and social realities. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 35(2).
- MacDonald, M. (2007). Toward formative assessment: The use of pedagogical documentation in early elementary classrooms. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 22, 232-242.
- McDonell, L., & Beaulieu, R. (2013). *Aboriginal early childhood development assessment: Issues and insights in a cultural context*. Vancouver, BC: BCACCS.
- Nguyen, M. (2011). Closing the education gap: A case for Aboriginal early childhood education in Canada, a look at the Aboriginal Headstart Program. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 34(3), 229-248.
- Richards, J. (2008). *Closing the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal education gaps*. CD Howe Institute Background. No. 116.
- Tsuruda, S., Hoogeveen, C., Smith, A., Poon, C., Saewyc, E., & the McCreary Centre Society (2012). *Raven's Children III: Aboriginal youth health in BC*. Vancouver, BC: McCreary Centre Society.





