A Narrative Inquiry Into the Experiences of Urban Indigenous Families As They Ready Their Children For, and During, Kindergarten

Janice Huber, Vera Caine, M. Shaun Murphy, Sean Lessard, Jinny Menon, and D. Jean Clandinin

Janice Huber, in the Faculty of Education, University of Alberta, has been privileged to engage in narrative inquiry alongside children, families, teachers, principals, Elders, and undergraduate and graduate students in three Canadian provinces.

Vera Caine is professor and CIHR new investigator in the Faculty of Nursing at the University of Alberta. Her most recent book with D. J. Clandinin and Sean Lessard focused on the relational ethics in narrative inquiry. Email: vera.caine@ualberta.ca

M. Shaun Murphy is a professor and the department head of Educational Foundations at the University of Saskatchewan. He was an elementary school teacher in rural and urban settings for twenty years.

Sean Lessard is a member of the Montreal Lake Cree Nation and an associate professor in the Faculty of Education at the University Alberta. He has had a long-standing interest in the lives of youth and families.

Jinny Menon is a PhD candidate at the University of Alberta and a member of the university's Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development. Jinny is engaging in a multiperspectival narrative inquiry into the curriculum-making experiences of South Asian girls, their mothers, and their teacher in Canada.

D. Jean Clandinin is professor emerita and founding director of the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development at the University of Alberta. She has published widely in narrative inquiry. Her most recent project with Vera Caine and Sean Lessard is a narrative inquiry into the experiences of young children and their families who are refugees from Syria.

In this paper we draw on a study alongside urban Indigenous families in western Canada that inquired narratively into their experiences as they readied their children for, and their children participated in, kindergarten. We built relationships with eight urban Indigenous families. As we looked across their experiences, six resonant threads became visible: each family and their life situations are unique; families wish for mutual respect and collaboration between school and family; respect is significant; families are invested in their children doing well in schools; siblings shape stories of school readiness; and intergenerational stories and places shape readiness.

Key words: *Indigenous; school; narrative inquiry; families; readiness*

> There was a boy named Warse (bear in Stoney). He was kicking and screaming going to school for the first time. He was raised by his grandparents, I knew this. I could recognize this. He was raised the Stoney way. He sure missed his grandpa. I kept calling him by his English name and I got no response. He disappeared on the teacher into one of the cubby holes where he was hiding, and as soon as I called him by his Stoney name he sat right up and came right to me. He came to me and he was settled then. I knew that this would settle him, because that is what he knows from home. I never ever called his English name anymore.

Stoney Elder Isabelle Kootenay shared this story as she and Sean Lessard engaged in conversation as part of this narrative inquiry. Her story turns attention toward the importance of acknowledging and respecting, as his kindergarten teacher, Warse's language and culture from his home and community places. Elder Isabelle's story, a reminder to always remember where children come from and where they learn first, resonated with our learning alongside eight families who participated in our study. We foreground six threads that resonated across the lived and told stories of the families: *each family and*

their life situations are unique; families wish for mutual respect and collaboration between school and family; respect is significant; families are invested in their children doing well in schools; siblings shape stories of school readiness; and *intergenerational stories and places shape readiness*. We show the everyday experiences and practices that the children and families lived in their home and community places. As we attended to participants' accounts of their experiences, our study added to what has been already learned from other studies critical of the dominant notions of readiness and how readiness shapes experiences differently in diverse lives and contexts (Peters, Ortiz, & Swadener, 2015).

Coming to the research

The long-term influences of early schooling experiences in the lives of Indigenous[1] children, and their parents and families, are of concern, particularly as Canada's Indigenous population is growing. The early years of education and schooling are also an important focus in implementing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Because, as Dockett, Perry, and Kearney (2010) assert, "there is insufficient information on what Indigenous parents and communities understand by 'readiness for school'" (p. 1), learning from parents about the ways they prepare, and wish to prepare, their children for transitions to schooling is of great importance. Given the intergenerational reverberations of residential schools in the lives, families, and communities of Indigenous peoples (Young, 2005a, 2005b; Young et al., 2012) it is important to understand what Indigenous parents (and families) experience as their children first attend schools and to engage with them about what they wish for their children to experience.

School readiness and success

School readiness is commonly understood by policy makers as meaning that young children are ready for school when they hold specific knowledge and skills. Within such a view, readiness refers to what needs to be achieved before school learning can begin. Being ready at school entry has been linked with ongoing academic and life success (Beaton & McDonell, 2013; Dockett, Perry, & Kearney, 2010; McCain, Mustard, & McCuaig, 2011; McClelland, Acock, & Morrison, 2006). However, there is too often an unquestioned acceptance of the importance of readiness without enough attention to what it means to ready a child, or to the diverse experiences that parents, families, and communities see as readiness for schooling.

This inquiry took place in Alberta, where in the years before 2000, the focus on readiness was more confined to grade 1. In Alberta, and elsewhere in Canada and the US, this focus has now shifted to issues around readiness in kindergarten, with some noting that kindergarten classrooms are becoming "one-size smaller first grades" in which "children are tested, taught with workbooks, given homework, and take home a report card" (Elkind, 2007, p. 2). Christopher Brown and Yi Chin Lan (2015) observe that "it appears that the definition of school readiness […] has coalesced around what could be considered a White, middle-class conception of this construct (p. 8). Also of concern is Jackie Marsh's (2003) sense of "one-way traffic" (p. 369), which she describes as an imbalance in which school practices are privileged over practices children live daily within their homes, families, and communities. These findings about the dominance of one notion of readiness are particularly concerning given our studies with children, youth, and families of Indigenous heritage (Clandinin, Huber, Huber, et al., 2006; Lessard, 2013; Lessard, Caine, & Clandinin, 2014).

While significant research attentive to early childhood education in Alberta and Canada has focused on ensuring that young children are ready for, and successful in, school (Alberta Government 2013, 2014) our concern is that little is known about parents' and families' understandings of readiness and their everyday and intergenerational

practices as they ready their children for school. We are particularly concerned with the lack of knowledge about the experiences of parents and families of Indigenous heritage.

Indigenous children and their families

UNESCO's (2010) report on the "social contexts of children's lives" (p. iii) noted "weak social protection … in North America … for Indigenous and traditional minorities" (p. vii). Also noted is that "early childhood services are generally mono-cultural and may practice little outreach to parents and families from diverse backgrounds" (p. vii). The cumulative effects of colonization, residential schools, and the Indian Act significantly changed traditional ways of life, which adds to the complexity of urban Indigenous families' experiences in provincially funded schools.

Researchers recognize that the experiences of Indigenous children and youth are embedded within place, family, and community (Friedel, 2010; Kirkmayer, Tait, & Simpson 2009; Restoule, 2008; Lessard, 2013; Lessard, Caine, & Clandinin, 2014). While we know that the experiences their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents lived in schools shaped their lives, researchers are just considering the intergenerational impact of these experiences within the present generation of parents and families as their children enter schools (Swanson, 2013).

We focused this research on processes of school readiness, rather than solely on its outcomes, achievements, or failures. While there are early childhood intervention programs, little research addresses the experiences of families and parents as their children enter such programs. Questions around disruption to families' lives and their intentions in engaging in programs have not been asked. While it is not uncommon for Indigenous families and children to experience "discontinuities between early childhood programs and schooling" (Beaton & McDonell, 2013), little is known about the strengths, resiliencies, aspirations, and hopes of Indigenous families with young children.

Research participants

We engaged in conversations with Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators, Elders, and researchers as we designed the study. Our purpose was to hear families' stories of school readiness and to inquire into storied experiences embedded within broader social, cultural, linguistic, and institutional contexts. We purposefully used the term families to be inclusive of people who are part of young children's lives. Eight parents and grandparents who self-identified as Indigenous and were parenting young children who entered kindergarten in the fall of 2015 or 2016 in urban northern Alberta settings participated.

Methodology and methods

Narrative inquiry is attentive to experience over time and in diverse places, beginning from, and unfolding through, relationships (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). We are a group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers with professional experiences as teachers, nurses, school counsellors, and teacher educators and personal experiences as parents, grandparents, uncles, and aunts. Our study is shaped by inquiries into our own experiences as, or with, Indigenous parents of young children. Different from some research in which "researchers" study "subjects," narrative inquiry positions people alongside one another, sharing stories of experiences and inquiring into our lived and told stories in order to understand ourselves, places where we are/have been, and past, present, and future contexts. Our research design enabled the formation of intensive relationships with each family over one year to hear how their home/school/community stories have unfolded, and are continuing to unfold, in relation with their young child and school readiness policies and practices. Narrative inquiry is a relational methodology and our understanding of collaboration is embedded within this (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Field texts (data) were transcripts of conversations between families and researchers, photographs, children's art work, memory box artifacts, and field notes on events and activities to which researchers were invited. Three to five conversations with each family happened in places convenient for families and were 60 to 120 minutes in length. Some conversations were conducted via Skype or telephone. All data collection methods were negotiated with participants. Research ethics were approved by the University of Alberta Ethics Board on June 26, 2015, and we adhered to the Tri-council Policy Guidelines for working with Indigenous peoples. We were guided by conversations with Elders Isabelle and Francis Whiskeyjack. Pseudonyms were used for anonymity unless participants requested and provided consent for the use of their first names.

We worked with the transcripts of the conversations to co-compose interim research texts (narrative accounts) of families' experiences. After the narrative accounts were negotiated with participants, we looked across the narrative accounts to compose research texts which foregrounded families' experiences of readying their child for school, as well as their experiences of interacting with school readiness policies and practices shaping the child's kindergarten experiences.

Attending to everyday practices

This section was composed by looking across participants' narrative accounts to discern the following six resonant narrative threads.

Thread 1: Each family and their life situations are unique. Across the narrative accounts, we noted different social contexts in which participants lived. All families lived in urban centres and children attended urban kindergartens. However, there were remarkable differences in the social contexts of children and families. Poverty marked some situations and some families struggled to provide food and shelter. Each child was readied for kindergarten in ways that reflected their families' stories. Working against single stories (Adichie, 2009) of Indigenous families, we saw the diversity within the families and the ways each family engaged with their children as they moved into schooling.

Aileen and her family lived in a northern Alberta city. For part of Stanley's kindergarten year, Stanley's father was on paternity leave. Throughout the study year, Aileen operated a day home for her own, and other, children.

Growing up in a Cree community Rochelle and her younger brother lived with her mom and her parents. Both grandparents passed when Rochelle was a teenager. When she was 19, Rochelle's mom passed in a sudden and tragic accident. *Everyone in my mom's family kind of left early and I've been on my own since.… It's been a tough road*. These experiences shaped Rochelle's hopes for Allison during and beyond kindergarten. *I want … Allison to live … the healthy, good way*. Questioning how stereotypes shape Indigenous children's experiences, Rochelle described encouraging her children to be *different, break your circle, make your own,* as well as *to love everyone.… There shouldn't … be colours and races.… I went through that my whole life.… I always tell them, "Never care what people think about you. Just be you.*"

Shelley and Brenda's lives were impacted by poverty, learning disabilities, and mental health issues. Despite these challenges, they continued to seek ways forward. Brenda said she *couldn't work* and *had to live on welfare, because I didn't know how to fill out forms, and apply to get a job.* When she tried to go back to school, *The government … said I couldn't … the message I got was it was a waste of funding because of my disability.*

Chronic poverty was a constant challenge for Mandy. She struggled to *get a daycare for [the children]*. In order to obtain daycare, she needed to be on *subsidy* and needed *to apply for subsidy* through a worker who said, *"No, I'm*

not paying for your daycare. If you're at home on medical, then I'm not paying for your daycare because you could be staying at home watching the kids." Mandy faced other challenges, like the need for counselling, and spoke of the difficulty of raising four children on her own.

As an adult who was adopted as a baby and in her earlier life *felt a lot of resentment towards the Aboriginal part* of herself, Britanny talked about family stories that she and Xander were making: *It took me a really long time to work through that.… That's why I put Xander in [Aboriginal] Head Start.… I want him to … feel positive about [being Indigenous]. He was so happy when he learned Cree.*

What the families made visible was not a single deficit story of Indigenous families but the ways that each unique context shaped the transitions to schooling for them.

Thread 2: Families wish for mutual respect and collaboration between school and family. Each family spoke of their desires that they and their child be respected for who they are. They respected the schools' programs and policies and wanted the schools to respect who they were and to understand what they were doing as they engaged their children for the transition to school. Families viewed mutual respect and their openness to collaboration with schools as very important.

Britanny found it "stressful" to talk with Xander's teacher as she often felt "judged." When describing how Xander's teacher said, "Stop, stop!" and held her hand in front of his face when he tried to talk, Britanny noted how this contradicted with her teaching Xander to *have a voice* and *to stand up for what he thinks.… Even though he's 5, he's still a person*.

Aileen was told of early fall testing by Stanley's teacher in which it was found he already knew a great deal of what was taught in the program. He already knew the alphabet and the teacher was *excited for him.* As Aileen explained, *it went really smooth for him.* The teacher noted *he's a fast learner* and Aileen was *glad that she picked up on that. Because he is a fast learner. He does learn quite fast. He's always been doing things at a fast pace*.

The importance of literacy was strong for Brenda and Shelley and was fuelled by knowing how difficult it is to be illiterate. Brenda shared that *a lot of people didn't know I was really illiterate because I always got my kids—paid them to write my reports.* Brenda's desire to gain literacy skills was expressed by the importance she placed on going into school; she often discussed the importance of getting *totally involved with your children* and of going *to the school and ask[ing] to sit in, so you can know where your children are and work with them.* Brenda and Shelley had concerns about the assumptions schools held about families and how these rippled into their home. For example:

> We don't speak Cree, and I'm not against teaching them Cree, but everything they said was in Cree. We're not Cree. We're from down south, but we lost our language.

Shelley and Brenda also shared stories about what was considered appropriate behaviour at school, such as younger children needing to line up with older children. They described how their daughter/granddaughter was "scared" and *kind of got lost into the shuffle.* They also spoke of the importance of children being allowed to *keep their power*, especially in relation with literacy.

Mandy talked about the importance of a school environment that supported her children to learn the Cree language and paid homage to their faith and cultural ways of being, as well as attending to her children in caring ways. When she shared about the depth of trust she had with the school, she said, *I usually just talk to the teachers: "How's she doing?" They're like, "She's doing really good."… Like, when her dad leaves I'll alert the teachers and the staff.... Like, "If her attitude changes, this is why." They'll call me anytime. They're really nice there. I love them.*

Irene took Porter to a pediatrician because of his active nature and pressure from the school to modify his program to attend full-day kindergarten. Irene wanted to ease him into the routine, with time at home for being energetic without school constraints. A note from a physician stating Porter would best be served with a half-day start to kindergarten was dismissed by the school.

Thread 3: Respect is significant. Respect was often discussed by the families and ranged from respect for their knowing of their children, their understanding of the school system, the contexts of their familial lives in terms of parent compositions, work lives, and other children, and recognition of the pride families hold for who they are in the world related to connections to familial home places on reserves or settlements, ethnicity, and familial and larger cultural ways of being.

> Who am I to say, "Don't be like that" and then have heartache later in life because I didn't let my child be who she wanted to be?... I have seen what that has done to people and I refuse to do it.

In the above transcript, Rochelle is referring to Allison's desires for short hair, to dress like her dad, and to play with boys. Even when her sister Serenna *came home [from school] and said to my baby, "You're not a boy, you're a girl,"* Rochelle stayed strong in living with Allison's stories of choosing who she was becoming. *Jamie [Allison's dad] is her hero . ..he's a man who works construction … she looks up to him … wants to be like him.… If she is trying to tell us something about her sexuality, I still don't see anything wrong with it.*

Involved in work that sometimes required her to meet with clients in the evenings, Britanny felt that Xander's school did not yet recognize that *families aren't set up the way they were, even ten years ago*. Due to her evening work commitments, Britanny was not able to participate in evening celebrations of learning during Xander's year in kindergarten. Xander was also told, *"Mommy's not sending … healthy snacks.… He was … mad at me.*

As her daughter's kindergarten year ended, Mary wondered if *kindergarten might be suppressing Lizzy*. At Lizzy's March parent-teacher meeting, the teacher *gently treaded on the topic of how Lizzy is disruptive, she's a social butterfly, she's often playing*; the teacher *recommend[ed] an assessment*. Mary described her initial feelings of *shock … not only because a 5-year-old was being assessed, but up until then, the teacher had always expressed this level of being blown away by Lizzy's intelligence. Then, her story was suddenly a different story*.

Aileen said she always tells her children's teachers that she is a teacher. She told Stanley's teacher that

> I've taught him, and that I do teach my children at home. But the funny thing about this is that I get a different reaction from the teachers when I do tell them that I'm a teacher.... So when I do tell them that, they kind of take a different stance on, you know, my situation, being a parent who is at home, who's raising my children and not teaching. And so I do feel like they're more understanding.

Aileen's strong sense was that teachers responded to her differently when she let them know she was educated as a teacher.

Shelley and Brenda frequently linked schooling with possibilities for both Mackenzie and her younger brother, Milo. In their stories, a key to good living meant being able to read, speak, and write well in English. Brenda talked about building a strong foundation:

> One of the things I've seen with my older grandchildren, and we didn't really do this early prevention and foundation, is they struggled in school after. And then, once they started falling behind in grade 3, they couldn't catch up. So they're always a couple years behind. So, what I'm trying to do

> with Mackenzie is have her try and have that this year, really push to have that "I can count 100" thing and then "I can say most of my sight words."

Wishing for her children to feel empowered through responsibility, self-confidence, and love, Mandy shared stories about her familial curriculum making alongside them, which was marked by "Help me to help you, so you can help me at the same time. And then we can all get along here."

Irene spoke about how the school brought in a behaviour consultant to observe Porter. The consultant, with no relationship with Porter, positioned the family in a deficit manner, stating a need for a family liaison social worker. Irene, in conversation with the administration, spoke about who Porter was in the world and wondered if this intervention was based on previous knowledge of Porter.

Thread 4: Families are invested in their children doing well in schools. Each family indicated strong investment in having their child do well in school. Families spent time preparing their child for school, spent time in kindergarten settings, and thought about how schools influenced their child; they wanted their child to be successful, socially and academically. Despite intergenerational experiences with residential schools, some parents and/or grandparents were hopeful about the potential positive impact of schooling on their child or grandchild's life. Families wanted schools to acknowledge their investment.

Aileen continued to work on school-related tasks with Stanley when he arrived home from kindergarten proud of what he had completed in school. She identified what he had difficulty with and then worked with him to ensure that he learned how to do school tasks correctly. Stanley excitedly shared his work: *Look what I did! Look what I did! … So he's very proud of his work, he wants to show it off. He wants us to see that he's doing good. And, like it's the basic things that we've done at home too.… I'm trying to keep a step ahead of his teacher.*

Brenda often talked about her investment in her grandchildren's future. Her struggles with literacy shaped her motivation to change through volunteering in a school literacy program: *[I] took a lot of that literacy training. ... I learned to work with my grandchildren where I didn't have the opportunity to work with my kids, and push my kids, and know that education was this important. Now … I … tell my kids to work with their kids, and to teach their kids. But to do it through play.… The important part is laying that foundation.*

Mandy also felt that her presence in schools was important in shaping her daughter's memory of childhood, which in turn reinforced how their family valued school.

Rochelle's desires for Allison to do well in school began the year prior when she attended Aboriginal Head Start so she could "learn Cree", as well as aspects of "culture, traditions [and] protocols." However, during both Head Start and kindergarten, Rochelle felt penalized for being dedicated to Allison's education, because the subsidy office refused to continue to pay part-time fees for Allison's daycare: *[The daycare] is making me pay full-time non-subsidized fees. I called them and said, "Do you want me to pull my girl out of full-day kindergarten so I can meet your hours?" And she said, "Do what you have to do."*

Thread 5: Siblings shape stories of school readiness. In all but one family, the children in kindergarten had older siblings, some of whom had already completed high school. Families shared stories of how older siblings came alongside their younger brother or sister to support their journey in(to) kindergarten, as well as how older siblings' experiences in school shaped how families readied their child for, and during, kindergarten.

Mary described how Lizzy entered kindergarten already knowing some of the people and places in the school because she was often with Mary as she dropped off, picked up, or participated in Gage and Byron's parent-teacher

interviews. When Lizzy participated in a mid-June visit to kindergarten, her brothers were already *laying down a plan for … tak[ing] care of their little sister at school*.

Theresa experienced a sense of integration as Kennedy's parent, because her older daughter, Realle, attended the same preschool.

Irene, who lived close to the home where she raised her children, noted her multigenerational experience with the school her grandchildren attend, because she and her children had also attended there. In this generation, Porter's sister watches out for him when they are at school:

> Now, what's happening is the kindergarten kids have learned that she's Porter's sister, so when Porter's crying in the field they'll go and find her and say, "Your brother's crying."

The experiences of Aileen's older son in school were strong shaping forces in helping her think about what she needed to do to ready Stanley for kindergarten.

> I didn't know that [about gender differences and education for First Nations children] going through with my ... first son. I think if I knew that I probably would have been able to pay more attention and helped him succeed. Because, again, First Nations and because he's a boy, and the teachers don't really have the time for that. Right? Or, that they have this biased thought or notion that 'I'm not going to teach him, because he's probably not going to be here, you know, for longer than a week." ... So yeah, I feel bad but I'm glad that I can help him [Stanley] now, my son.

Aileen's experiences with her older son, both when he struggled at the outset of school and now as she works with him at home, shaped how she readied, and worked with, Stanley for kindergarten. She said she tried to help him *be the person he is today and to be able to be confident […] in the classroom*.

Stories of siblings were also very present for Elder Isabelle as she recalled vividly her time as a kindergarten teacher and how siblings were "guides" and helped in the "process" of learning to get ready for school. She also recalled her own memories of preparation and how her older brother Dan became the teacher for the rest of her brothers and sisters, as well as her parents. Dan would go to school and share what he learned from the place of school and these were important lessons shared in their home and in their Stony language. These teachings prepared the entire family for what they would encounter in school: *My brother attended and in Stoney he would tell me all the things that would happen at the school. It seemed like I knew so much about school before it even started*.

Thread 6: Intergenerational stories and places shape readiness. Coming from various backgrounds, the participating families are not monolithic in the ways they conceptualize their identities and distinct experiences. Some families were Métis, some had roots in the city, others were more connected to their particular First Nation and the protocols, language, and practices within their specific communities. These are important distinctions within this thread as the memories pulled forward are related to these unique shaping experiences that are rooted in place(s).

Stories stood out as mothers shared their experiences of preparing for school and what mattered and counted at this time. There was a strong sense of looking backwards, at times nostalgically, and exploring from where particular feelings emerged. For example, Brenda shared stories about her experiences within residential school and how they shaped how she and Shelley came to understand what school was as, well as how these experiences lingered. Memories were present in the telling, but the negative experiences manifested in the relationships with school. Shelley shared how Brenda *never came to school. She never came to nothing at school.* These words cast a shadow that pulls memories of experiences from the past into the present. The history in this case is reverberating in a phenomenon that is much more in the present as it ruptured relationships across generations.

The link to this thread is not meant to dwell in this painful past but to name its existence and relevance to stories that are shaping school experiences in the present. For many participants, it is the first time that mothers, fathers, guardians, and families are more active in their response, no longer as silent as they call on, and call out, schools to respond to the distinctness of their children as partners in schooling experiences.

When mothers like Shelley share *when I had my kids, I kind of, broke that and I would go to every concert. I'd go to every teacher interview*, we see that stories of the past shape their responses as early memories of school create opportunities for new stories, counter-stories that create small spaces to interact differently with the institution of school. Yet, while both Shelley and Brenda talked about their childhood experiences in school, Brenda was more hesitant. Brenda's stories were difficult ones that spoke of loneliness and isolation and painful experiences with residential schooling. She reflected on her life with her mother growing up and how her experiences shaped her hopes for Mackenzie.

We saw this, too, with Mary. Reflecting on her *duplicat[ing] how … [she] was raised by parents … [who had] allowed … [her] to grow at … [her] own pace … [and] promoted … [her] to make up … [her] own mind*—alongside her present commitments for ongoing connection at home with family and Elders who describe Lizzy as *kiyiteyasis, a little old person*—Mary noted her *readying Lizzy for life*. Memories of experiencing many *positive, healthy influences … from being a … [a small Métis community] homegrown kid* often turned Mary's thoughts toward her mom's encouragement: *Come home a lot. Be here more often. My mom … values that the … [small Métis community] influence is <u>inside</u> my kids*.

Imagining forward-looking stories

The families' experiences both echoed and extended earlier recommendations for the inclusion of voices and cultures of Indigenous peoples in Indigenous early childhood education in Canada to include emphasis on language, discipline/guidance, and diverse life/social contexts. Families foregrounded the significance of listening to children's voices. The readying practices of parents and families encompassed temporal spans, as well as contextual/place and personal/social interactions much more expansive than the child's entry into and progression through kindergarten. This points to the need for reconceptualizing readiness as beginning long before, and extending far beyond, kindergarten. This reconceptualization of readiness includes the need to widen understandings of what readiness can mean, include, and require, as well as acknowledging and respecting the many differences among Indigenous children and families.

The significance of respect was also highlighted by Elder Isabelle as she reflected on experiences of her schooling, as well as time spent as a kindergarten teacher. Her words emphasized the importance of traditions and teachings that were learned at home and that helped in the negotiation of preparing for school. Near the end of the conversations she connected the ideas surrounding respect with a sense of pride in who they were as people that was nurtured at home:

> One strength I will always remember is our pride. My parents were strong in their ways. My mom and dad very strong in their ways of trapping and hunting, gone for a month … months just to help us out. It seems to me my dad had tremendous pride in our culture and family, we felt it even though he wasn't there. My mom was very powerful in her ways, never did she neglect the rabbit snares. My brother would wake up very early before school to set up the snares to respect them. When we have that pride it was good teaching for us.

That sense of pride was a sustaining memory that was passed on, and, as Elder Isabelle shared, it needs to continue

to be nurtured in children of Indigenous heritage.

Such shifts hold potential for increased respect for the everyday practices that children and families live in their home and community places. Shifts which position children's lives as central in understanding school readiness will turn attention toward the processes of school readiness and the need for mutual respect and collaboration among children, families, teachers, and policy makers when designing, initiating, revising, and sustaining programs and policies around early childhood education.

Given the differing ways families readied children for kindergarten, it is evident they are not seeking instruction on how to parent; they desire to participate in the ordinary and everyday work in kindergarten and are seeking spaces where they can understand what their child is experiencing, including how their child is being taught. Their intentions are to learn more, as well as to share their ways of guiding, and being guided by, their children. All families expressed desires to be welcomed into school as people committed to supporting their children to experience success in school, and in life. Families are aware, and seek recognition from policy makers and schools, of the diversity of their lives, including that their cultures, family structures, and first languages differ and that many inequities (e.g., housing, literacy, poverty) are experienced by Indigenous families. Rather than feeling ignored, stressed, or judged as they interact with schools, families seek interactions in which they are respected for the ways they are invested in their children doing well in school.

Persistent gaps in knowledge

Given the study focus on urban Indigenous families, it is also important to see how rural, First Nation, and Métis communities might shape children's readiness experiences differently. Some families indicated that transitions from rural, First Nation, and Métis family and community settings were not easy. Making it easier to honour these transitions may lessen the disruption for children in kindergarten. We also see the need to develop understandings of diverse languages, faiths, and familial cultures. Further, researchers, policy makers, and educators need to be attentive to school readiness practices within familial contexts and discourses. While the impacts of colonization on Indigenous peoples have been studied, there has not been a focus on how this affects the ways children are supported in their transition to kindergarten and school. Through listening to the families, we saw how readiness practices shaped long-term experiences in school, as signified by their stories of older children who had moved into higher grades. The disconnect between readiness for school that attends to the lives of children and readiness focused on school academic outcomes was also highlighted, and indicates a need for further work in the area.

Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge Stoney Elder Isabelle Kootenay's research guidance and participation in this inquiry and Cree Elder Francis Whiskeyjack's friendship, tea, and stories as the study unfolded. We are grateful to participating families and to community agencies who supported our connections with some families, and to community members for support. We are grateful to PolicyWise for Children and Families for study funding.

References

Adichie, C. (2009). *The danger of a single story*. [Ted Talk]. Retrieved from https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story

Alberta Government. (2013). *Together we raise tomorrow: An Alberta approach to early childhood development*. Edmonton, AB: Author.

Alberta Government. (2014). *How are our young children doing? Final report of the Early Child Development Mapping Project*. Edmonton, AB: Early Child Development Mapping Project Alberta.

Beaton, W., & McDonell, L. (2013). *The transition into kindergarten: A community approach to integrating a child's fragmented world – A discussion paper examining issues and implications of early childhood transitions to kindergarten*. Nanaimo, BC: Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre and Vancouver Island University.

Brown, C., & Lan, Y. C. (2015). A qualitative metasynthesis comparing U.S. teachers' conceptions of school readiness prior to and after the implementation of NCLB. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 45*, 1–13. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2014.08.012

Clandinin, D. J. & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Clandinin, D. J, Huber, J., Huber, M., Murphy, S., Murray Orr, A., Pearce, M., & Steeves, P. (2006). *Composing diverse identities: Narrative inquiries into the interwoven lives of children and teachers*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Dockett, S., Perry, B., & Kearney, E. (2010). *School readiness: What does it mean for Indigenous children, families, schools, and communities?* Issues Paper No. 2. Canberra, Australia: Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

Elkind, D. (2007). Preface to the twenty-fifth anniversary edition. *The hurried child: Growing up too fast too soon* (pp. 1–8). Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press. Retrieved from

http://www.parentbooksummaries.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/29-Hurried-Child.pdf

Friedel, T. L. (2010). The more things change, the more they stay the same: The challenge of identity for Native students in Canada. *Cultural and Pedagogical Inquiry, 1*(2), 22–45.

Kirkmayer, L. J., Tait, C. L., and Simpson, C. (2009). The mental health of Aboriginal peoples in Canada: Transformations of identity and community. In L. J. Kirkmayer & G. Guthrie Valaskaskis (Eds.), *Healing traditions. The mental health of Aboriginal peoples of Canada* (pp. 3–35). Vancouver, BC: UBC press.

Lessard, S. (2013). *Red worn runners: A narrative inquiry into the stories of Aboriginal youth and families in urban settings* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from https://era.library.ualberta.ca/items/8ff0c378-47eb-4a5d-926f-ce0070f19115/view/7b1f8b79-1957-403f-9e67-e5d99f508d3e/lessard_sean_spring2014.doc.pdf

Lessard, S., Caine, V., & Clandinin, D. J. (2014). A narrative inquiry into familial and school curriculum making: Attending to multiple worlds of Aboriginal youth and families. *Journal of Youth Studies, 17*(9), 1–18. doi:10.1080/13676261.2014.944121

Marsh, J. (2003). One-way traffic? Connections between literacy practices at home and in the nursery. *British Educational Research Journal, 29*(3), 369–382. doi:10.1080/01411920301857

McCain, M. N., Mustard, J. F., & McCuaig, K. (2011). *Early years study 3: Making decisions taking action*. Toronto, ON: Margaret & Wallace McCain Family Foundation.

McClelland, M. M., Acock, A. C., & Morrison, F. J. (2006). The impact of kindergarten learning related skills on academic trajectories at the end of elementary school. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 21*, 471–490.

Peters, L., Ortiz, K., & Swadener, B. (2015). Something isn't right: Deconstructing readiness with parents, teachers, and children. In J. M. Iorio & W. Parnell (Eds.), *Rethinking readiness in early childhood education: Implications for policy and practice* (pp. 33–48). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Restoule, J. P. (2008). The values carry on: Aboriginal identity formation of the urban raised generation. *Canadian Journal of Native Education, 31*(2), 15–33.

Swanson, C. (2013). *An autobiographical narrative inquiry into the lived tensions between familial and school curriculum-making worlds* (Master's thesis). Retrieved from https://era.library.ualberta.ca/items/2288398d-148d-4aac-83ed-2295083678c5

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. Toronto, ON: James Lorimer.

UNESCO. (2010). *Early childhood care and education regional report: Europe and North America*. Retrieved from http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001892/189211E.pdf

Young, M. (2005a). Is the legacy of residential schools relevant today? *Manitoba Association of School Superintendents, Fall*, 35–38.

Young, M. (2005b). *Pimatisiwin: Walking in a good way-A narrative inquiry into language as identity*. Winnipeg, MB: Pemmican.

Young, M., Joe, L., Lamoureux, J., Marshall, L., Moore, D., Orr, J. L., Parisian, B. M., Paul, K., Paynter, F., & Huber, J. (2012). *Warrior women: Remaking postsecondary places through relational narrative inquiry*. Bingley, UK: Emerald.

1 While some families have identified by particular Nations, most families identified as Indigenous.