



Northern Canadian Indigenous Children's Use of Language and Construction of Indigenous Cultural Meanings in Play

❖ What you need to know

Language contributes to literacy and learning. Research shows that teachers' typical classroom interactions following Eurocentric pedagogies involve children responding to teachers' questions. They offer limited opportunities for children's talk. There are persistent disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children's achievement on large-scale literacy tests and in their overall academic success.

❖ Why this research is important

Our research in northern Canadian Indigenous offers alternatives to Eurocentric pedagogies and discourses of disadvantage and exclusion that have contributed to Indigenous communities' linguistic and cultural loss and the destruction of Indigenous peoples' self-esteem and cultural pride.

❖ How this research was conducted

Three kindergarten teachers in two northern Canadian First Nations communities video-recorded their students' construction and dramatic play. They and university researchers analyzed children's use of language and their construction of Indigenous cultural meanings in the two play contexts.

❖ What the researcher found

Participating Indigenous children most frequently used language for learning to give information, explain, or elaborate on certain topics. Girls used language to express disagreement more often than boys, while boys used language for directing more than girls. Moreover, children showed a sense of agency in exploring different relationships and roles that have potential to contribute to positive change, if they could use language in these ways outside their Indigenous communities, as well.

❖ How this research can be used

Teachers can gather information about students' play interactions to gain a more complex picture of children's language use. Play contexts open up space for children to construct powerful cultural identities and meanings and to use Indigenous and other non-dominant languages, alongside English, in authentic social contexts.

Keywords: oral language and play, Indigenous children, Indigenous cultural construction

Publications based on the research

Eisazadeh, N., Rajendram, S., Portier, C., & Peterson, S.S. (2017). Indigenous children's use of language during play in rural northern Canadian kindergarten classrooms. *Literacy Research: Theory, Method, and Practice*, 66, 293-308.