

Seven Years of the AECEO Guiding Committee on Truth and Reconciliation: Walking Together in Reconciliation

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In many Indigenous worldviews, the number seven carries deep significance, often representing the Seven Grandfather Teachings—wisdom, love, respect, bravery, honesty, humility, and truth—which serve as guiding principles for living in balance and harmony. The past seven years of the AECEO’s Guiding Committee on Truth and Reconciliation reflect a journey of learning, unlearning, and re-learning, rooted in these values. Walking together in reconciliation requires time, patience, and relational accountability, much like the seven generations teaching, which reminds us that our actions today impact those who come after us. This work is not simply about policy changes but about nurturing a collective responsibility to uphold Indigenous ways of knowing and being in early childhood education, ensuring that future generations of children, families, and educators walk forward with knowledge, respect, and a shared commitment to truth and reconciliation.

Introduction

Over the past seven years, the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO) has committed to reconciliation with First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities through its Guiding Committee on Truth and Reconciliation, formed in 2018. This collaborative effort included the development of a comprehensive framework rooted in Indigenous principles aimed at transforming early childhood education (ECE) practices and policies across Ontario in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action. By addressing colonial barriers, amplifying Indigenous leadership, and supporting inclusive spaces for Indigenous children, families, and educators, the AECEO has initiated significant milestones, including published articles, professional learning opportunities, and establishing the All Nations Circle of Practice. This issue of eceLINK reflects on these achievements and the ongoing journey toward meaningful reconciliation in ECE, centering Indigenous voices and knowledge systems.

Spring/Summer 2018: AECEO’s Active Commitment to Truth and Reconciliation published in the eceLINK.

2017: Commitment to Reconciliation

The AECEO Board of Directors unanimously committed to reconciliation with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, stating:

“The AECEO will actively participate in and support reconciliation processes with Indigenous communities in Ontario and across Canada.”

Following initial conversations with Indigenous community members, establishing a **Guiding Committee on Truth and Reconciliation** emerged as necessary to support this commitment.

2018: Establishing the Guiding Committee

March 28, 2018:

The introductory meeting of the AECEO Guiding Committee on Truth and Reconciliation took place. The invitation to join emphasized:

“We have a role to play in the journey toward reconciliation and much work to do. With the help of a Guiding Committee, we aim to establish a formal statement and action plan.”

2018-2020:

The Committee met quarterly to develop its **Terms of Reference, Guiding Principles**, goals, and priorities.

Key Guiding Principles:

- Center Indigenous self-determination and cultural reclamation.
- Honour cultural protocols and diverse perspectives.
- Address settler colonialism within governance structures.
- Foster leadership from underrepresented voices.

2020: Formalizing Action

July 2020:

The Committee co-developed and published a formal **Statement and Action Plan** outlining the AECEO’s commitment to reconciliation, equity, and systemic change in ECE.

Excerpt from the Preamble:

“AECEO is dedicated to ensuring that Indigenous educators have equity within the organization and are positioned to lead in matters concerning their children and communities.”

The plan acknowledged the ongoing impact of colonial frameworks on Indigenous children and families and committed to creating equitable opportunities for Indigenous ECEs to lead and share their knowledge.

2020–2024: Expanding Impact

The Guiding Committee continued to broaden its reach through AECEO professional learning offerings and published articles focused on Indigenous pedagogies, land-based learning, and allyship:

Guiding Committee Articles Published in eceLINK (Open access)

- **Walking Together in Reconciliation** – Winter/Spring 2020
- **Exploring Indigenous Pedagogies Connected to Experiential Learning in Relation to Mother Earth** – Summer 2020
- **Awakening and Coming to Know Indigenous Pedagogies in Early Learning** – Fall/Winter 2020
- **Sharing the Experiences of Indigenous Educators and Communities During COVID-19** – Spring 2021
- **Interview with Métis Nation of Ontario’s Early Learning and Child Care Program** – Fall 2021
- **Meaningful Change for First Nations Children** – Winter/Spring 2022
- **All Nations Circle of Practice** – Spring/Summer 2022

- **What Kind of Ancestor Do You Hope to Be?** – Fall/Winter 2022
- **What Kind of Ancestor Do You Hope to Be: Responses to Elder Brenda Mason (Part 1)** – Spring/Summer 2023
- **What Kind of Ancestor Do You Hope to Be: Responses to Elder Brenda Mason (Part 2)** – Winter 2024
- **A Story of Keaton and His Wisdom** – Spring/Summer 2024

Also Published in *eceLINK*

- **AECEO's Active Commitment to Truth and Reconciliation** – Spring/Summer 2018
- **Peer-Reviewed Collection Special Issue on Indigenous Knowledges and Pedagogies in Early Childhood Education** – *eceLINK* Spring/Summer 2018
 - ◊ *Decolonizing and Co-constructing Contexts that Welcome Indigenous Practices and Knowledges in Early Childhood Education*
 - ◊ *Gizhaawaso: Culture as a Protective Factor for Indigenous Children with Disabilities*
 - ◊ *Dramatic Play in Northern Aboriginal Head Start Classrooms: Supporting Indigenous Children's Learning of Their Culture and Language*
 - ◊ *The Leadership Journey in the Spirit of Indigenous Early Childhood Educators in Remote Northern First Nations Communities*
- **2 Articles Contributed by the Northern Oral Language and Writing Through Play (NOW Play) Project:**
 - ◊ *Indigenizing Curricula: Developing a Pedagogy of Relationship that Centers on the Child* – Spring/Summer 2024
 - ◊ *An ECE Instructor's Action Research: Reflections on an Initiative to Teach Anishinaabemowin* – Winter 2024

Professional Learning Offerings

- *Reimagining Our Relationship to Land through Natural Curiosity*
- *(Re)Imagining Relationships with Land*
- *Listening to Land as Teacher (Part 1/4: Birth)* – *Beginning with a Seasonal Pedagogy in ECE*
- *Listening to Land as Teacher (Part 2/4: Movement)* – *Walking Together on Mother Earth Through the Four Seasons in ECE*
- *Listening to Land as Teacher (Part 3/4: Relationships)* – *Acknowledging the Importance of Ceremony in Truth and Reconciliation in ECE*
- *Listening to Land as Teacher (Part 4/4: Passing)* – *Giving Back to a Growing Understanding of Community in ECE*
- *AECEO Conversation: Listening to Land as Teacher Sharing Circle*
- *Allyship: Relationships, Humility, and Moving Forward*
- *Question & Answer on Allyship*
- *Indigenous Astronomy: As Told by the Haudenosaunee – Filling Your Spirit with Stardust and Astronomical Knowledge*
- *Family and Race Representation on Screens* – *ECEs Exploring Children's Media*

2021: AECEO Guiding Committee Webpage

Space created on the AECEO website where stories, information, and resources are shared on an ongoing basis: www.aeceo.ca/aeceo_guiding_committee_on_truth_and_reconciliation

- Guiding Committee on Truth and Reconciliation
- *eceLINK* Articles
- Shared Resources & Information
- CMAS Webinars: Supporting Child Care in the Settlement Community

2022: All Nations Circle of Practice

The AECEO Guiding Committee launched the **All Nations Circle of Practice**, inviting Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators to share experiences and knowledge.

Goals of the Circle:

- Foster relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators.
- Advocate for justice and equity for Indigenous families.
- Reclaim Indigenous knowledge and connect educators with land-based learning.

Excerpt from Elder Brenda Mason:

“We gather to serve children and families, deepening our understanding of our responsibilities to community and land.”

Spring/Summer 2022: All Nations Circle of Practice article published in *eceLINK*.

For information about joining the Circle of Practice please email Sue Parker at sparker@aeceo.ca

Looking Ahead: A Vision for Future Generations

As the AECEO Guiding Committee on Truth and Reconciliation reflects on seven years of progress, the work remains ongoing and deeply considering the impact of the **Seven Generations**. This teaching reminds us that our actions today shape the world for those who come after us.

Invitation for Indigenous Educators

Through sustained efforts, the AECEO is committed to supporting inclusive, equitable early learning environments where Indigenous children, families, and educators can thrive. By listening, learning, and acting

together, we walk forward with the knowledge that reconciliation is a collective responsibility—a journey we take for today and future generations.

We welcome Indigenous educators to join this journey, sharing their voices, knowledge, and leadership to shape early learning environments that reflect and honour Indigenous worldviews, values, and ways of being.

For more information and resources, please visit the AECEO website:

aeceo.ca/aeceo_guiding_committee_on_truth_and_reconciliation.

For information about becoming a member of the Guiding Committee please email Sue Parker at sparker@aeceo.ca

As we reflect on the past seven years, we acknowledge that reconciliation is not a destination but an ongoing journey—one that requires sustained commitment, deep listening, and reciprocal relationships. The work of the AECEO’s Guiding Committee on Truth and Reconciliation has laid a strong foundation, but the path forward calls for continued action, humility, and courage. By centering Indigenous leadership, upholding Indigenous knowledge systems, and fostering meaningful partnerships, we move closer to creating early childhood education spaces where Indigenous children, families, and educators feel valued, heard, and empowered. Walking together in reconciliation means embracing both the challenges and the possibilities, ensuring that the next seven years—and beyond—are guided by the spirit of respect, responsibility, and collective care.

Miigwech, Meegwetch, Merci, Thank you to our readers.