

[All Nations Circle of Practice

The AECEO currently supports six existing Communities of Practice across Ontario, where Early Childhood Educators create space for community care, dialogue, support and connection. The AECEO's Truth and Reconciliation Guiding Committee would like to invite interested Indigenous Early Childhood Educators and non-Indigenous Educators also, to join a newly developing *All Nations Circle of Practice* with support from Guiding Committee members, including Elder Brenda Mason, Guiding Committee Elder.

What is a Community of Practice (CoP)?

- When a group of people that share a common concern, an interest, or a set of problems and then come together to accomplish both group and individual goals.
- By working together to focus on sharing and creating best practices and new knowledge to achieve an area of professional practice. Continuing interaction on an ongoing basis, whether weekly or monthly, is an integral part of this.
- Many gatherings are face to face, web-based communication, conducting and connecting with various activities.
- Communities of practice are made of people that all have a common interest and work together to do better.

What is the origin of the term 'community of practice'?

While many have come together through informal communities of practice, the original concept was the primary in learning theory. Cognitive anthropologists Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger created the term "community of practice"- this term is used to describe the acts of a community as a living curriculum, changing over time, adding more information, creating a common ground, and guiding the learning to give meaning to the actions and goals that everyone collectively would like to achieve. While CoP is a newer term, the AECEO's Truth and Reconciliation Guiding Committee members chose the term *Circle of Practice* to acknowledge the gathering of all First Nations, Metis, Inuit, and non-Indigenous Educators. We intend to hold an initial sharing circle in the fall of 2022 to connect, share ideas and support each other in nurturing this Circle of Practice.

There are three characteristics of a CoP:

1) Domain:

Identity is defined by a shared domain of interest. Membership implies a commitment to the domain.

2) Community:

Members build relationships that enable them to learn from one another through sharing, discussions, and pursuing a common interest in their domain.

3) Practice:

Members develop a shared repertoire of resources-tools, experience, stories, and ways of knowing and addressing the current issues and concerns-shared practice.



Goals for the Circle of Practice:

- Gather all First Nations, Metis, Inuit, and non-Indigenous Educators to share experiences, knowledges and pedagogies.
- Advocating for justice and equity for all Indigenous people.
- Reclaiming the knowledge that has been lost over the years.
- Connecting with the communities to build a sustainable relationship.
- Providing information, resources and support for all families regardless of where they reside and how they identify.
- Provide Continuous Professional Learning opportunities.
- Forming an Indigenous provincial body for Early Childhood Educators and child care workers.
- Connecting families, children and educators to land and land-based learning.
- Providing education, support and system navigation for our families.
- Serving children and families and deepening our understanding of per-sonal responsibilities.

A community can deliver on many aspects of value; however, choosing one or two specific areas to focus on will start the Circle of Practice on a path to achieving optimal results.

Responsibilities of the CoP:

There will be a collaboration with Elders throughout the communities, Elder Brenda Mason advised that the Circle of Practice gatherings are opened with a Ceremony and prayer; there are protocols that everyone will be mindful of – that the information is not shared outside the Circle. While everyone gathers, it will be in a Circle formation (anytime we're able to gather in-person) to resolve, create, and plan for the future of our communities.

Everyone is equal, and bringing together a group of like-minded individuals will ensure that the planning and outcomes are a collective agreement between everyone with common goals to better the future generations of children and families everyone serves.

The Circle of Practice will embody First Nation, Metis, and Inuit traditional and sacred guiding principles and teachings in building relationships and co-creating ethical spaces. Being together will create a sense of belonging, acceptance of the uniqueness everyone possesses, and a chance to understand the different perspectives everyone will share. This will also allow so many a chance to heal from intergenerational trauma as we connect through heart and plan for future generations.



Story and Teaching from Elder Brenda Mason

“Community of Practice – Circle of Practice – what I see is people sitting in a circle to discuss various issues over a period of time, as stated in the article – coming together to resolve, create and plan. To teach each other who we are, how we practice, how we raise our children and share our community. This leads me to think about Community – people living together in certain areas with common interests, characteristics, practices, etc. Circle – a round shape, within the Circle, one can see all points. When sitting in a Circle, we are all equal, no one is greater than the other and we are accepting of each other’s unique way of life and community practices. We recognize our differences and we find a way to work together within the Circle. Many practices are common with many differences as well. I think about the Seven Grandfather Teachings as guiding teachings to live within the Circle so that we can see each other with acceptance, respect and love. Honesty is never easy to practice within a group – to say or admit something can be scary. I have been scared to admit when I made a mistake for fear of being judged. I soon realized the sense of freedom I experienced within when I no longer worried about what others thought of me. Staying true to self is freeing. So, I’m sure someone else thought about bringing all the words together. It’s a Community of people sitting in a Circle that brings equal-ness to all and communicates, “I see you”. In this Circle, we share practices from who we are and how we live in our own communities, and there is a willingness to share, resolve, plan, create, etc.

One thing I’ve been contemplating further on and how it still sits with me is when I was a kid; I used to believe I belonged to all Indians across Canada. I have become aware of the differences and commonality of life among the People, I still feel I belong. And that is so healing for me”

(Elder Brenda Mason, Guiding Committee email communication, May 20, 2022).

Conclusion

We would like to offer a safe space for our fellow RECE's, child care workers, knowledge holders and community members who identify as First Nation, Inuit and Metis to come together and share our journeys. Inclusive of working in our communities, working off-reserve, in urban cities, with Indigenous children and families in any capacity. Non-Indigenous educators and community members are also welcome to join.

As we build upon our inherent right to self-determination, we want to gather our voices and build relationships that will strengthen, support and guide us on our journey to advocate for and co-develop our own system of Early Learning and Child Care, one that serves our People in all areas equally. Our time has come to start making changes that will benefit all the children and families of our Nations and communities.

We hope that anyone interested in this new and exciting opportunity to create an All Nations Circle of Practice will get in touch with us and look out for an invitation to join the first sharing circle in the fall. We recognize that a Circle of Practice that is culturally safe, inclusive, and where we all feel a sense of belonging will take time and will require much care, understanding, respect, and big conversations.

To conclude, we share guidance Elder Brenda Mason gifted to us as we discussed the Circle of Practice:

"I've said this a number of times, I always try to remember to put the children in front of me. That is the reason why I'm here [with the AECEO Truth and Reconciliation Guiding Committee]. That is the reason why I am learning to speak up, not only here but also in my other work. If I speak up for adults, I end up speaking up for children because we as adults need to heal as well so that we can raise our children in a good way.

Mino Bimaadiziwin, the way of a good life. We as adults need to demonstrate that to the children. The children need to see that, and they do see it, they see us. They are always watching us, observing us, they

may not appear to be paying attention while they are playing and we're around them, but they are because they are spirit first. The connection that we have is through spirit, and our Elders remind us to work from your heart, and they also say look to someone's heart first, and then we can help people to help themselves, and that's what we want to do here. We want to help our people, to walk with them in a good way. There is division and politics, we all recognize that, but we have to walk with that gently. Sometimes I say the government is happy when we fight amongst ourselves because we are dividing and distracting ourselves. So, we need to find a way to walk gently with each other, to re-spect each other and we have the teachings among us to do that. We always need to be honest with ourselves, to be honest about the journey that we are on. Every once in a while, I still find myself judging somebody in my mind, and I don't want to do that anymore; I can admit when I do it, and I forgive myself, I ask for forgiveness, and that helps me. We are all still growing. I am still growing in my heart and in my life, and I don't know everything, and I don't want to because I am always gaining knowledge"

(Guiding Committee article meeting, May 19, 2022).

Please contact the AECEO at info@aeceo.ca to inquire about the newly developing Circle of Practice and be added to the email list to receive information and an invitation to the inaugural Circle of Practice meeting in the fall. Membership in the AECEO is not required in order to be part of the All Nations Circle of Practice.

This following Guiding Committee Members collaborated on this article:

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Some of the information in this article was modified from the following sources:

www.communityofpractice.ca/background/what-is-a-community-of-practice
www.scaledagileframework.com/communities-of-practice