University of Alberta

Social-Emotional Development: An Exploration of Definitions in the Literature
And Aboriginal Perspectives

by

Melissa Daniels

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Abstract

The current thesis consists of two papers. The first paper, presented in Chapter 2, examined recent research literature to identify how researchers define social-emotional development and to consider where further clarity is needed in defining this term. Using content analysis to examine researchers' definitions, four categories emerged, consisting of self-regulation; emotion knowledge; social and relationship skills; and self-concept. Researchers were generally consistent in their definitions; however, it was discovered that remarkably few researchers explicitly define social-emotional competence, instead relying on tools to operationalize this construct. The second paper, presented in Chapter 3, is a qualitative study that explored social-emotional competence from Aboriginal perspectives. Five themes emerged from the data. A strong identity was central to the other themes of cultural, social, emotional, and mental wellness. As a concluding discussion piece, Chapter 4 integrates the learnings from both papers, discusses implications for practice, and identifies directions for future research.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Purpose

Research evidence indicates the crucial importance of the first few years of life in establishing the basis for positive child development (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). As part of this literature, social-emotional (SE) development has been the focus of much research in recent decades. However, multiple terms are used to refer to SE development, and the concept is ill-defined (Humphrey et al., 2011). This lack of clarity can be problematic for measurement, as it is difficult to accurately measure a concept that has not been precisely defined (Wigelsworth, Humphrey, Kalambouka, & Lendrum, 2010). This challenge is reflected in the wide variety of constructs included in screening and assessment tools that purport to measure SE development. Further, concerns have been raised that conceptions of healthy SE development and the accompanying tools and programs that focus on this construct are not sensitive to culturally influenced aspects of development that are important to minority children (Lyman, Njoroge, & Willis, 2007). In Canada, this may be especially problematic for Aboriginal children, as these children face unique challenges in navigating multiple cultural contexts during the course of development (Priest, Mackean, Davis, Waters, & Briggs, 2012; Robinson, Tyler, Jones, Silburn, & Zubrick, 2012).

The current thesis has two purposes: to examine how researchers are defining the term "social-emotional"; and, to understand how Aboriginal youth, adults and elders describe healthy SE development and the ways in which it is supported. In order to achieve this dual purpose, the current thesis consists of two separate papers. The

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first paper is presented in Chapter 2. This paper examines recent research literature to identify how current researchers are defining SE development and to consider where further clarity is needed in defining this term. A second paper, which is a qualitative study that explores the concept of SE competence from an Aboriginal perspective[1], is presented in Chapter 3. This paper focuses specifically on elements of children's SE health and wellbeing as defined by Aboriginal perspectives. These elements of SE wellbeing identified in the qualitative study will be discussed in light of the literature as well as current SE measurement tools and programming. Finally, as a concluding discussion piece, Chapter 4 integrates the learnings from both papers, discusses implications for practice, and identifies directions for future research. To contextualize each of these papers, a review of the literature is provided below.

The Early Childhood Years

The early years of childhood represent a period of rapid growth in multiple developmental domains (Ramey & Ramey, 2004; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). In general, there is consensus among researchers that the first years of life are critical in laying the foundation for lifelong trajectories of health and wellbeing (Maggi, Irwin, Siddiqi, & Hertzman, 2010). A plethora of recent research studies have demonstrated the central importance of the early years to the development and refinement of skills that predict later academic, social, and behavioural success (Conner & Fraser, 2011; Dunlap et al.,

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[1] The study presented in this paper is part of a larger research program carried out by Dr. Rebecca Gokiert through the University of Alberta's Faculty of Extension, and funded by the Norlien Foundation and the Women and Children's Health Research Institute. Through conducting a series of focus groups, the larger study seeks to explore the social-emotional competencies necessary for navigating multiple cultural contexts as an immigrant to Canada, child of an immigrant to Canada, and as an Aboriginal person.

2006; McCabe & Altamura, 2011). Early childhood experiences are also linked to brain development (Luby et al., 2012), later antisocial features (Shi, Bureau, Easterbrooks, Zhao, & Lyons-Ruth, 2012), later aggressiveness and anxiety (Schmidt, Demulder, & Denham, 2002), adult socioeconomic status (Delaney & Smith, 2012), and adult mental health (Morley & Moran, 2011).

Research has demonstrated that the foundations for mental health are laid as early as infancy (Yates et al, 2008), and that very young children have the potential to exhibit behaviours that can persist into later childhood, adolescence, and even adulthood. As such, the importance of *early* identification and intervention for problematic behaviours cannot be understated (Carter, Briggs-Gowan, & Davis, 2004; Dunlap et al., 2006; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Because mental health and behavioural problems most often develop in early childhood, the first years of life are an optimal period for intervention (Waddell, 2007). Evidence shows that negative developmental trajectories can be prevented with early promotion and prevention efforts, as well as with early identification and intervention (Ramey & Ramey, 2004). On the contrary, when children with mental health problems are not identified and given access to appropriate education and treatment in a timely manner, their problems tend to become exacerbated and longer lasting, necessitating more intensive treatment later for related mental health sequelae (Dunlap et al., 2006).

Children's Mental Health in Canada

Despite researchers' increasing focus on the early years regarding behavioural and mental health identification and intervention, the amount of research being

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conducted in the area of children's mental health remains sparse as compared to the

amount of research in other areas of health care (Kutcher & McLuckie, 2010). This is

concerning, given that over 800,000 children up to the age of 18 in Canada, or one in

seven, meet criteria for a diagnosable mental health disorder (Waddell, McEwan,

Shepherd, Offord, & Hua, 2005). As well, in Canada, the vast majority of collective health

spending is directed toward treatment services as opposed to prevention (Waddell,

2007). In a review of early childhood programs in Canada, no programs were found that

specifically aimed to prevent mental health disorders in children, although a number of

programs that included goals related to mental health were identified (Waddell,

McEwan, Peters, Hua, & Garland, 2007). As such, the authors asserted that the

development and evaluation of early childhood mental health prevention programs

should be a public health priority (Waddell et al., 2007).

　　　With elevated attention being paid to matters of children's mental health,

Canadian public policy has recently become more focused on early intervention and

preventive services for children in the first few years of life (Waddell, 2007).

Accordingly, children's mental health policies have been established in a number of

provinces. To illustrate, the province of Alberta funded a three-year Children's Mental

Health Action Plan (Alberta Government, 2008), while the province of Ontario enacted a

policy framework for child and youth mental health (Ontario Ministry of Children and

Youth Services, 2006). As well, a number of national child mental health initiatives have

been launched, including the Mental Health Commission of Canada's recent child and

youth mental health Evergreen Framework (Kutcher & McLuckie, 2010). The Evergreen

Framework provides a set of values to guide child and youth mental health policies,

programs, and services in Canada, and focuses on equitable access to programs and

services that promote positive social and emotional functioning.

Social-Emotional Development

Along with growing recognition regarding the importance of children's mental

health has come the recognition that children's mental health and children's social-

emotional development are intertwined and crucial for one another (McEwan, Waddell,

& Barker, 2007). As with mental health, SE competencies and SE difficulties begin to

develop in infancy (Denham, Wyatt, Bassett, Echeverria, & Knox, 2009; Yates et al.,

2008); accordingly, the early years are a critical time for identifying and dealing with SE

difficulties and for fostering competence in this area (Reicher, 2010). Social-emotional

competencies have been variably defined in the literature; however, a model proposed

by Denham (2006) has been well-referenced in the literature, and has been commended

for being comprehensive (Wigelsworth et al., 2010). According to Denham's (2006)

model, SE competence includes *behavioural and emotion regulation*, described as the

ability to differentially retain, enhance, attenuate, and dampen emotions and behavior,

as appropriate; *emotion knowledge*, described as children's developmentally

appropriate knowledge of emotional expressions and situations; *social and relationship

skills*, including cooperating, listening, as well as forming and maintaining prosocial

relationships; *social problem solving*, described as the ability to determine effective

ways to solve differences among oneself and peers; and *emotional expressiveness*,

described as the expression of more positive emotions relative to negative emotions.

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Research shows that SE skills are crucial for healthy development in early childhood. In particular, although school curriculum is typically more focused on cognitive and language skills, research evidence and the experience of teachers indicate that SE skills are paramount in facilitating school readiness and later academic success (Carter et al., 2004; High, 2008; Thompson & Goodman, 2009). It is now recognized that during early childhood, cognitive development does not take place in isolation from SE development; rather, because social relationships are crucial to early childhood development, the quality of these relationships greatly influence the ways that children learn (Thompson & Goodman, 2009). It has been asserted that SE skills can facilitate cognitive development and academic skills (Boyd, Barnett, Bodrova, Leong, & Gomby, 2005).

Specifically, preschool emotion knowledge has been shown to be a significant predictor of first grade achievement (Rhoades, Warren, Domitrovich, & Greenberg, 2011). Further, the ability to cooperate well with others strongly predicts school success during the early years because cooperative children develop stronger relationships with teachers and peers, and show greater involvement in learning activities (Thompson & Goodman, 2009). Indeed, when children have healthy relationships with their peers and teachers, they tend to report more positive feelings toward school, and reach higher achievement levels than children who are not able to develop and maintain positive relationships (Denham, 2006). In contrast, according to Raver and Knitzer (2002), who have integrated research evidence regarding the implications of SE development in early childhood, young children who lack SE skills: (1) participate less in classroom activities

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and have less positive interactions with peers and teachers than classmates who have well developed SE skills; (2) perform more poorly in first grade, even when controlling for cognitive abilities; and (3) have academic and social problems in later elementary school. As a result, it has been suggested that SE programming in schools can address the root causes of academic underachievement (Greenberg et al., 2003).

However, kindergarten teachers have reported that approximately 20 percent of students do not enter kindergarten with the SE skills necessary for proper learning (Boyd et al., 2005). In a recent US national study, results showed that the prevalence of behaviour disorders at the time of kindergarten entry was 14%, that children with behaviour problems were a full standard deviation below their peers in SE competence, and that parents of children with behaviour problems were five times more likely to report that their child was not ready for kindergarten (Montes, Lotyczewski, Halterman, & Hightower, 2012).

The issue of discord between the growing knowledge of the importance of SE skills in early childhood, and the lack of attention paid to these skills in educational programming, has been raised by a number of researchers and practitioners (e.g., Bernard, 2006; Denham, 2006). Accordingly, increasing resources have been devoted to focusing on SE skills as significant not only to learning and school success, but also to more general wellbeing, adaptive functioning, mental health, and social success (Carter et al., 2004; Denham, 2006; Thompson & Goodman, 2009). As a result, recent years have witnessed a necessary proliferation of programming that specifically focuses on fostering SE skills (Boyd et al., 2005; Payton et al., 2000). However, for programs to have

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maximal impact in terms of preventing long term difficulties and fostering healthy development, intervening for difficulties in early childhood is crucial, as similarly discussed above with respect to children's mental health more generally (Reicher, 2010; Squires, 2003). In order to ensure the effectiveness and appropriateness of such early interventions, programs and services must be grounded in research evidence. However, the evidence for early social-emotional interventions is not entirely clear. In fact, it has been identified that use of the term "social-emotional" has become problematic (Humphrey et al., 2010; Wigelsworth et al., 2011). This is because multiple terms are used to refer to this construct, researchers tend not to clearly or comprehensively define this construct, and overall, this term lacks a clear operational definition (Wigelsworth et al.,2011). For tools and programs that rely in large part on research evidence to guide their development, a lack of clarity in defining this term is problematic for accuracy in identifying and intervening for SE difficulties and promoting healthy SE development.

Cross-Cultural Considerations

Despite the established importance of early identification and intervention for children with SE difficulties, concerns have been raised that mainstream tools and programming may not accurately reflect the development of children from minority cultures (Yates et al., 2008). Although cultural proficiency is necessary for gathering accurate information regarding a child's functioning (Carter et al., 2004), research on SE functioning has primarily been conducted with North American children from Euro-

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American ethnic backgrounds; accordingly there is a lack of knowledge regarding SE

functioning in children from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Chen, 2009).

Given that child development is inherently culturally influenced (Rogoff, 2003),

this lack of knowledge is concerning. With respect to SE development specifically, the

role of culture is being increasingly recognized (Chen, 2009). In particular, young

children from different cultures may display SE characteristics in disparate ways, and

different cultures may place greater or lesser value on different aspects of SE

functioning (Chen, 2009). As such, standard screening and assessment tools must be

used with children from diverse cultural backgrounds cautiously (Carter et al., 2004),

and research is urgently needed to investigate and gain an understanding of SE

functioning from different cultural perspectives (McIntosh, Jason, Robinson, & Brezinski,

2004).

Aboriginal Children

Within the Canadian context, it is particularly important to consider the

development of Aboriginal children (i.e., First Nation, Métis, or Inuit; Indian and

Northern Affairs Canada, 2002) because the number of Aboriginal children in Canada is

increasing at a faster rate than any other identified group (Statistics Canada, 2008).

Moreover, Aboriginal children are among the most vulnerable populations in the

country, as they show higher rates of poverty, inadequate housing, malnourishment,

disabilities, substance abuse, and suicide than non-Aboriginal children (Trocmé et al.,

2006; Turpel-Lafond et al., 2011). Aboriginal children are also significantly over-

represented in child protection services, with the number of Aboriginal children in care

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continuing to increase in recent decades (Blackstock, 2003). These facts are concerning,

given that children experiencing poverty are at an elevated risk for not achieving social-

emotional developmental milestones (McWayne, Owsianik, Green, & Fantuzzo, 2008).

In contrast, Canadian studies have demonstrated that non-Aboriginal children and those

from a higher socioeconomic background possess more characteristics of school

readiness that are important for academic achievement (Ball, 2002). As such, promoting

the healthy development and wellbeing of Aboriginal children should be a public priority

both presently and in the future (Turpel-Lafond et al., 2011).

In order to address this priority, an increased understanding of early childhood

development in an Aboriginal context is needed. Due to colonization, Canadian

Aboriginal children grow up in multiple contexts (i.e., urban, rural, on-reserve, off-

reserve). Accordingly, Aboriginal children must navigate multiple cultures, which

involves the task of developing competencies based on both mainstream and traditional

cultural practices (Malcolm & Sharifian, 2005; Kerwin, 2011). The literature clearly

demonstrates that growing up in a mainstream context presents multiple challenges for

minority children, with implications for their social and emotional well-being, and

highlights that the successful navigation of multiple cultures is associated with the most

positive developmental outcomes (Ingalls, Hammond, Dupoux, & Baeza, 2006;

Smokowski, Rose, & Bacallao, 2009). There is well-documented evidence to this end

with respect to minority children in general, but little is known about the SE

development of Aboriginal children in particular (Sarche, Croy, Big Crow, Mitchell, &

Spicer, 2009). Accordingly, more research on early childhood development must

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endeavor to focus specifically on Aboriginal children and the unique SE skills that they require in order to successfully navigate multiple cultures.

Conclusion

To begin to address concerns raised in the literature about the lack of clarity in defining SE development, Chapter 2 of the current thesis examines and reports on the way in which current researchers are defining this term. To begin to address the lack of cross-cultural knowledge with respect to SE development, Chapter 3 reports on the way in which Aboriginal community members conceptualize healthy SE development and envision SE wellness being supported in Aboriginal children. Finally, Chapter 4 is a concluding discussion that links the findings of the preceding chapters, and presents implications for research and practice.

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Chapter 2. Defining Social-Emotional Competence: Identifying Trends and Gaps in the Literature

Introduction

It is widely recognized that healthy social-emotional (SE) development is one of the foundations for ensuring the optimal wellbeing of young children (Fantuzzo et al., 2007; Heo & Squires, 2012). Children who lack social-emotional skills in early childhood are at risk for problems with both immediate and future academic achievement (McClelland, 2006; Whitted, 2011), preschool and kindergarten readiness (Conner & Fraser, 2011; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004), kindergarten achievement (Howse, Calkins, Anastopoulos, Keane, & Shelton, 2003), general success in school (Payton et al., 2008), and longer-term poorer social and emotional functioning (Conner & Fraser, 2011). However, explicitly teaching social-emotional skills in the early years can alter the continuation of problematic behaviours (Schultz, Coombs Richardson, Barber, & Wilcox, 2011). As such, early identification through screening and assessment, followed by skill-based interventions, can reduce the negative effects of early developmental challenges on later outcomes (Briggs-Gowan, Carter, Skuban, & Horwitz, 2001; Squires, Bricker, Heo, & Twombly, 2001). The attention paid to fostering positive social-emotional development has led to an increase in the number of measurement tools and programs that specifically focus on screening, assessing, and enhancing social-emotional development in the early years (Conner & Fraser, 2011; Humphrey et al., 2011). However, the literature across these domains (i.e., screening, assessment, and programming) lacks a clear, comprehensive, and consistent definition

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of social-emotional development (Humphrey et al., 2011; Wigelsworth, Humphrey,

Kalambouka, & Lendrum, 2010). As a result, the growth and advancement of social-

emotional programs and measurement tools is taking place without a widely accepted,

comprehensive conceptualization of social-emotional development. In the current

paper, definitions of social-emotional development used in recent articles published in

peer-reviewed journals are examined. This paper represents a starting point for the

development of a new and comprehensive definition of social-emotional competence

by examining how researchers are currently defining this term and identifying specific

areas where further clarity and comprehensiveness in the definitions are required.

     Defining Social-Emotional Competence. Social and emotional competencies

have been extensively researched in recent decades (Carter, Briggs-Gowan, & Davis,

2004). Social competence has been defined in terms of social skills, relationships,

functional social outcomes, and status among peers (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). Studies of

social competence refer to this concept globally, for example in terms of social

adjustment, or more specifically, in terms of certain social skills such as effectiveness in

relationships (Spritz, Sandberg, Maher, & Zajdel, 2010). Although social competence is

not uniformly defined, most definitions of social competence refer to socially acceptable

behaviours that have positive consequences and contribute to goal achievement

(Stefan, 2008). On the other hand, emotional competencies are reflected in how

children react to situations (Ashiabi, 2007). Emotional competencies have been most

often defined to include emotion expressiveness, emotion regulation, and emotion

recognition (Denham 2003; Stefan, 2008). The umbrella term "social-emotional" has

been advanced because emotional and social competencies are inherently tied together. In particular, social interactions between children involve emotions, and children's ability to regulate and express their emotions, as well as understand the emotions of others, determines how successful they are in social situations and relationships (Halberstadt, Denham, & Dunsmore, 2001). As well, children's emotional reactions to others indicate their openness and willingness to engage in social interactions (Spritz, et al., 2010). Conceptions of social-emotional competence must take into account that "emotional experience is embedded in social experience and the two are reciprocally influential" (Reicher, 2010, p. 217). Accordingly, it has been asserted that simply amalgamating conceptions of social competence and emotional competence does not enhance our understanding of social-emotional competence and the interaction and influence that one has on the other (Reicher, 2010). To further complicate the confusion in the literature, multiple terms have been used to describe social-emotional skills.

Terminology. The terms used to describe social-emotional competence in the literature are widely variable. While most authors use the term "social-emotional development" (e.g., Whitcomb & Merrell, 2011), others use the terms "social-emotional wellness" or "wellbeing" (Yates et al., 2008), "social-emotional competence" or "skills" (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012; Bierman et al., 2008), "early childhood mental health" or "psychological health" (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2008), "socioemotional functioning" or "characteristics" (Chen, 2009), "behavioural adjustment" (Carter et al., 2004), or "social-emotional learning" (e.g., Denham, 2006).

Others switch between the terms "social-emotional competence" and "social competence" to refer to the same constructs (e.g., Conner & Fraser, 2011; Schmidt, Demulder, & Denham, 2002). In moving away from a strengths-based approach, other authors use the terms "social-emotional symptomatology" (Jones, Brown, & Aber, 2011), "emotional and behavioural problems" (Fox & Hemmeter, 2009), "psychopathology" (Briggs-Gowan et al., 2001), and "psychosocial problems" (Hielkema, de Winter, Meer, & Reijneveld, 2011) to describe deficits in social-emotional functioning. In keeping with the terms used by authors of the articles reviewed for the current paper, the terms "social-emotional competence," "social-emotional functioning," and "social-emotional development" will be used.

  Current Conceptualizations. Although there has been a recent increase in the development and implementation of tools and programs that claim to measure, enhance, and promote social-emotional functioning, there is a distinct lack of clarity in the literature with respect to defining social-emotional development (Humphrey et al., 2011). Where the literature is lacking a clear and comprehensive definition of social-emotional development that can be adopted by researchers, practitioners, and tool developers, multiple problems can arise. First, this lack of clarity creates difficulties for the accurate measurement of social-emotional competencies and problems (Wigelsworth et al., 2010). In order for tools to identify the social-emotional problems in young children, the constructs measured by these tools must be based in clear research evidence. Where the research evidence is ambiguous, tool development can correspondingly lack clarity. To illustrate, there are currently a wide variety of social-

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emotional measurement tools that examine both global and specific constructs, and in some instances, there is a lack of consistency across measures. A robust definition that could provide a clear understanding of social-emotional constructs would assist in the development of tools that clearly measure important aspects of social-emotional development. Similarly, where research evidence is not based in a clear definition, the choice of which tools to utilize for research can pose a challenge, as ensuring consistency between definitions of social-emotional development and corresponding measures is not straightforward. Also, where a clear definition of social-emotional competence is lacking, the utility of screening and assessment results can be questionable, as it is unclear whether the most important aspects of children's social-emotional strengths and challenges are being reflected in measurement. Second, implications arise for program development, which must also be grounded in research evidence. Insofar as this evidence is unclear or inadequate, difficulties arise in determining the most appropriate focus for social-emotional interventions. In order to accurately claim that programs are evidence-based, there must be a clear understanding of such evidence, which is not possible without a clear understanding of what constitutes social-emotional competence. Third, programs are most often evaluated with the use of measurement tools. In order to make meaningful evaluative comparisons among social-emotional programs, there must be a clear understanding of the constructs included in measurement tools, and the evidence from which these tools have been developed must also be clearly understood. Essentially, a clear and comprehensive definition of social-emotional development must be established and

adopted in order for social-emotional tools and programs to support children in a consistent and effective manner.

Purpose. This paper represents a starting point for generating and advancing a clear and comprehensive definition of social-emotional development by examining current definitions found in the research literature. Currently in the literature, social-emotional development is a term that lacks a clear, comprehensive definitional framework capable of taking into account the multiple constructs that can be subsumed within it (Humphrey et al., 2011; Wigelsworth et al., 2010). Before a clear and more comprehensive definition and/ or framework of social-emotional development can be generated, it is important to move beyond the simple statement that this term is ill-defined (Humphrey et al., 2011; Wigelwsworth et al., 2010), and into an understanding of *how* this term is ill-defined, that is, where the similarities and gaps in the definitions exist. Accordingly, this paper aims to identify how researchers are currently defining social-emotional development, as well as the similarities and gaps that may exist. Implications for research, measurement, and programming are discussed.

Methods

A search for peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2000 and 2012 was conducted using the Academic Search Complete and PsycInfo databases. This twelve-year span was chosen to include the most recent articles available, and to limit the articles for review to a manageable number.

Articles were examined for the current review if (1) there was a focus on social-emotional development (i.e., not emotional development or social development alone),

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as evidenced by the term "social-emotional" or "socioemotional" in the article title; and

(2) there was a focus on early childhood, defined as age 0 to 8 years. Articles were not

included if they comprised validation research on a social-emotional tool, as the

purpose was to examine definitions of social-emotional competence being used in

current research on social-emotional development, and not to examine research on

social-emotional tools themselves. Ninety-four articles met the inclusion criteria.

These 94 articles were reviewed for definitions of social-emotional competence

used by the authors. Of the 94 articles reviewed, 67 did not include a definition of

social-emotional competence. These 67 articles used the term social-emotional or

socioemotional throughout, and most often discussed the importance of competence in

this area, but did not describe what was meant by this term. The authors of the

remaining 27 articles explicitly stated the definition of social-emotional competence

being used in their research. The definitions contained in these 27 articles were

reviewed in detail using content analysis. Content analysis is "a research method for the

subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic

classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh & Shannon,

2005, p. 1278). Definitions in the 27 articles were each read thoroughly, and notes were

made relevant to key concepts. Upon further review of the definitions, key concepts

were organized into categories. Finally, definitions in each article were reviewed again

to code parts of the definitions into the identified categories. It was necessary to

categorize the definitions because researchers used different language in describing

elements of social-emotional development. Categorizing the definitions of social-

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emotional development allowed for the creation of a common language in order to make sense of the definitions being used by current researchers, to note/identify the similarities in conceptualization, and to identify gaps in these definitions.

Findings

Through content analysis, four main categories emerged from the definitions of social-emotional competence: *emotion knowledge* with two sub-categories of self awareness (i.e., knowledge of one's own emotions) and social awareness (i.e., knowledge of others' emotions); *self-regulation* with two sub-categories of emotion regulation and behavioural regulation; *relationship skills*; and *self-concept*. Although the definitions of social-emotional development were organized into distinguishable categories, there was overlap across the content of these categories, indicating that in early childhood, the elements of social-emotional development represented by these categories certainly influence one another. Table 1 describes the four categories that were identified through content analysis. Because these categories, and their accompanying definitions, were arrived at through content analysis, they reflect definitions used by current authors, which in many cases, lacked depth. Accordingly, the definitions in Table 1 may also lack depth, and may be missing certain aspects of social-emotional competence that theories have identified as important. This concern is addressed more fully in the discussion section of the current paper. Table 2 is a matrix of the 27 articles examined, with the components of each article's definition placed into the four categories that were generated through content analysis.

The nature of the definitions included in the 27 articles varied. Fifteen of the articles were empirical in nature, and in most cases investigated the impact of certain variables or interventions on social-emotional functioning of a particular sample of children. The remaining 12 were review articles that focused either on interventions to promote social-emotional competence (e.g., Doyle & Bramwell, 2006), or on reviewing the literature related to a specific aspect of social-emotional development (e.g., social-emotional competence as related to executive function; Riggs, Jahromi, Razza, Dillworth-Bart, & Mueller, 2006). In some cases, there were differences in the language used by the authors of the 27 articles (Table 2) and the language used in the categories identified for the current paper (Table 1). This is because many authors used different language to describe qualitatively similar concepts. For example, Squires (2003) describes "management of aggression and conflict," while Bierman et al. (2008) use the term "behavioural inhibition" to describe constructs that were determined to fit within the "self-regulation" category of the current paper. The disparate language used by different researchers has contributed to the lack of clarity around the term "social-emotional" and was part of the impetus for the current paper.

With the exception of the construct of temperament/ personality described by Denham (2005), these four categories are inclusive of each of the elements of social-emotional competence included in the 27 definitions examined. Temperament/ personality is not included because Denham (2005) is the only author out of the examined articles that describes this construct as related to social-emotional development. Accordingly, this did not constitute a prominent category in the content

analysis process. Further, it has been acknowledged that temperament can contribute to social-emotional functioning, but should be conceptualized as distinct from the social-emotional developmental domain (Marakovitz, Wagmiller, Mian, Briggs-Gowan, & Carter, 2011).

The extent to which authors defined and explained the components of definitions varied. Some authors provided a simple list of components included in their definition of social-emotional competence, but did not define these components, while other authors detailed the meaning of each of these components. In Table 2, an asterisk appears beside the authors who expanded on their definitions of social-emotional competence. Where an asterisk does not appear, authors provided a simple list of components of social-emotional competence without defining the components. What follows is a description of the four identified categories of social-emotional competence, based on the descriptions of authors who expanded on the meaning of each of the components included in their definitions. For authors who simply provided a list of components of social-emotional competence, these components are listed in Table 2, and contributed to the content analysis, but are not described in the text that follows.

Table 1

Categories of Social-Emotional Competence Arrived at Through Content Analysis

Category	Definition
Emotion Knowledge (self awareness and social awareness)	The ability to identify, label, and understand the emotions or feelings of both self and others.

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Self-regulation (emotion regulation and behavioural regulation)	The ability to (a) regulate one's internal emotions and feelings; (b) control (i.e., suppress or enhance) one's behaviour, attention, and expression of emotion, including positive emotions relative to negative emotions, as well as empathy, in order to achieve one's goals and act in a socially appropriate manner.
Relationship Skills	The ability to sustain relationships with peers and adults. This includes the capacity to engage in socially appropriate behaviours, play with peers, cooperate, share, take turns, speak politely, communicate, listen, as well as the ability to create and implement positive solutions in situations of conflict.
Self-Concept	The development of a positive sense of self-efficacy, self-worth, or mastery.

Table 2

Definitions of Social-Emotional Competence Included in 27 Selected Articles

Article	Emotion Knowledge	Self-regulation	Relationship Skills	Self-concept
Ashdown & Bernard, 2012		Experience, express, and regulate emotions in a culturally and socially appropriate way	Form close, secure adult and peer relationships	
Ashiabi, 2007*	Emotion understanding	Emotional expression and regulation	Social development	
Aram & Aviram, 2009		Persistence at tasks; Impulse regulation; Emotional expression	Conflict resolution	
Bierman et al., 2008		Behavioural inhibition; Follow rules; Self-regulation; Control attention; Persist on	Initiate and sustain positive relationships; Prosocial engagement; Cooperation; Social problem-	

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		learning tasks	solving	
Boyd , Barnett, Bodrova, Leong, & Gomby, 2005	Identify and understand one's own feelings; Comprehend others' emotions	Emotion expression; Develop empathy; Regulate behaviour	Establish and maintain relationships	
Bywater, Hutchings, Whitaker, Evans, & Parry, 2011		Attentive	Foster good relationships; Solve problems	Happy and confident
Denham, 2005*	Understand one's own and others' emotions	Experience, express, and regulate emotions in a well-modulated manner	Social competence	Self-perceived competence (evaluate own cognitive, physical, social abilities relative to others)
Denham, 2006*	Emotion knowledge	Emotion expressiveness	Relationship and social skills; Social problem-solving	
Denham et al., 2012*	Social awareness; Emotion knowledge	Self-regulation	Relationship skills; Responsible decision-making; Social problem-solving	
Dennis & Kelemen, 2009		Persistence; Delay of gratification	Social skills	
Doyle & Bramwell, 2006*	Distinguish differences between emotions	Moderate and control feelings; Understand how and when to express emotions	Social skills	
Fantuzzo et al., 2007		Self-regulation	Prosocial behaviours with teachers and peers	Self-concept; Self-efficacy

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Foster, Reese-Weber, & Kahn, 2007		Express and regulate emotions; Rarely display aggressive or disruptive behaviours	Effective social interactions; Display prosocial behaviours	
Gormley, Phillips, Newmark, Welti, & Adelstein, 2011	Identify and understand own and others emotions	Regulate behaviours, emotions, and thoughts	Establish and sustain peer and adult relationships	
Hemmeter, Santos, & Ostrosky, 2008	Recognize emotions	Emotion expression; Persist at difficult tasks; Follow directions; Manage difficult emotions	Maintain relationships with peers and adults; Solve social problems	
Joseph & Strain, 2003		Regulate emotional responses to frustrating experiences; Tackle and persist at challenging tasks; Attentive	Converse with other children; Enter into play with groups of peers; Solve interpersonal problems	
McCabe & Altamura, 2011*	Affective perspective taking; Emotion identification	Emotion expression including empathy; Emotion regulation	Initiate and sustain friendships; Social problem-solving	Self-concept
Pahl & Barrett, 2007		Emotional reactivity and regulation; Management of aggression; Take on and persist at	Initiate and maintain peer and adult relationships; Cooperative and prosocial behaviour;	Development of a sense of mastery and self-worth

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		challenging tasks	Manage conflict	
Pears, Fisher, & Bronz, 2007		Self-regulation	Social competence	
Reicher, 2010*	Self-awareness; Social awareness	Self-management	Maintain positive relationships; Come up with and carry out positive solutions; Take responsibility for decisions	Identify one's thoughts, feelings, and strengths
Rhoades, Greenberg, & Domitrovich, 2009	Emotion recognition	Compassion; Emotion management; Behaviour management	Positive social relationships; Responsible decision-making	
Riggs, Jahromi, Razza, Dillworth-Bart, & Mueller, 2006	Awareness of feelings	Inhibition of impulsive behavioural responses; Regulation of feelings	Develop positive solutions and goals for social situations	
Sassu, 2007		Emotional expression; Observe rules	Relate with children; Relate with adults; Communication	
Squires, 2003		Emotional reactivity; Emotional regulation; Management of aggression	Initiate and maintain peer and adult relationships; Cooperative, prosocial behaviour; Management of conflict	Development of self-worth and a sense of mastery
Stefan, 2008*	Emotion recognition,	Emotional expressiveness, including empathy; Emotion regulation;	Social competence	

		Effortful control		
Vick Whittaker, Jones Harden, See, Meisch, & Westbrook,, 2011		Emotion expression; Delay gratification; Self-regulatory behaviours; Lack of problem behaviours	Social competence	
Whitted, 2011		Express emotions; Persist at difficult tasks; regulate emotions	Make and sustain peer and adult relationships; Negotiate and cooperate in group settings	

Emotion Knowledge. The content analysis process led to the distinct category of

emotion knowledge which constituted the ability to identify, label, and understand

emotions or feelings, with knowledge of one's own emotions (i.e., self awareness) and

knowledge of others' emotions (i.e., social awareness) representing two sub-categories.

Emotion knowledge was reported by 13 of the 27 authors with varying degrees

of similarity. Stefan (2008) refers to this construct as emotion recognition, and explains

that this construct involves the ability to label emotions and to recognize emotions

based on their verbal labels. Boyd, Barnett, Bodrova, Leong, and Gomby (2005) do not

label this construct, but discuss the importance of being able to identify and understand

one's own feelings, as well as read and comprehend others' emotions. McCabe and

Altamura (2011) also highlight the capacity to identify and understand others' emotions.

Denham (2006) describes emotion knowledge as the ability to differentiate among

emotions, use emotion language, and identify the emotions of other people even when

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they may differ from one's own emotions. In another paper, Denham (2005) again lists the ability to understand one's own emotions and others' emotions as central to the definition of social-emotional competence. In 2012, Denham et al. separate emotion knowledge into social awareness and self-awareness, where social awareness involves the ability to identify and understand others' emotions, and self-awareness involves the ability to identify and understand one's own emotions. Reicher's (2010) definition follows a similar organization. Ashiabi (2007) describes the ability to recognize one's own emotions as central to understanding others' emotions, and labels this construct emotion understanding.

Self-regulation. Each of the 27 articles examined described the concept of self-regulation. The self-regulation category is defined as the ability to (a) regulate one's internal emotions and feelings (i.e., emotion regulation); and (b) regulate or control (i.e., suppress or enhance) one's behaviour, attention, and expression of emotion, including positive emotions relative to negative emotions, as well as empathy, in order to achieve one's goals and act in a socially appropriate manner (i.e., behaviour regulation).

For the subcategory of internal emotion regulation, Boyd et al. (2005) describe this as the ability to manage strong emotions constructively. Similarly, Joseph and Strain (2003) mention the ability to regulate emotions in response to frustrating experiences.

Other authors focus exclusively on the external aspect of self-regulation. Bierman et al. (2008) list behavioural inhibition as a component of social-emotional competence. Others describe the importance of delaying gratification and engaging in

self-regulatory behaviours (Vick Whittaker, Jones Harden, See, Meisch, & Westbrook

2011).

Still other authors describe both the ability to regulate internal emotions, as well

as to regulate external behaviour, attention, and the expression of emotion, but group

these internal and external aspects of self-regulation together. To illustrate, Reicher

(2010) describes the ability to control feelings and behaviour in order to achieve goals,

and labels this construct self-management. Rhoades, Greenberg, and Domitrovich

(2009) describe the management of emotions and behaviours in accordance with

societal expectations.

Further, many researchers, such as Stefan (2008), distinguish between emotion

expression, described as the ability to send emotional messages that are appropriate to

the social context and that align with one's goals, and emotion regulation, described as

the ability to monitor, evaluate, and control emotional reactions in order to achieve

one's goals. Denham (2006) adds that emotion expression includes the expression of

positive emotions relative to negative emotions, as well as the expression of socially

appropriate affect, and separately describes emotion regulation as the ability to

suppress or enhance emotions and behaviours in differentially appropriate contexts.

Similar to Denham's (2006) conception of emotion expression, McCabe and Altamura

(2011) describe emotion expression as involving a balance of positive and negative

affect, and add that this construct involves the ability to respond prosocially and

empathetically to peers.

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In their definition of social-emotional competence, Joseph and Strain (2003) also describe the ability to be attentive and to persist at difficult tasks. Similarly, Bierman et al. (2008) discuss the ability to control attention, follow rules, and persist on learning tasks, while Pahl and Barrett (2007) also include in their definition the ability to persevere at challenging tasks. Stefan (2008) also subsumes the concept of empathy under the category of emotion expression. Along these lines, Rhoades et al. (2009) describe the ability to express compassion for peers when appropriate.

Relationship Skills. All 27 examined definitions included a description of the ability to develop and sustain relationships with peers and adults, which was categorized as relationship skills. Descriptions also included the capacity to engage in socially appropriate behaviours, play with peers, cooperate, share, take turns, speak politely, communicate, listen, as well as the ability to create and implement positive solutions in situations of conflict.

Stefan (2008) discusses the ability to engage in socially appropriate behaviours that produce positive results and goal achievement, and that are performed for the benefit of others. Squires (2003) describes the initiation of both peer friendships and relationships with adults. Reicher (2010) describes the ability to communicate and listen in order to maintain positive social relationships. Denham (2006) adds to this definition that relationship and social skills involve sharing, taking turns, speaking politely, and cooperating. McCabe and Altamura (2011) include the ability to respond prosocially to peers as an element of relationship skills. Joseph and Strain (2003) also add the ability to enter into play with peers. Ashiabi (2007) labels this construct more generally, as social

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development, described as the ability to get along with peers and form relationships.

Doyle and Bramwell (2006) also use the more general term of social skills to describe

prosocial behaviours including cooperation, taking turns, listening, and solving

problems.

   Authors of five of the 27 examined articles distinguished problem-solving, social

decision-making, and/or responsible decision-making from relationship skills in general.

Reicher (2010) defines responsible decision-making as the ability to generate and carry

out positive solutions to social problems, and to take responsibility for the decisions that

one makes in social situations. Denham (2006) and Denham et al. (2012) also conceive

of social problem-solving as a separate skill from general relationship skills, and

describes this construct as involving the ability to accurately process social information

so that responsible decisions can be made and so that effective conflict resolution can

be employed. Squires (2003) similarly lists management of conflict as an element of SE

competence that is separate from relationship skills. Joseph and Strain (2003) do the

same, listing the ability to solve interpersonal problems as an ability that is distinct from

relationship skills. The decision was made to subsume descriptions of social problem-

solving and responsible decision-making under the category of relationship skills

because descriptions of social problem-solving and responsible decision-making

overlapped strongly with the majority of authors' descriptions of general relationship

skills.

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Self-concept. Seven of the 27 authors provided definitions that were categorized as self-concept, which involves the development of a positive sense of self-efficacy, self-worth or mastery.

Squires (2003) describes this construct as the development of self-worth and a general sense of mastery. Pahl and Barrett (2007) similarly describe this construct, and how a sense of self-worth manifests in increased confidence as an element of social-emotional competence. Bywater, Hutchings, Whitaker, Evans, and Parry (2011) simply describe an element of social-emotional competence as being happy and confident. In a 2005 paper, Denham describes self-perceived competence as a stand-alone component of social-emotional competence that involves the ability to evaluate one's own cognitive, physical, and social abilities, particularly in relation to the abilities of others. Although a description of these constructs is not provided in their definition, Fantuzzo et al. (2007) use both of the terms, self-efficacy and self-concept, in their definition of social-emotional competence. Finally, Reicher (2010) describes social awareness as the ability to identify one's thoughts and strengths, and to recognize how one's thoughts and strengths influence actions and choices.

Discussion

The purpose of the paper was to examine the ways in which current researchers define social-emotional competence. This was important because this construct is associated with a multitude of terms, and lacks definitional clarity (Humphrey et al., 2011; Wigelsworth et al., 2010). In the current paper, articles in academic journals with either of the words "socioemotional" or "social-emotional" and that were focused on

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early childhood populations (birth to 8 years) were searched. The search resulted in 94

articles, of which 67 did not contain a definition of social-emotional competence. The

remaining 27 research articles did provide a description of social-emotional

competence, and were reviewed using content analysis. This analysis resulted in the

identification of four categories that, together, reflect the way in which the term "social-

emotional competence" is defined by current researchers. The four categories

generated through content analysis consist of emotion knowledge (with the two sub-

categories of knowledge of one's own emotions and knowledge of others' emotions),

self-regulation, (with the two sub-categories of emotion regulation and behavioural

regulation), relationship skills, and self-concept.

At first glance, there appear to be significant discrepancies in the literature with

regards to definitions of social-emotional functioning, as the language used to describe

this construct varies widely between researchers. However, Table 2 shows that the

process of content analysis revealed that authors are, for the most part, describing

qualitatively similar concepts in defining social-emotional functioning. For example,

constructs that are similarly defined and that fall under the umbrella of self-regulation

are variably described as constructive emotion management (Boyd et al., 2005),

attention control (Bierman et al., 2008), and controlling feelings and behaviour (Reicher,

2010). Although these authors use different language, they are each describing aspects

of self-regulation. Further, Denham (2005; 2006; 2012) organizes and presents social-

emotional competencies differently for different studies, as can be observed in Table 2.

However, differences are again found mainly in the organization and labeling of the

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constructs that constitute social-emotional functioning, and not in descriptions of the content of these constructs. As such, it appears that there is general agreement in the literature with respect to the constructs that constitute social-emotional competence, although the manner in which these constructs are categorized and/or the language that is used to describe them can differ greatly. Moving toward a more uniform, comprehensive categorization of social-emotional competencies will assist in research evidence for social-emotional development to be synthesized, and therefore utilized, in the most efficient and effective manner possible.

With respect to comprehensiveness, only three of the 27 articles examined (i.e., Denham, 2005; McCabe & Altmura, 2011; Reicher, 2010) include all four categories in their definitions of social-emotional competence. This suggests that researchers are failing to put forth comprehensive definitions of social-emotional competence. Self-concept was the element of social-emotional competence that was most frequently left out of definitions. Research has established strong ties between children's self-concept and their experience and regulation of emotions, as well as their competence in social interactions (Samuels, 1977). Despite the established ties between self-concept and other elements of social-emotional competence, researchers may be omitting this construct from their definitions because operationalizing and measuring for self-concept is less straightforward than operationalizing and measuring for other aspects of social-emotional development (Marsh, Debus, & Bornholt, 2005). All 27 articles include both self-regulation and relationship skills in their definition of social-emotional competence, indicating the central importance of these constructs. This also reflects a degree of

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uniformity in the definitions put forth by researchers in this area, but the lack of comprehensiveness in definitions cannot be ignored. Many authors simply provided a list of constructs that comprise social-emotional competence without defining the constructs listed. It is recognized that, due to word limit restrictions, the authors of research articles cannot define every construct to which they make reference. However, in providing brief definitions of complex concepts such as social-emotional competence, researchers could tie their work to theoretical definitions by referencing well-established theories. The majority of articles examined in the current paper did not reference theories in their brief definitions, although rich theoretical descriptions of social-emotional competence do exist. For example, a seminal book chapter by Rose-Krasnor and Denham (2009) provides robust, theoretically based descriptions of early childhood social-emotional competencies, and ties these descriptions to empirical work. None of the articles examined for the current paper reference Rose-Krasnor and Denham (2009) in their definitions of social-emotional competence, and few reference any theoretical pieces. Referring to theoretical work in explicating the aspects of social-emotional development being investigated will assist researchers in advancing a more comprehensive, uniform definition of social-emotional competence for both research and practice purposes.

In examining more comprehensive descriptions of the four identified categories of social-emotional competence, it is clear that these constructs are complex and accordingly, require clear explanations. With respect to emotion knowledge, the content analysis revealed that this construct is best described as the ability to identify,

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understand, and recognize the emotions of oneself and others. This simple definition

does not take into account that emotion knowledge also involves recognizing and

labeling facial expressions (Pons, Harris, & De Rosnay, 2004), which presupposes the

developmentally appropriate acquisition of language skills. Further, emotion knowledge

involves being able to correctly attribute different causes of emotions (Pons et al.,

2004). In particular, if children lack knowledge and awareness of emotions, it can be

difficult for them to understand what is appropriate in terms of regulating their

emotional and behavioural responses in social situations (Rose-Krasnor & Denham,

2009). Articles examined for the current paper described both emotion regulation and

behavioural regulation. Rose-Krasnor and Denham (2009) note that a variety of skills can

be subsumed under self-regulation, including the control of arousal, effortful control,

conscience development, delay of gratification, executive function, attention, and the

ability to choose the appropriate response when faced with conflicting options. These

authors also acknowledge that self-regulation requires *knowledge* of what behaviours

are appropriate in different contexts, *motivation* to behave appropriately, as well as the

ability to behave appropriately. Self-regulation skills have been linked with children's

social and relationship skills (McKown, Gumbiner, Russo, & Lipton, 2009). Rose-Krasnor

and Denham (2009) describe social and relationship skills as involving prosocial

behaviour, which is acting in a way that benefits others. Social and relationship skills

involve a vast array of abilities, including those of cooperating, listening, sharing,

guiding, being polite, empathizing, and providing help and support (Gulay, 2011). Social

problem-solving is another important aspect of social and relationship skills. This

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construct itself includes a multitude of skills, including analyzing social situations,

determining goals for social interactions and effective ways to solve problems, as well as

the ability to act on these effective ways of problem-solving (Crick & Dodge, 1994).

Given the multitude of abilities that can be subsumed under social and relationship

skills, it is clear that the articles examined for this paper touch on only a portion of this

construct. Finally, children's self-concept is described in this paper as the development

of a sense of self-efficacy, self-worth, or mastery. Rose-Krasnor and Denham (2009)

conceive of self-efficacy as part of a broader set of social-emotional competencies that

are achieved after children are competent with respect to having a prosocial

orientation, social problem-solving, social awareness, and self-regulation. These authors

also acknowledge the transactional nature of the development of self-efficacy, and note

that achieving self-efficacy requires children to recognize and evaluate differences

between themselves and others. Clearly, self-efficacy is related in multiple and complex

ways to other aspects of social-emotional competence, further reinforcing the

interrelatedness of the categories identified in the current study. Highlighting some of

the more comprehensive descriptions of these categories that can be found in both

empirical and theoretical literature emphasizes that the complex nature of these

constructs is often not communicated in the research literature, particularly with

respect to some of the articles examined for the current paper. However, it is clear that

the categories identified in the current paper have well-documented evidence

elsewhere to support their relation to social-emotional competence.

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Of further interest with respect to the findings of this review is that only 27 of

the 94 articles reviewed provided any description or definition of social-emotional

competence. The remaining 67 articles did not include a definition of social-emotional

competence. In the introduction and background sections of these 67 articles, there is

often information presented as to the importance of positive social-emotional

development, and the implications of children possessing or lacking competence in this

area, without specifying exactly what is being referred to in describing social-emotional

competence. Some authors comprehensively describe other constructs investigated in

their study, but still neglect to describe social-emotional competence. For example,

Allan and Lonigan (2011) describe what constitutes effortful control, and comment that

this is an ill-defined construct. However, despite their use of the term socioemotional

development, these authors do not explicate what is meant by this term.

In the 67 articles, it also became apparent that researchers take for granted that

the screening or assessment tool(s), and/ or coding systems/ behavioral observation

tools they are using to measure social-emotional development are sufficient to define

the construct for the purposes of their research. However, in these 67 articles alone, 37

different tools are used to measure social-emotional development. In many articles,

more than one tool is used. The most commonly used tool, which appears in 15 of these

67 articles, is the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach, 1991). As the CBCL

measures problems, and does not examine skills or competencies, researchers should

avoid relying entirely on the CBCL to operationalize social-emotional development.

However, many researchers claim that the tools they use provide evidence for social-

emotional development in general. For example, Feldman and Eidelman (2004) utilize

the CBCL-2/3 (Achenbach, 1992) as a measure of children's behaviour problems, but

refer to their results as providing evidence relevant to social-emotional adaptation in

general. It would be more accurate to state that their findings provide evidence related

to internalizing and externalizing behaviour problems rather than social-emotional

development in general. This is a common theme in the articles examined for the

current paper that do not contain definitions. Namely, researchers use a variety of tools

to measure aspects of social-emotional development, and discuss their findings in terms

of social-emotional development in general, rather than the specific aspects measured

by their chosen tools. This is particularly important for program evaluation. In evaluating

the success of programs designed to promote social-emotional competence, tools need

to be chosen that clearly align with the aims of programming. It is important for

researchers to recognize the limitations of the measures they use and to refrain from

drawing conclusions about social-emotional development generally when they have

used a tool capturing only a specific aspect of social-emotional development. Further

decisions can be made as to the specific aspects of social-emotional development that

will be examined for any given study, so that a tool can be chosen that measures the

specific aspects of social-emotional competence being investigated. When these

decisions are not made in designing research studies, the result can be a wide variety of

research evidence that is confusing and difficult to translate to practice. Indeed, when

researchers neglect to define social-emotional development, they may end up

measuring a conglomeration of different constructs and labeling their studies as

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constituting evidence for social-emotional development in general, which may be

misleading. In short, authors should be clear in journal articles about the specific aspects

of social-emotional development that they are investigating, rather than claiming to put

forth evidence for social-emotional development in general.

Because it is suggested here that researchers should describe the specific

aspects of social-emotional functioning that they are focusing on, and not claim to focus

on social-emotional functioning in general, this calls into question the utility of using the

umbrella term "social-emotional" to describe different skills and competencies in early

childhood. Indeed, Stefan (2008) describes social competencies and emotional

competencies separately, and views social-emotional competence as a combination of

social competence and emotional competence. Similarly, Denham et al. (2003)

investigate the contributions of emotional competence to social competence, indicating

that these are two distinct developmental domains. In describing social-emotional

competence, researchers may simply be describing a combination of constructs that can

fall under the domains of social competence and emotional competence, acknowledging

that these domains influence and build off of one another during the course of early

childhood development. Because there are well-established theories of social

development and emotional development (e.g., Rose-Krasnor, 1997; Saarni, 1990),

researchers in the area of social-emotional development may be combining these well-

established definitions to suit their purposes. This may be why such a multitude of

constructs can be subsumed under this term, and why the term itself lacks clarity. Again,

this highlights the importance of explicitly stating the aspects of social-emotional

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competence being examined, rather than relying on an umbrella term to describe the focus of research.

Conclusion

The current paper has explored the ways in which researchers are defining early childhood social-emotional development. Many researchers neglect to define social-emotional development altogether, and use their chosen tool(s) to define the constructs for their research with the assumption that these tools measure social-emotional development in a valid and comprehensive way. It is recommended that researchers clearly explicate the definition of social-emotional development used to guide their research so that evidence can be clearly understood and adopted. All articles examined in the current paper that do put forth a definition of social-emotional development include self-regulation and relationship skills in their definitions. However, researchers are, for the most part, failing to put forth comprehensive definitions of social-emotional development to guide their research. It is recommended that researchers cite more comprehensive, well-established theories in defining social-emotional development. Further, in order to ensure alignment between theory, research, and practice, future research should examine (i) the extent to which researchers' definitions of social-emotional competence are consistent with the tools being used to measure this construct; (ii) the extent to which social-emotional measurement tools are consistent with theoretical conceptions of social-emotional development; and (iii) the extent to which the content of social-emotional programming is consistent with both theoretical definitions of social-emotional development and social-emotional measurement tools.

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Chapter 3. Aboriginal Perspectives on Social-Emotional Development in Early

Childhood

Introduction

The importance of early childhood in establishing a foundation for positive

outcomes in later life has been well established in the literature (Shonkoff & Phillips,

2000). As part of the early childhood development literature, the social emotional

competence of young children has gained the attention of researchers. Social-emotional

competencies have been defined in the research literature to include behavioural and

emotional regulation, understanding emotions, self and social awareness, social

problem solving, as well as relationship skills (Denham, 2005; McCabe & Altamura,

2011). The development of social-emotional competencies during early childhood can

significantly impact outcomes in the areas of learning and academic success, mental

health, and general wellbeing (Peth-Pierce, 2000; Rhoades, Warren, Domitrovich, &

Greenberg, 2011; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg,

2004). However, because not all environments and experiences in early childhood are

optimal, many children exhibit difficulties that may persist into later childhood and

adolescence (Bornstein, Hahn, & Haynes, 2010; Briggs-Gowan & Carter, 2008). For

Aboriginal children in particular (i.e., First Nations, Métis and Inuit children, in keeping

with Canadian constitution definitions; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2002),

socio-cultural adversities related to colonization and loss of language and culture, can

contribute to long-lasting struggles with social and emotional wellbeing and with

positive identity development (Chandler & Lalonde, 2008; King, Smith, & Gracey, 2009).

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Aboriginal children represent the fastest growing segment of Canada's population (Statistics Canada, 2008), yet fare among the worst in the country in terms of health, social, educational, and economic well-being (National Association of Friendship Centres, 2009). In Canada, Aboriginal children are also at a higher risk for poverty, health problems, maltreatment, and placement in the child welfare system than are non- Aboriginal children (First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, 2003). Further, due to colonization, Aboriginal children develop within multiple contexts in Canada (i.e., urban, rural or on-reserve, traditional or non-traditional) that may, at times, be incongruent with one another. As a result, Aboriginal children may receive contradictory information about who they are, how they fit into their heritage culture and the dominant culture, the meanings associated with being a visible minority, and may have difficulty reconciling such information during the course of their development (Corenblum, 1996). This can further complicate the positive development of social-emotional skills during early childhood. As such, gaining an understanding of how best to support the development of Aboriginal children is of the utmost importance in preventing social, emotional, and mental health problems in later life (Rabaa, 2010). For this reason, the aim of the present study was to identify the elements of overall health and wellbeing that are particularly important for Aboriginal children during early childhood development, with a specific focus on social-emotional health and wellbeing.

Research has demonstrated that early intervention with respect to social-emotional issues is paramount for ensuring optimal developmental trajectories for children (Baggett et al., 2010; McCabe & Altamura, 2011). In order to engage and

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effectively serve Aboriginal children and families in early childhood interventions, it is imperative for programs to have a foundation in Aboriginal ways of knowing and being (Hare, 2011; Taylor, 2011). However, of the 0-6 year old Aboriginal children who attend early childhood programming in Canada, less than 20 percent attend programs that promote First Nations, Métis, and/ or Inuit cultures (Statistics Canada, 2008). It has been identified that mainstream early childhood programs are typically not culturally sensitive, and do not provide opportunities for Aboriginal children to engage with and uphold their language and culture (Ball, 2009). In recognition of this deficit, early childhood programs that are culturally appropriate for Aboriginal children and families are beginning to emerge, and preliminary reports indicate that the cultural content of these programs is highly valued by Aboriginal community members (Ball, 2009). However, systematic evaluations of early childhood programs are lacking, in part because tools that measure culturally relevant aspects of development for Aboriginal children are similarly lacking (Ball, 2009). Indeed, the majority of tools used in Canada for measuring development have been created based on Euro-western worldviews (Trimble, Lonner, & Boucher, 1983).

The lack of culturally sensitive tools can have multiple consequences for Aboriginal children. In particular, for children who require intervention in the early years, identification of difficulties most often occurs with the use of standardized screening and assessment tools (Briggs-Gowan, Carter, Skuban, & Horwitz, 2001). Because standardized tools do not take into consideration how culture and ethnicity play a role in responses obtained, these tools can be biased to the non- Aboriginal

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populations with whom they are typically developed (Tonemah, 1991; Williams, French, Picthall-French, & Flagg-Williams, 2011; Williamson et al., 2010). Interpretations that are generated from the results of culturally insensitive tools put children at risk for being incorrectly identified as at-risk or functioning in the clinical range and can result in inappropriate placements in special education programs (De Plevitz, 2006; Gould, 2008). Alternatively, there may be specific social and emotional competencies that Aboriginal children require in order to successfully balance multiple cultural contexts that are not reflected in commonly used screening and assessment tools. Indeed, the literature has identified developmental advantages, as operationalized, for example, by increased happiness and decreased anxiety, for children who successfully navigate multiple cultures (Kiang, Yip, Fuligni, Gonzales-Backen, & Witkow, 2006). The use of tools that fail to measure such potentially important aspects of development can result in under-identifying Aboriginal children who may require additional supports in these critical, culturally influenced areas.

Clearly, the healthy development of today's Aboriginal children hinges on a better understanding of the developmental processes, coping responses, and competencies that are required to effectively straddle two or more cultural contexts (Padilla, 2006). It is also evident that the process of identifying and intervening for the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal children in Canada needs to identify essential elements of development from the perspectives of Aboriginal peoples, rather than solely relying on conceptual frameworks that have not taken into account the culturally specific needs of Aboriginal children (D'Aprano, Carapetis, & Andrews, 2010). As such,

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the purpose of the current study was to identify the most important elements of healthy development for Aboriginal children from the perspective of Aboriginal peoples, with a particular focus on social-emotional development.

Methods

Community-based Participatory Approach. This qualitative study used a community-based participatory research approach (CBPR; Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003) that attends closely to the relationships between partners and aims to benefit the partners involved (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003). Aboriginal communities may not be receptive to conventional research approaches that neglect to recognize the value of Aboriginal knowledge, reinforce unequal power relations among researchers and participants, and operate on an outside researcher-defined agenda rather than collaborating with the community to achieve social change (Schnarch, 2004). For this reason, CBPR is often well suited for use in Aboriginal communities, because it levels power relations between researchers and participants by involving all partners equitably in the research process. The approach also focuses on collaboration, the recognition of multiple forms of knowledge and expertise, and works towards changes that benefit the community (Boser, 2007; Israel et al., 1998; Malone, Yerger, McGruder, & Froelicher, 2006).

This study was conducted as a partnership between university researchers and an Aboriginal-serving not for profit agency. The research questions emerged from the community partner through previous research relationships and consultations, ensuring the direct relevance of the research questions and outcomes to the Aboriginal

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organization, and the children and families that they serve. Further, a recursive reflection-in-action framework was incorporated in the research design to ensure continual community engagement (Schön, 1982; Chow, 2007). This involved working with representatives of the partner agency to modify focus group questions, design processes to engage focus group participants, facilitate selected focus groups, and support the interpretation and dissemination of the findings.

Participant Selection and Sampling. This study was reviewed and approved by the Human Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. Consent forms and information letters for youth and adult participants are included in Appendix B and Appendix C, respectively. The partners engaged in purposeful sampling, which involves making a judgment about who can provide the richest source of information on the phenomenon under investigation, and purposefully choosing those people to participate in the study (Abrams, 2010). Because the current study sought to identify competencies important for Aboriginal children who have exposure to and must balance both mainstream and traditional cultures, a recruitment requirement was that participants had to have experience with, or be in the process of, navigating multiple cultural contexts. As such, participants consisted of parents who had experienced this navigation process themselves and whose children were currently involved in this process, service providers of the partner agency who support Aboriginal children and families in skill and competency development, adolescents attending programming at the partner agency, and young Aboriginal adults attending university. Parents, service providers, and adolescents were recruited by the partner agency. Key individuals in the partner agency

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initiated discussions with potential participants to gauge interest regarding involvement

in a study about the social-emotional skills that Aboriginal children need in order to

successfully balance mainstream and traditional cultures. These individuals acted as the

point of contact for participants in subsequently scheduling and relaying details about

the focus groups. University students were recruited by a graduate student involved in

the study, who similarly initiated conversations with Aboriginal peers to gauge interest,

and subsequently followed up with interested participants regarding focus group

details. Such informal methods of participant recruitment are considered acceptable for

exploratory qualitative research with populations that may be difficult to reach (Abrams,

2010; Priest, Mackean, Davis, Waters, & Briggs, 2012).

   Focus group participants were 37 Aboriginal Canadians, and consisted of

parents (1 male and 10 females), service providers including 1 elder (11 females),

adolescents (5 males and 6 females), and young adults attending University (4 females).

Service providers who participated in the focus groups were involved in a number of

agency programs and services, including: school outreach services; programs such as

sharing circles or cultural family nights designed specifically to cultivate cultural pride in

Aboriginal children and families; programs that support pregnant women and parenting

families through home visitation and nutrition services; and an Aboriginal Head Start

program, which promotes the development of skills for school readiness in a culturally

appropriate context. Parent participants were from families with young children who

had received or were currently receiving programs or services offered by the partner

agency. Adolescent participants recruited by the partner agency were taking part in a

16-week skill development program intended to address the issue of high school attrition in Aboriginal youth aged 16 to 25. Skill development in the program focused on self-esteem, education completion, job preparation, and culture. University student participants were studying education, psychology, and political science at the undergraduate level. Consistent with a qualitative research framework, the sample size was not pre-determined (Lincoln & Guba, 1985); rather, the point at which saturation in the data was reached dictated the size of the sample. Saturation occurs when no new information is surfacing in the data collection process, and when collecting more data would, as a result, not be helpful in adding to an understanding of the phenomenon being explored (Mayan, 2009).

Focus Groups. Using a basic interpretive inquiry method to "simply seek to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved" (Merriam, 1998, p. 11), participants were asked semi-structured questions about the most important skills, strategies, and resources necessary for healthy development in the early years and more specifically in the area of social-emotional development. At the beginning of focus groups, facilitators discussed the importance of understanding the skills that Aboriginal children need in order to balance mainstream and traditional cultures, and the lack of research that investigates these skills. Participants were asked to think of their own experiences as a developing child and the experiences of children in their lives in discussing the unique skills that Aboriginal children need in order to be healthy and successful. See Appendix A for an example of a focus group guide used in this study. Additionally, preliminary themes

identified from previous focus groups were presented to the participants of subsequent

focus groups to allow for discussion as to how these themes did or did not reflect

participants' own experiences and perspectives relevant to healthy development for

Aboriginal children. Accordingly, in following a qualitative approach to simultaneous

data collection and analysis (Suter, 2006), each focus group was modified to reflect the

findings of previous focus groups.

Data Analysis. For those focus groups that took place through the partner

agency (i.e., parents, service providers, and youth), audio recording was not possible

due to an agency policy prohibiting voice recording. In these instances where audio

recording was not possible, three researchers participated in detailed note taking

and/or focus group facilitation. For those focus groups that took place independent of

the partner agency (i.e., with the university students), focus group discussions were

audio taped with participants' permission and were transcribed verbatim. Consistent

with a qualitative inquiry approach, data were analyzed and collected concurrently

(Morse, 1999). After the first focus group was conducted, the researchers engaged in

preliminary data analysis to identify potential themes, and used this information to

guide subsequent focus groups.

A series of systematic steps were carried out to analyze the focus group data

using content analysis (Morse & Field, 1995). Initially, three researchers independently

read through focus group transcripts and notes and engaged in the process of memoing,

whereby notes, questions, and possible connections between parts of the transcripts

were written in the transcript margins (Mayan, 2009). Next, the researchers came

together to code the data by identifying recurring phrases and concepts in the

transcripts, and to subsequently group these recurring phrases and concepts into

categories (Mayan, 2009). Finally, after a coding scheme was developed based on an in-

depth analysis of one of the focus groups, the other focus group data were analyzed

using this scheme in order to develop final themes. Representatives of the partner

agency reviewed the themes that emerged in order to ensure that the interpretation of

the findings was congruent with Aboriginal worldviews.

Findings

Five broad, inter-connected themes emerged from the data, and consisted of

cultural wellness, emotional wellness, mental wellness, social wellness, and strong

identity. Strong identity, which is pictured in the centre of Figure 1 below, was

foundational to the other themes and will be discussed first. Each theme is described in

detail below using participant's voices to maintain the integrity of the data.

Figure 1. Visual depiction of themes.

Strong Identity. For focus group participants, social-emotional health

corresponded to having a strong identity. Participants described a socially and

emotionally healthy child as having a strong identity, and that this contributed to overall

health and wellbeing. According to participants, having a strong identity meant knowing

who you are, being confident and proud of who you are, accepting who you are and

having self-respect, loving yourself, and having a sense of authenticity. In describing

social emotional wellness, one participant stated that this could only be achieved when

someone "can love themselves within, inside and out, unconditionally." The concept of

identity was described as important for virtually all aspects of a child's wellbeing and

provided a sense of grounding and belonging for a child. Further, a reciprocal

relationship emerged between the theme of identity and each of the other themes. In

particular, having a strong identity clearly facilitated social, emotional, mental, and

cultural wellness while alternatively, health and wellness in these four areas facilitated

the development of a strong identity. Participants described the facilitating factors and

challenges in developing a strong identity.

Part of having a *strong identity* simply involved knowing who you are. According

to one participant:

> Success is almost the same as that self-actualizing, when you get to the top of
> Maslow's pyramid. Once you're there, it doesn't matter how much money you
> have or regardless of you've been to school or not, as long as you're there and
> you have that sense of identity and you have that sense of who you are and your
> family and you have everything else underneath I think that defines success.

Having a strong identity also meant having pride and confidence in yourself as an

Aboriginal person. Parent participants extensively discussed how younger generations

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needed to "get their pride back" and "need to be taught how to be proud of their

cultural heritage." In this sense, a strong identity was described as:

> A fundamental confidence, sense of belonging to your identity…I think it's
> confidence, obviously confident in who you are as a person and knowing certain
> things about yourself. I'm not gonna not be who I am, I'm confident in who I am.

Another participant stated that, "adopting my Aboriginal culture makes me feel

good about who I am...I think we find a connection in ourselves when we belong to our

heritage."

Having a strong identity also meant finding an *inner contentment and respect for*

oneself: "for me, success isn't what society says. It's an inner thing. Being happy with

who you are, contentment. It's helping people find that." This inner contentment and

self-respect was described as related strongly to the development of a proud identity:

> In addition to respecting each other, it's important to respect yourself. My son
> went through a stage where he was free-flowing with offensive jokes….and I
> didn't raise my kids like this. And it's coming from friends, but multicultural
> friends. And it seems acceptable to make racist slurs against your own race. That
> shows no self-respect. Like be proud!

Challenges to the development of identity included experiences that contributed

to the development of shame and even self-hatred. These challenges related strongly to

inter-generational residential school experiences and the legacy of colonization.

Participants described the impact on Aboriginal children and families of historical

experiences with residential school and continued experiences with colonization:

> When you have families that have had residential school experiences, you've
> taken away the ability to teach their children and how to be a parent. All those
> things essential to being a parent were taken away and that took away who they
> are and being able to have an identity. And so where do you learn how to be a
> parent? And you come out of that and have adopted those ways, so a lot is
> missing there and a lot of kids struggle with how to identify.

It's that breakdown. 'Cause my grandparents, it was against the law to go to that school to get my mom. It was against the law for their parents to come and save them. So there was no sense of…well I'm responsible for these kids. As soon as I have a child and soon as they're old enough to start talking and walking, they're gonna be taken away from me. They have no attachment to their family. They have no attachment, there's nothing there. And then when they have their own children, it's like, well how do I, they have to learn how to be attached to their child, you know, it has to learn all over again and if they don't see it…

Participants also frequently mentioned how racism can interfere with identity development, which is critical for social-emotional wellbeing. They described the significant challenges faced in developing a strong identity and cultivating pride and confidence in the context of a mainstream culture that is often racist toward Aboriginal peoples:

No matter how much you try to assimilate to white culture, you know you don't quite fit in. Because racism exists. As a child you know you're not accepted and it affects you socially, emotionally, in your development.

Growing up, it was kind of hard to…accept that you were…Aboriginal I guess. 'Cause people have stereotypes attached to being Aboriginal, or you'd be like, 'I'm Aboriginal,' and they'd be like, 'oh, well, you're not that type of Aboriginal person,' so I don't know, I didn't fully accept it until grade 11 or 12, so it took a long time.

Participants also described familial experiences with internalized racism, wherein parents relayed to their children that it was necessary to reject their Aboriginal heritage in order to be successful. This strongly interfered with the development of a strong Aboriginal identity. As one participant stated:

I was brought up non-Aboriginal. My mom grew up in a residential school and she didn't want us to be Aboriginal. She said, if you wanna go far in life, you have to be Caucasian. But I didn't look like a Caucasian person.

Another participant stated that, "my parents raised us white and we were told the Aboriginal way was wrong."

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Also in relation to racism, a university student participant spoke about her identity challenges coming to the fore in university: "As a child, I didn't know when I was being discriminated against until university because then when you have the definitions and connect the dots and understand why there was this separation between me and Caucasian culture."

Another participant described the negative implications associated with her struggle to develop an identity as an Aboriginal person:

> When I was going through identity and living in mainstream society, and also trying to follow the Native culture, I had a lot of conflict with, I didn't wanna be Native and, and I wanted to party and get drunk and do drugs.

In order to achieve a strong identity, Aboriginal children had to overcome these barriers, which became increasingly possible when cultural, emotional, social, and mental wellness were attained. Alternatively, wellness in these four areas, discussed below, strongly facilitated a strong identity, which is foundational to social-emotional wellness.

Cultural Wellness. Participants described the importance of children knowing and understanding their cultural history and Aboriginal language, and having the opportunity to become familiar with and participate in cultural and spiritual activities. The elements of cultural wellness were described as particularly important in the development of a strong identity. Again in relation to residential schools, one participant stated that, "many children were taken away from their heritage and weren't with their families, so it's important to encourage that in kids because you feel stronger once you connect to your culture."

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Of particular significance with respect to cultural wellness was children developing *knowledge of Aboriginal history*. Participants pointed out that many Aboriginal peoples lacked information important to understanding their histories. As one participant stated, "the first thing that pops out about being proud of your heritage is assuming everyone really understands their heritage. I was surprised when I first came here that many Aboriginal people don't understand their history." According to another participant, "It's great to feel proud, but in order to be proud, you first have to understand your heritage". This illustrates that cultural wellness is especially important because it contributes strongly to a proud identity. A proud cultural identity can only develop in children if they have knowledge of their culture.

Knowledge of Aboriginal history was described as important in order to understand the "struggles of your people," and to relate these struggles to the present day. Becoming familiar with Aboriginal history was also crucial for identity development, as children needed to know and understand their past in order to make sense of the present. As one youth shared:

> When I did find out about [residential schools] it was like a complete culture shock for myself, being Aboriginal, and I didn't even know that and…when I was in junior high and high school, I never understood why my people were the way they were. And I think if I did know about residential school, like, at a younger age, that maybe I would've understood better and would've been more open to being who I was at an earlier age and I think that part of communication needs to be done at an earlier age then 'cause I was already almost an adult by the time I found out and I was still going through identity crisis at that time, so…I was in shock and sad and hurt about lots of stuff that I thought that I would've had a grasp of by that time, right?

Another participant spoke about growing up with knowledge of her family's history:

It's a lot easier for me to have that empathy and understanding 'cause I witnessed my parents and the effects, of, you know, residential school syndrome supposedly or whatever it's called. And driving by the old residential school every day on the reserve and knowing that's where your parents were, you know, being told that at 5 years old, if I didn't smarten up maybe they'd send me to residential school, you know, that was kind of how it became, it was, it was scary.

Many participants emphasized that Aboriginal history should be embedded in the mainstream school curriculum. They expressed frustration with not having the opportunity to learn about Aboriginal history because "they teach us about Nazi Germany and…the Holocaust, but they won't teach us about…the 60's scoop and the residential schools." A participant voiced further frustrations about her schooling experience:

These are just facts that could be in the textbooks…I feel like in the social studies textbooks…they're so…they're just not giving you the complete truth…if you're gonna be teaching the kids history at least tell them the truth and it's very broad and general…they're gonna have to know sooner or later.

Participants also emphasized the importance of *knowledge of Aboriginal history on the part of the wider society.* All Canadians should be educated as to the history of Aboriginal peoples in order to promote understanding, empathy, and respect between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people:

I think when non-Aboriginal children will learn that in the schools, they'll go home and ask their non-Aboriginal parents, and, you know, maybe they'll teach their parents and so it's a whole community that starts learning. Like, the whole city…will start learning and having more empathy. Okay, well, that's how come we see so many Aboriginal prostitutes or that's how come we see so many Aboriginal homeless people or gangs…so then there's a whole empathy…it truly takes a whole community to raise a child.

On a similar note, one of the service provider participants shared that:

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When I worked in the justice system, the judge asked how come there are so many Native people going to court. Then they would have to take Aboriginal awareness and it's so important…same with our kids. If they didn't know, we'd send them to workshops. I think everyone should have these workshops. Awareness, not just for Aboriginal people, but awareness for all cultures is very important to teach in university or anywhere. Just to respect each other.

Another strong element of cultural wellness was knowledge of *Aboriginal language.* Participants reported that if children know their Aboriginal language, their connections to family, culture, and their identity as an Aboriginal person, could be strengthened:

It's the communication part. Just being able to have that at home, something on my own, and I know that it made our family stronger. Mainly, most of the time when we did speak it was during the ceremonies and during the society gatherings and during the sundances. That's when we spoke it for real.

Alternatively, some participants spoke about feelings associated with not knowing their Aboriginal language, and how this could interfere with a sense of connection to culture:

It's a sense of loss and you feel kind of sad because you don't know your own language. And I attend a lot of ceremonies, like sweats, and they all- everyone speaks in the cultural language and to not understand is kind of, like at the time you're happy to be there but you still feel like you're not fully understanding everything you need to be, and not fully experiencing it to the extent. Like, they have people telling you what's happening and what they're saying, but it's not the same.

For some participants, this was experienced as a sense of panic and guilt about reaching adulthood without learning their Aboriginal language:

There's a sense of urgency, and I could hear that in [participant's] words too about learning the language. By the time you get to university, it's like oh my gosh, I've missed out on 18 years of this. It's an urgency you have, it's like, okay, I gotta learn my language, I gotta learn. It's a sense of urgency because you know…the Native speakers are dying. You know that it's not gonna last forever.

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I was telling my Cree friends, 'You should be able to do this. This is your language.' But I seen that, like the reverse role, I seen that in their faces and how the urgency was and it was like, 'Oh my God. It was my language. Why shouldn't I know it? And I used to try to get them to say, 'Relax. It's in your DNA. It's there.'

Engaging in *cultural practices* was another important element of cultural wellness. Reflecting on their own childhood experiences, participants discussed the different methods through which they gained exposure to cultural practices and traditions:

We do actually go out to…my Grandpa's reserve quite often. 'Cause my Grandma's actually buried out there. But we did go to…different cultural events like dances or powwows or things like that, or…round dances…my mom used to bead, so I'd still witness the culture…

And I think for me on the reserve, it was getting inundated every day by everything…I was getting immersed in it…living it…everybody in my family…speaking culture, teaching me this, teaching me that.

Participants also discussed the benefits of observing and engaging in cultural practices and traditions from a young age. According to participants, when children had the opportunity to become familiar with their own culture as they grew up, they developed a set of skills that allowed for a culturally and spiritually rich life, and they began to understand what constituted culturally appropriate behaviour. One participant stated that, "there's certain places, you know, the ceremonies you go to and there's a certain way to act." Another participant had positive memories of growing up immersed in Aboriginal culture:

Being on the reserve, you get access to all your Elders, you get access to all the societies, all, you know, all the tools you need to have a cultural and spiritual life, and that's what I liked about it too.

One of the youth participants also appreciated being exposed at a young age to

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her Aboriginal culture:

> A program that actually got me more involved more into the culture and that I'm very grateful that was there was…a regalia making class…I feel like if it wasn't for that program, that I wouldn't have, I wouldn't be where I am.

Additionally, engaging in cultural practices had a unique significance for

Aboriginal children, as evidenced by their behavioural responses to being taught and

involved in culture:

> I think those schools too and how they empower Aboriginal culture and…one of the Elders there…he teaches the kids how to make crafts and bead, and the kids in that room were silent. Like, down the hallway you can hear the other classroom is crazy. And as soon as they get into his classroom, they're silent. And they're beading or they're…focused on the task. And he has…powwow music playing in the background. And I thought it was so amazing to see them…

Finally, *spirituality and belief* systems were described by participants and the

importance of educating children about the Creator and the story of creation as it

existed in their own communities, and educating children to respect differences in

spiritual beliefs. Having the opportunity to learn about and experience spirituality was

also important for facilitating connections to culture and community.

Spirituality was also described as a potential resource for Aboriginal children and

families:

> I think my outlet, too, was my spirituality, the fact that I knew that even though I'm living this life here, you know, off the reserve and then when I come home there's always good things about coming home too. You know, there was that balance at home…

> My theory is it's because…the residential school system broke the entire family structure up, in my family, it was five generations went to residential school and in that five generations, the chaos and everything, what rebuilt my family was the church.

According to participants, when children knew and understood their Aboriginal history and language, had opportunities to engage in cultural practices, and had connections to spirituality and belief systems, this enabled the development of a strong and proud identity, as reflected by a socially and emotionally healthy child.

Social Wellness. Under the theme of social wellness, participants described the importance of Aboriginal children feeling connected to other individuals, families, and community, having people in their lives to support them, and developing a sense of respect for others.

The importance of children *being connected to family, culture, and community* was discussed. In order to experience a sense of connectedness, participants described how children must be socially involved with other individuals and groups. It was described that, when children lack important social connections, they may exhibit maladaptive behaviours. One participant stated that, "I think first being committed to your own family is important to feel connected once you grow up. My nephew isn't connected to his family and he gives up and he's learned helplessness and giving up."

Alternatively, being socially connected can assist with identity struggles and confusion. According to one service provider, "in high school, you're lost and you don't know…what culture are you? So it's good to have youth drop-ins so they can stay connected." Similarly, another service provider shared that:

> I was confused because I didn't know If I was Black or Aboriginal. My daughter was even more confused. She got burnt because she's mixed and she went to an Aboriginal program, and they said, 'you're not Aboriginal,' so she didn't go back and it stopped her from being connected to something I wanted her to be connected to.

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For one participant, social connectedness was the basis for defining overall

success:

> For me, success is being able to raise your kids or teach your family to grow up in society to feel some sort of connection, live as a healthy person in society, function in society, be humble in their hearts and happy.

> Related to social connectedness was the element of *social support.* Family

members were particularly important in helping children deal with challenges and

generally acting as a support system:

> I have to give credit to my parents and my grandparents just because they were so supportive and any time I'd go home, I'd have issues, you know. I had an older sister too and she was two grades ahead of me, so she…really helped me as well.

> The children that I've seen and I've worked with…they don't have the parents that are there to support them or the family. Or they've all been split in different directions, they create that. They create their own family…and it's really sad 'cause you see a lot of those children from the child welfare system create that support within the gang system now…but that's all they need is support.

> Families also provided support by encouraging children toward pursuits outside

of their own communities. For participants who lived in communities that struggled with

high rates of crime, violence, and substance abuse, this encouragement was initially

unwelcome, but later greatly appreciated:

> My grandparents and my parents forced me. They forced me…at times I wanted to go to school on the reserve and say you know what, my friends are on the reserve, can I just go, I'm tired of riding the bus, you know, getting up when it's dark, and you know, they forced me. They said you have to learn how. They told me, you have to learn how to be there. You have to 'cause we don't wanna see you live in this community…my mom didn't want me to become one of the teen pregnancy statistics…and so I think that's what really helped was the fact that I was forced to do it. And I knew that it was gonna be better for me.

> Peers were also an important source of social support. For some participants, it

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was especially valuable to have friends who were also Aboriginal so that experiences related to identity development could be shared. As one youth stated, "I think it was the peer support…just being able to empower each other and support. I always had that too, throughout school and throughout my life." Another youth shared that, "my best friend…he's Métis also, and we went to the same high school together so we got involved and…started actually accepting the fact that we were Aboriginal…so that kind of opened up the door and…let me fully accept it."

Role models also provided support, as one participant described "there are positive role models and it is okay to accept who you are and do your culture and have fun and it's supposed to be a fun thing." People who acted as role models demonstrated a positive acceptance of Aboriginal culture and an ability to balance mainstream and Aboriginal contexts:

> I seen her and how she…played basketball and she was on the honour roll, like she was living both lives too but she was successful in both kind of cultures whereas…me, I thought I was only successful in my home culture.

Finally, participants discussed at length the importance of children being *respectful* to others. Many participants had experienced a lack of respect from others, and saw the value in teaching children to respect differences between themselves and the people with whom they interacted:

> A lot of it is respect. When I came here I was told I had to do things a certain way and I said no, I respect your way of doing things and I'll do my own way. For me to fit in, I had to learn Cree to fit in. At school and on reserve, I didn't fit in. People said, 'your dad's French so you should know French.' My parents said, 'You know who you are. And just have respect.' And that's what's missing in our culture. People just assume and have no respect…then anger comes out in the wrong way….when you teach your kids to be prejudiced, they carry that with them and it's wrong. I teach my kids I don't care what color you are. You're no

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different. To me, you're no better. It's what you feel inside. We need to teach our kids that. A lot of where our culture gets lost is where we don't respect each other.

Insofar as children were respectful of others, received support from family members, peers, and role models, and were connected to their families, communities, and culture, they were able to successfully function in different social contexts and learn how to develop a strong identity. These connections and sense of belonging helped with the development of self-confidence and pride, which appeared to be critical in enabling children to successfully move between two worlds in an authentic way.

Emotional Wellness. Participants described a number of elements of emotional wellness. It was important for children to focus on positive feelings and attitudes, and to de-emphasize negative feelings involving anger and blame. In particular, it was crucial for Aboriginal children to develop the capacity for *love, empathy, and understanding*. Children who experienced and focused on feelings of love for themselves and others were able to forgive, heal from negative experiences, and engage in successful social relationships. One participant spoke at length about the capacity for love and understanding:

> They don't understand the concept of love or some people don't even know how to love and I think that's something that's not shown enough and for someone to love themselves within, inside and out, unconditionally is what I believe is true happiness because once you love yourself you can show others how to love and you can love others and that's when the whole cycle begins. And everybody else follows through with that and along with the love, then you then have empathy for maybe those who don't know how to…and then it becomes more you're not mad or sad because this person acted a certain way towards you. You would understand that maybe they don't understand what they're doing at that time and do it doesn't affect you. And you know that you still love yourself and you're a good person and I think that's something that this society needs and needs to learn how to do.

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Another participant stated that, "understanding is a big one. Understanding how others are feeling. Not only understanding our own kids but how everyone feels."

Healing was also discussed as important for emotional wellness:

It is confidence and I think also too healing…there's that healing that you have to go through 'cause…you see the street people and you know they need healing. And you know a lot of them, given the right tools, they'll get themselves out of that. But then they'll end up right back on the street. So for them to be able to shape shift into the student or whoever they wanna be, it's healing and acceptance and that authenticity of…okay, well these are the issues, I'm gonna deal with them, or…I lived through this abuse and I'm gonna, you know, find the healing I need.

For participants who had experienced challenges and hardships in their relationships, *forgiveness* was also emphasized. Particularly for those children whose families had been impacted by residential school experiences, forgiveness was an important alternative to cultivating feelings of anger and pain:

Forgiveness because it's not good to keep a grudge because it will just be negative against you in the end. It's not good to keep negative thoughts or you'll have a negative life.

As part of forgiveness, participants shared the importance of not only focusing on positive emotions relative to negative emotions, but also of recognizing where negative emotions come from. This helped in allowing participants to make the conscious decision to move on from negative emotions toward emotional wellness. As one participant stated:

You're not experiencing it but thinking about it's because of residential school but it is still there and you still get the sense of anger and hurt and pain even though you haven't been a part of it you still are experiencing the ripple effect of what has happened.

Children who experienced and expressed positive emotions including love,

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empathy, understanding, forgiveness, as well as self-respect and an inner contentment, rather than focusing on negative emotions such as anger and blame, were better able to relate to others and to develop pride in themselves.

Mental Wellness. Participants described mentally healthy children as being able to persevere in the face of challenges, use negative experiences to fuel the desire for success, and demonstrate adaptability in different social and cultural contexts. In recognition of the problems and challenges that many Aboriginal children face in the course of development, *problem solving* was an important element of mental wellness:

> Another skill that people need to be successful is the ability to problem solve. Find solutions. Kids especially need to learn that. When kids don't have that skill, life can be very challenging.

> Some families show the flight response, they don't fight. They don't ask for help. You see it so clearly with our youth and families. We need to problem solve and find a way to manage problems.

> Participants also described how, when children were faced with challenging

situations, adults in their lives often attempted to solve problems for them rather than encouraging them to solve problems themselves:

> When kids get into a tight space, we need to not just lift them out but teach them coping skills and how to problem solve instead of rescuing them because then they're still dependent even when they become an adult. We don't realize what damage we do by always doing things for our kids.

> Related to problem-solving abilities was the ability to approach challenges with a

determined attitude. A mentality of determination allowed Aboriginal children to persevere when faced with barriers:

> I like the words perseverance and persistence. There's so many challenges to get through before kids get to the good stuff, what comes after that. There's lots of barriers.

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It's also attitude. Other kids would say, 'You're family is backwards.' I'd say you need a way to live, you need heat, light, a place to live, but you don't need all these systems. You need and can find a way to live and solve problems. You should see my son's Halloween costumes. He's ingenuity man. He's proud of how he grew up so it's a matter of attitude.

Participants discussed how having an attitude of determination could help children to anticipate and achieve success. On the other hand, a defeatist attitude could interfere with the achievement of success:

Success is something you're taught as a child. If you're taught you can be successful, you can reach for the next thing. And that's why our families in the system are defeatist because they haven't been taught success.

Similarly, it was also important for children to have the ability to *derive motivation from negative experiences*:

Some kind of experience that they need to be able to say okay, well, I'm not gonna put myself…in that place or I'm gonna learn how to not, you know, do it a different way, or, you know, learn from their own experiences.

Some of the motivators I had were the negative things that I witnessed and a lot of it, like, losing a parent, like, my dad died when I was young, so losing him and the circumstances that I lost him…I didn't wanna keep living that and living in that cycle…so it was prevention…I'm not gonna let myself, you know, live this life.

Some participants had grown up and/ or were still living in communities where substance abuse and criminality were significant issues. They described their continued ability to witness others making poor decisions and utilize what they had witnessed to motivate their own success:

Going home every day, seeing negativity…people smoking on the streets or [prostitutes]…it just makes me not wanna be like that and to try to work hard so I don't end up like that. And then seeing my friends or family in jail…all that just makes you wanna…keep working hard.

Participants also discussed the importance of witnessing others' success in order

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to motivate their journey toward their own achievements:

> Well I experienced the non-Aboriginal life…my white friends at school…when they turn 18 they get a vehicle and university…they were even given a university trust account, and I'm like, you know, wow, that's what I want…you experience it and you want a kind of taste of it and so when I go back home I was like, mom, you know, I wanna go to school…and she's like, well, you're gonna have to work for it. Or…there's that sense of…when you experience it and you know you want it. Just, it works both ways, negative too, like with the drugs it'll…overtake you.

Finally, participants relayed the importance of children exhibiting *adaptability in different social and cultural contexts*. A crucial element of adaptability was being able to fit in to different contexts while still retaining your core identity:

> There's that authenticity…it's a real asset to have. 'Cause…there's certain places, you know, the ceremonies you go to and there's a certain way to act and, you know, on the street….there's a survival thing that sort of kicks in…there's a lot of adaptability today and I think all children and all people need to have that in some aspects…that adaptability is really important. Just being authentic in those situations…being yourself or being your professional self or being your student self or being, you know, your cultural self.

Essentially, this meant having an integrated sense of self that could look slightly different depending on the varying contexts that Aboriginal children found themselves in. One participant described this ability as being a "chameleon." On the contrary, some participants described the necessity to change their roles as burdensome:

> I feel like I have…all these different people I have to be…when you go…to the street or to see your cousins, they're all gangsters, like, you're a different way, then you go to, like, a gala and you're all…high class…I feel like I'm always switching my roles.

> It's hard living like that, though. Like, always having to change your role and change your identity for…people you're around…I even noticed here…hanging out with a group of…Aboriginal friends…we're just really lax and open, we can talk about anything. But then…once you go into a certain…[political science] seminar or something and you're talking about the same issues…but you have to watch what you're saying or…you have to be…the educated person or something.

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In order for a child's adaptability to serve their overall wellbeing and contribute to a strong identity, it was necessary for their adaptability to come from a place of strength, and authenticity, and not a place of vulnerability. Aboriginal children need to have the ability to competently fit in to different social and cultural contexts while retaining their strong identities, rather than attempting to act as someone that they are not by hiding parts of their identities in order to fit in.

Discussion

The current study has identified key elements of the healthy social-emotional development of Aboriginal children from the perspectives of a sample of Aboriginal Canadians. This analysis revealed important elements of cultural, social, emotional, and mental wellness that contribute to the development of a strong identity. This study found that a strong and proud identity as central to social-emotional health, and therefore imperative to the overall health and wellbeing for Aboriginal children.

For Aboriginal children, having a strong identity meant knowing who you are and having pride in who you are as an Aboriginal person. These findings are consistent with other research that has indicated that a strong cultural identity can be a protective factor against suicide in Canadian Aboriginal youth (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Chandler & Proulx, 2008), and is associated with more favorable outcomes related to school attendance and academics (Purdie, Tripcony, Boulton-Lewis, Fanshawe, & Gunstone, 2000). On the other hand, social, emotional, and behaviour problems exhibited by Aboriginal children may be linked to lack of a positive identity (Zubrick et al., 2005). For this reason, First Nations are actively striving to encourage young children's positive

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identification with their heritage cultures (Ball, 2004). In a qualitative study seeking to

explore the concept of identity in Aboriginal children and youth, Kickett-Tucker (2009)

identified that, "A strong racial identity and related self-esteem is like a hub of a wheel

because without the hub, the wheel can go nowhere. Like the hub, racial identity is the

centre of a child's and youth's well- being... it is their spirit…" (p. 130). This description

of identity is remarkably fitting with the voices of the participants from the current

study. Echoing the conceptualization of identity as expressed by Kickett-Tucker (2009),

findings from this study revealed a strong, proud identity as the foundation for each of

the other elements of wellness described by participants. Other researchers have

recognized the importance of cultural factors to Aboriginal child development generally,

and identity more specifically. Janus and Hopkins (2012) have developed an addendum

to the Early Development Instrument (EDI), widely used in Canada to provide

population-level outcomes on kindergarten aged children's development. The

addendum, called the Sense of Identity Questionnaire, was developed and used in the

North West Territories to capture Aboriginal children's sense of their community's and/

or family's culture; a sense of place; the land, local community, and/ or the North; and a

sense of belonging (Janus & Hopkins, 2012). It is evident that the development of a

strong, proud identity is increasingly being recognized as crucial for the healthy

development of Aboriginal children. The current study adds to the growing evidence

base supporting the importance of a strong identity, and highlights the need to address

issues of identity development in screening, assessment, and programming for

Aboriginal children.

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There is also a growing literature base to support the elements of cultural wellness identified by participants in this study, including knowledge of Aboriginal history, Aboriginal language, cultural practices, and spirituality/ belief systems. To illustrate, knowledge of a cultural language has been linked to positive school outcomes for Aboriginal children (Guevremont & Cohen, 2012), the development of a strong identity, and can support Aboriginal children's cultural knowledge and connectedness with their communities (Ball, 2008). Further, according to Ball (2004), "First Nations leaders have linked improvement of developmental conditions for children to the reconstruction of their cultural identity, revitalization of intergenerational transmission of culture and traditional language, and reproduction of culturally distinctive values and practices in programs for children and youth" (p. 455). As part of cultural wellness, participants in the current study discussed the importance of children knowing and understanding their cultural history. They also expressed frustration with their own prior lack of knowledge of Aboriginal history, and attributed this lack of knowledge to the omission of important aspects of Aboriginal history from mainstream school curricula. In a qualitative study by Lee and Cerecer (2010), Aboriginal youth identified similar frustrations. Youth felt that their mainstream school systems were intolerant of their Aboriginal heritage, and emphasized that it was unacceptable to leave Aboriginal culture, language, and history out of their education (Lee & Cerecer, 2010). In a recent policy report, Toulouse (2008) identified that respect for Aboriginal culture and traditions, as manifested by representing Aboriginal cultures, languages, and traditions in the classroom, is crucial for supporting and ensuring the academic success of

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Canadian Aboriginal youth. It is evident that there are distinct advantages to Aboriginal children and youth being educated about their histories, heritage, and language. Research has identified the importance of such education, and the frustrations of Aboriginal youth about a lack of cultural knowledge have been voiced through studies such as the current one. Following such research, movement must be made in translating these findings to practice by taking concrete steps to ensure that Aboriginal children have opportunities to learn and practice their culture, language, and history.

In addition to research on the cultural development of Aboriginal children, the literature also supports the elements of social wellness identified by participants in this study, including connections to family, community, and culture; social support; and the capacity to respect others. With regards to connectedness and social support, in Aboriginal populations, connections, relations, and family are considered fundamental aspects of overall wellness (King et al., 2009). Connections to family and community have also been identified as primarily important in promoting Aboriginal child health (Long & Sephton, 2011). Further, when Aboriginal children have access to family members and other adults who can provide social support, their knowledge of Aboriginal language and culture is strengthened (Bougie, 2010), indicating the interrelatedness of social wellness, cultural wellness, and identity. With regards to the capacity to respect others, respect has been cited as a core value of Aboriginal peoples (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Toulouse, 2008). For a population that has been dispossessed, marginalized, and generally disregarded in Canadian society, it is understandable that teaching children respect was identified in the current study as

essential for wellness. Further, in Aboriginal cultures, it is essential for children to learn to respect elders as keepers of knowledge and wisdom (Roué, 2006). Although a history of colonization and discrimination could understandably interfere with the development of a sense of respect in Aboriginal children, this is essential for moving toward forgiveness and emotional wellness. Accordingly, it is clear that conceptions of Aboriginal child health need to take these important aspects of social wellness into account.

Emotional wellness in young children was articulated as a child's ability to develop an inner contentment and self-respect that is free from shame, self-hate and rejection, as well as a willingness and capacity to forgive, love, and demonstrate empathy and understanding. While these elements of wellness might be beneficial for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children, it is arguable that they are particularly relevant for Aboriginal children because they are growing and developing in the context of pervasive challenges that they must face simply by virtue of their heritage. These challenges include disrupted attachment caused by residential schools, which has continued to have an intergenerational impact, racism, marginalization, and inequities in virtually all areas of the health spectrum (Heath, Bor, Thompson, & Cox, 2011; King et al., 2009). In this context, it is imperative that Aboriginal children learn to find a contentment and self-respect from within themselves, as well as to forgive, love, empathize with, and understand others.

Similarly, elements of mental wellness identified in the current study included the ability to problem solve, a determined attitude, the ability to derive motivation from

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negative experiences, and adaptability to different social and cultural contexts while at the same time maintaining a core sense of self. Again, given the current social and political landscape in which Aboriginal children are developing, it is clear that cultivating these elements of wellness is essential. It is evident to Aboriginal peoples that the barriers children face make it more difficult for them to achieve success than their non-Aboriginal counterparts (Priest et al., 2012). This is particularly relevant to the skill of being adaptable, as discussed by participants. Because Aboriginal children develop in multiple social and cultural contexts, they must learn to fit in to these contexts while maintaining authenticity. When participants described the course of their development, they spoke about feeling challenged in terms of maintaining authenticity. The goal for Aboriginal children is not to fit in a superficial way into different contexts, or for Aboriginal children to compromise their identities to blend in. Rather, part of mental wellness involves Aboriginal children moving between social and cultural contexts in a seamless way, meaning that they maintain their sense of identity while flowing between contexts. Accordingly, having well-developed skills in the areas of mental wellness identified by participants is especially important for Aboriginal children.

Relating these findings to early childhood, children can be given opportunities to develop elements of social, emotional, and mental wellness identified in this study, and to learn and practice cultural wellness, by attending culturally appropriate programming in their early years. The literature demonstrates that programs delivered to Aboriginal children that neglect consideration of the cultural aspects of development, often result in a homogenizing, colonizing approach to program delivery that is unsuitable for

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Aboriginal children and families (Ball, 2004).

Accordingly, early childhood programs that honour and respect Aboriginal

worldviews are being increasingly recognized as crucial for supporting the healthy

development of Aboriginal children (Hare, 2011; Mckeough et al., 2008). It has been

identified that, in order to develop a strong identity, Aboriginal children need to have

opportunities for early learning experiences that are grounded in culture (Best Start

Resource Centre, 2010). In a recent synthesis of literature relevant to Aboriginal early

childhood education in Canada, a primary recommendation was that programs should

incorporate Aboriginal worldviews, language, and culture (Preston, Cottrell, Pelletier, &

Pearce, 2012). This study sheds light on some of the culturally relevant aspects of

wellness that are essential for the development of a strong identity, and that are

therefore particularly important to focus on in early childhood programming.

Similarly, findings from this study are relevant to the early childhood

measurement literature. In particular, the majority of the elements of social-emotional

wellness described by focus group participants are not reflected in current screening

and assessment tools. Current tools include domains that largely focus on emotional

recognition, expression, regulation, socially acceptable behaviours, communication

skills, autonomy, social and coping skills, and empathy (e.g., Alpern, Boll, & Shearer,

2007; Bayley, 2005; Briggs-Gowan, Carter, Irwin, Wachtel, & Cicchetti, 2004; Squires,

Bricker, Heo, & Twombly, 2002). Current tools do not reflect the importance of children

having knowledge of culturally relevant history, heritage language, cultural practices,

spirituality and belief systems, social connectedness, the ability to draw motivation from

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negative experiences, and a strong, proud identity. As the vast majority of social-emotional screening and assessment tools are normed and standardized with American children who are not necessarily ethnically diverse (Humphrey et al., 2011), these findings are not surprising. Examining how these elements of wellness can be incorporated into screening and assessment processes will be important to more accurately reflect Aboriginal child development and for achieving enhanced indicators of both short and long term outcomes. Further, because these elements are not currently captured in measurement tools, this study suggests that the results of mainstream tools should be interpreted critically when used with Aboriginal children. Moreover, this study provides the foundation for future research into the evaluation and enhancement of commonly used screening and assessment tools to better reflect our multicultural landscape and the elements of wellness that lead to healthy development outside of Euro-Western standards and norms.

Accordingly, this study strengthens the assertion that Aboriginal children require an additional set of social-emotional skills to successfully navigate different cultural contexts during development. What is also clear from this study is that participant descriptions of Aboriginal child wellness reflect a holistic way of understanding the world that is characteristic of many Aboriginal cultures (Wenger-Nabigon, 2010). Conceptions of wellness that are consistent with Aboriginal worldviews emphasize balance between spiritual, emotional, mental, physical, and cultural elements (Hill, 2009). As participants in the current study were specifically asked about social and emotional wellness, they did not focus on physical elements of wellness. However, it is

clear that participants discussed elements of wellness that strayed beyond a Western view of what constitutes social-emotional health (i.e., behavioural and emotional regulation, understanding emotions, self and social awareness, social problem solving, relationship skills; Denham, 2005; McCabe & Altamura, 2011). Findings from the current study highlight that, in order to obtain a complete picture of Aboriginal child health and wellness, the whole child must be considered in his or her entirety, as well as additional elements such as his/ her context, support systems, and available opportunities. Some researchers contend that examinations of social-emotional development should not take place without considering other developmental domains (Squires, 2003); this study highlights that for Aboriginal children, considering other domains and influences on development is particularly important. With respect to screening and assessment, this could involve utilizing multiple informants (e.g., the child, parents, caregivers, teachers) and multiple methods (e.g., interviews, questionnaires, direct observations, valid assessments) in order to obtain a complete picture of Aboriginal child development. It has been asserted that utilizing the lived experiences and knowledge of Aboriginal peoples in supplementing existing measurement tools is invaluable for understanding Aboriginal child development (Janus & Hopkins, 2012). These experiences and knowledge could be taken into account with the use of multiple methods and informants in screening and assessing Aboriginal children.

Conclusion

The current study identified that, from the perspectives of a sample of Aboriginal Canadians, early childhood wellness was comprised of a strong, proud identity as an

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Aboriginal person. Elements of social, emotional, mental, and cultural wellness were essential in contributing to identity development, and a strong identity facilitated wellness in these areas. A number of conclusions can be drawn from this study, related to holistic approaches to child development, measurement, and early childhood programming. Primarily, there were strong interconnections among the elements of wellness described by participants, and each of the elements of wellness contributed to a strong, proud identity. This reflects that child development is holistically described and practiced in Aboriginal cultures. Similarly, assessment and screening tools and processes need to take a holistic approach for Aboriginal children by incorporating all of these elements of wellness identified by Aboriginal peoples themselves, rather than considering social-emotional health in isolation. Finally, early childhood programming for Aboriginal children must also incorporate each of these elements of wellness in order to contribute to the development of a strong identity, and therefore overall health and wellness.

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Chapter 4: General Discussion

In this final chapter, a general discussion is provided that ties together the papers from chapters 2 and 3. An overview of the thesis is first presented, along with potential contributions to the research and practice literatures. Findings of both papers are then discussed in terms of human ecological and systems perspectives, as these perspectives provide a useful theoretical lens.

Thesis Overview and Research Contributions

Background and purpose. There is consensus among researchers that the first years of life are critical in laying the foundation for lifelong trajectories of health and wellbeing (Maggi, Irwin, Siddiqi, & Hertzman, 2010). As part of the early childhood literature, social-emotional development has been the focus of much research in recent decades. Research has demonstrated that healthy social-emotional development is important for school readiness, later academic success, cognitive development, and mental health (Boyd, Barnett, Bodrova, Leong, & Gomby, 2005; Carter, Briggs-Gowan, & Davis, 2004; High, 2008; Thompson & Goodman, 2009). Within the Canadian context, it is particularly important to consider the development of Aboriginal children (i.e., First Nation, Métis, or Inuit; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2002). This is because Aboriginal children are among the most vulnerable populations in the country; they show higher rates of poverty, inadequate housing, malnourishment, disabilities, substance abuse, and suicide than non-Aboriginal children (Trocmé et al., 2006; Turpel-Lafond et al., 2011). Further, non-Aboriginal children and those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds possess more characteristics of school readiness that are

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important for academic achievement (Ball, 2002). This points to the importance of considering the many environmental contexts in which children are developing (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In recognition of the multiple environmental and cultural influences on Aboriginal children's development, the overarching purpose of the current thesis was to identify the most important aspects of social-emotional development for Aboriginal children, which was the focus of chapter 3. In order to contextualize and understand social-emotional development from Aboriginal perspectives, it was important to understand how social-emotional development is being described in current research literature, which was the focus of chapter 2.

Chapter 2: Defining social-emotional competence. Recent articles from peer-reviewed journals were examined for researchers' definitions of social-emotional development. This represents an important contribution to the literature because it has been generally identified that social-emotional development is an ill-defined concept (Humphrey et al., 2011); the first paper responds to this claim by exploring how this concept is ill-defined. By examining the literature, it was found that remarkably few researchers explicitly define the concept of social-emotional development. Rather, it is most often taken for granted that readers know what is meant by the concept, or researchers rely on the particular screening or assessment tool they are using to measure social-emotional development in their research to operationalize the concept. This can be problematic, as tools often measure very specific aspects of social-emotional development, and not social-emotional development in general. As such, this highlights

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the importance of defining and explicating the concepts on which research is based,

which in part can be achieved by referring to well-established theories in the area.

Content analysis was utilized to examine articles that did provide descriptions of

social-emotional development, and through this process four categories that together

make-up social-emotional development as a concept were identified. These categories

consisted of emotion knowledge (with the two sub-categories of knowledge of one's

own emotions and knowledge of others' emotions), self-regulation, (with the two sub-

categories of emotion regulation and behavioural regulation), relationship skills, and

self-concept. Of those researchers who do provide definitions of social-emotional

development, there is general consistency in definitions, as almost all elements of

social-emotional competence discussed by researchers could be appropriately placed in

the four categories identified through content analysis. Further, all researchers included

elements of self-regulation and social/ relationship skills in their definitions of social-

emotional competence. This is an encouraging finding for the field, although much work

remains in achieving an acceptable level of clarity, uniformity, and comprehensiveness

in defining social-emotional development. Achieving definitional uniformity and clarity is

important to facilitate more straightforward interpretation of study findings, thus

allowing for the implications of research to be more readily realized, and eventually, for

the further advancement of theories. Finally, in considering the findings of the first

paper, it must be recognized that cultural considerations are rarely acknowledged in

defining and discussing social-emotional development. There is increasing recognition,

however, that culture plays a prominent role in determining children's social-emotional

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competence (Cassels, Chan, Chung, & Birch, 2010). If researchers are to systematically investigate social-emotional development for children from minority cultures, it will be important to achieve clarity and consistency in the definition of this construct.

Chapter 3: Aboriginal perspectives of social-emotional development. In the second paper, findings were presented for a qualitative study investigating the aspects of development that are important for Aboriginal children, with a particular focus on social-emotional development. Thirty-seven Aboriginal Canadians participated in focus groups for this study. Five themes emerged from the findings representing social, emotional, mental, and cultural areas of wellness, and all connected to the central theme of identity. From Aboriginal participant perspectives, the development of a strong cultural identity was akin to social-emotional wellness, and was described as critical for the overall wellness of Aboriginal children. Particularly rich findings were generated in the area of identity as well as cultural wellness. Culturally relevant research investigations of social-emotional development are notably sparse (Chen, 2009). As such, this paper represents a critical starting point for investigating important aspects of social-emotional development from the perspectives of Aboriginal peoples themselves, rather than from the perspectives of non-Aboriginal researchers and practitioners. The findings of this study also reinforced that child development is holistically described and practiced from Aboriginal perspectives. Accordingly, it was recommended that screening and assessment practices and early childhood programming for Aboriginal children take a holistic approach that acknowledges the importance of culture and identity in Aboriginal child development.

Comparing definitions from the literature with Aboriginal perspectives. With

respect to comparisons between findings of the two papers, similarities and differences

can be identified between definitions of social-emotional competence in the literature

and the elements of social-emotional wellness identified by Aboriginal participants. In

particular, some researchers' descriptions of self-regulation focused on the expression

of more positive emotions relative to negative emotions (e.g., Denham, 2006). This was

a strong component of emotional wellness, as described by Aboriginal participants.

According to participants, Aboriginal children need to focus on and express positive

emotions such as forgiveness and love in order to achieve wellness and move on from

feelings of anger and pain. That Aboriginal participants focused more on forgiveness and

love than did researchers can be interpreted as a reflection of the historical

circumstances in which Aboriginal children are developing. In particular, given Aboriginal

experiences of marginalization and discrimination, emotions such as forgiveness and

love are especially important for Aboriginal children to exhibit.

Self-regulation in the literature was described as regulating emotional and

behavioural responses as appropriate to different contexts, and emotion knowledge

was described as understanding emotions that are differentially appropriate to various

situations. This was echoed in Aboriginal participants' descriptions of adaptability and

authenticity that were found in the theme of mental wellness. According to participants,

Aboriginal children need to have knowledge of which emotional responses and

behaviours are appropriate for the different social and cultural contexts in which they

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grow and develop. As with conceptions of self-regulation identified in the literature, Aboriginal children must be able to act appropriately based on that knowledge.

The components of social and relationship skills identified in the literature share some commonalities with the elements of social wellness identified by Aboriginal participants. The literature focuses on the formation and maintenance of positive social relationships, while Aboriginal participants discussed the importance of social connectedness, and on having relationships with peers, role models, and family members who can support and contribute to overall wellness.

Aboriginal participants also talked extensively about the importance of cultural wellness, including knowledge of Aboriginal history, Aboriginal language, involvement in cultural practices, as well as spirituality and belief systems. The literature is completely lacking in this culturally specific area, indicating a gap that needs to be addressed in order to best support the development of Aboriginal children. Finally, the most prominent theme that emerged from focus groups with Aboriginal participants was that of a strong cultural identity. According to participants, Aboriginal children need to be proud of who they are and feel a sense of belonging to their families, communities, and cultures in order to achieve overall wellness. In the research literature, self-concept emerged as one of the four categories of social-emotional competence. Self-concept was defined as the development of a sense of self-efficacy, self-worth, or mastery. Achievement of a positive sense of self was identified by focus group participants and in the literature as contributing to social-emotional wellness. However, from the perspectives of Aboriginal participants, a positive sense of self was tied significantly to

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culture. Again, as this was not present in any of the definitions of social-emotional

competence in the literature, this points to the need for future research to examine

ways to incorporate culturally relevant conceptions of social-emotional and overall

wellness into screening, assessment, and programming for Aboriginal children.

A Human Ecological Perspective on Development

Human ecological perspectives are holistic and interdisciplinary in nature, and

are concerned with the interactions and interdependencies between human beings and

their environments (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993). Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of

human development is particularly useful for understanding development in context

and the importance of culture in impacting development.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) described five systems within which humans are

embedded, and with which humans interact. The microsystem is a human being's most

immediate environment. In early childhood, immediate family constitutes the

microsystem. Exosystems are environments that are more distant than immediate

family, but nonetheless have a direct impact (e.g., child care environments). Exosystems

are also the environments that humans experience vicariously. For example, although a

child may not be physically present at a parent's workplace, children are affected by the

work stress that parents experience (Swick & Williams, 2006). Macrosystems are

constituted by cultural beliefs, values, and political trends that influence how children

develop. Mesosystems are what connect two or more systems, and chronosystems are

constituted by the historical contexts that frame each of the systems. In discussing

social-emotional development, Reicher (2010) asserts that it is essential to be aware

that individual development takes place in a social context. Reicher (2010) distinguishes

between the proximal and distal environments in which children learn social-emotional

skills. Children's proximal environments are their homes, schools, and neighborhoods

where they interact with family members, peers, teachers, and others. Proximal

environments are embedded in distal environments that include social and economic

conditions as well as societal regulations. Consistent with a systems perspective, Reicher

(2010) also notes that, "individual development is not determined by but dependent on

the environment" (p. 216).

Human ecological and systems perspectives provide a useful lens through which

to view the current thesis. In particular, research indicating the importance of the family

system has significant implications for Canadian Aboriginal children, who are generally

being raised in larger families and by younger parents than non-Aboriginal children

(Statistics Canada, 2008). Growing up in unique family circumstances and cultural

contexts may necessitate the development of social-emotional competencies that are

not currently captured by mainstream literature and measurement tools, as discussed in

the second paper. Also pertinent to Aboriginal children is research demonstrating the

importance of safe and caring learning environments. Research has demonstrated the

need for high-quality preschool environments that attend to the multi-faceted needs of

children, including those related to social, emotional, and physical aspects of

development (Boyd et al., 2005). For children to learn social-emotional skills effectively,

the environments in which they learn must be safe, supportive, and organized (Reicher,

2010). For Canadian Aboriginal children who are at elevated risk for being raised in

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poverty and in unstable environments (First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, 2003), there is a need to establish supportive, stable environmental conditions so that social-emotional competence in early childhood can be realized. With respect to social-emotional programming, "issues such as improving parent/child interactions, maternal depression, poverty, domestic violence, and child abuse must often be dealt with concurrently for interventions to have any lasting effects" (Squires, 2003, p. 13). This is particularly important in considering the findings of this qualitative paper. Even if advances are made in understanding social-emotional development as related specifically to Aboriginal children, practitioners and decision-makers must be able to take action based on research results such as these in order for the results to be meaningful. This means that programming and resources that reflect the aspects of development identified as particularly important to Aboriginal children must be made available for and accessible to Aboriginal families.

A systems perspective is also helpful in specifically considering the findings of the second paper. Participants identified a strong, proud cultural identity as critical for Aboriginal children in early childhood, and particularly rich findings emerged that were relevant to cultural competence. Similar concerns relevant to children developing a strong identity and cultural competence have not been identified for children from a mainstream Canadian background. These findings can be interpreted by considering the chronosystems in which Canadian Aboriginal children grow and develop. In particular, it is well known that Canada's history has involved a destruction of Aboriginal language, culture, and traditions, which has negatively impacted Aboriginal peoples in part by

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resulting in a loss of positive cultural identity (Wang, 2010). This explains the central

importance, as reflected in the findings of the second paper, of fostering a strong

identity and cultural competence in Aboriginal children in order to ensure social-

emotional and overall wellbeing. Because mainstream Canadians have not experienced

the same loss of culture and identity, these factors are not reflected in mainstream

conceptions of social-emotional and overall wellness. In sum, the findings of the second

paper provide support for considering early childhood development in the context of

broader ecological factors and from a systems perspective. As Yates et al. (2008) have

indicated, "it is necessary for us to implement a systems approach in order to ensure

better outcomes and success for infants, toddlers, young children, and their caregivers"

(Yates et al., 2008, p. 7).

Concluding Comments

This thesis research examined the definitions of social-emotional development

used in recent research, and explored social-emotional development from the

perspectives of Aboriginal focus group participants. It is evident that researchers

investigating social-emotional development must work toward achieving elevated

uniformity, clarity, and comprehensiveness in defining the constructs that they are

investigating. With elevated uniformity, clarity, and comprehensives, it will be possible

to investigate and more fully understand the development of minority children,

including Aboriginal children, and to offer programming and intervention that can best

meet their unique needs. In order to do so, it will be imperative to consider broader

ecological influences outside of individual-level factors that can have a profound effect

on development in early childhood.

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Appendix A

University Student Aboriginal Youth: Focus Group Lesson Plan February 4, 2011

A. Introductions/Consent/Food (10 minutes)

- Go around the table for **introductions**
- Provide a brief **introduction to the research project**
  - ○ What is CBR and why are we doing this research?
  - ○ What we hope to accomplish by adding their voice?
  - ○ What we will use the information for?
- Hand out **consent forms**, walk through each section, sign, and remind youth of the ground rules of the focus group.

B. Report back on data collected so far (20 minutes)

- Report back about assets based on the conversations we had so far-these are the domains that support children who grow-up having multiple windows into the world.

- Refer to social-emotional competencies print outs around the room.
  - **From the conversations we have had so far, we have grouped the information into 6 themes. We would like to get your thoughts on what we are learning so far, if you would add anything, delete anything, or modify anything.**

- **Sense of Belonging/Identity**: Feeling connected to individuals and groups; feeling a part of something; feeling proud of your heritage and who you are; acceptance; having a sense of belonging; feeling connected to both mainstream and traditional/heritage worlds.

"Accepting each other and who they are, their beliefs, even if they're different."

- **Communication**: Verbal and nonverbal ways of understanding and communicating with others; styles of communication; protocols in communication; social roles in communication (e.g., teacher and student, elder and adult); the ability to communicate (speak and understand) both English and the heritage language (e.g., Cree, Mohawk, Chinese, Urdu, etc); knowing the language of parents and grandparents helps children connect to their family, community, and culture.

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"On my reserve, young kids can speak their language because their culture is so strong and it stuck with them but people my age don't speak our language and don't know how because we weren't taught."

- **Culture:** The set of attitudes, values, and beliefs, and behaviors shared by a group of people, communicated from one generation to the next. Knowledge of cultural traditions, values, social roles, and history; Active participation in cultural activities.

- **Relationships:** Intimate and reciprocal engagement with another individual or group of individuals; boundaries in relationships; social roles in relationships; importance of interdependence over independence; relationships with elders are important; respecting others (e.g., being respectful of differences).

- **Belief Systems**: Connection with spiritual and/or religious practices that guide individuals in their life. These practices may vary between different cultural groups (e.g., respect Mother Earth, Creator, prayer, religious protocols)- yet being connected with spiritual and/or religious practices is described as part of holistic child development and is seen as important across groups.

- **Higher order human qualities/intercultural assets**: Competencies that are inherent or develop as a result of the process of navigating multiple worlds. These may include: empathy, forgiveness, humour, patience, acceptance and understanding of others views, openness to hearing and seeing greater good, trust, and honesty.

"We are all people."

"Accept all and respect all."

"Being true to yourself."

Other things we've been learning so far about how these competencies are nurtured:
- Foundational experiences learned at a very young age (pivotal life moments)
- Modeling from family members, friends, parents
- Learned from parents' mistakes
- By reading, conversations, personal experiences
- Learning as you go
- Mentors within and external to the community
- Organizations within the community/ Participation in community activities
- Importance of self-reflection and reflecting back
- Learning different strategies from different people and different groups

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1. *Elaborating on the findings*

- What do you think about these competencies/assets?
  o Would you like to add-delete-change any of these?
    ▪ Go through each theme and have them add, change, or modify- this is all part of the report back. They can talk out loud or jot their ideas down on sticky notes to add to the theme.

D. Focus Group Discussion (80 minutes)

2. *Understanding how competencies support success?*
   • Do you think these are important things (the themes and competencies that are on the wall and were just presented) to have in order to be successful?
   • How do you define success, for yourself, for other Aboriginal children and youth?
   • Can you think of a time (from your own experiences or someone you know) where you have experienced success as a result of possessing these competencies?
     • What facilitated the success?
       i. We could give them time to think here, and jot down their stories/ ideas on a sticky note. They can share or post it on the wall under the competency that resonated with them.

3. *Gaining a deeper understanding of the journey*

   o We are hearing people describe being multicultural and Aboriginal in many different ways. For example, it has been described as having different windows on the world, having a foot in 2 worlds, having multiple identities, navigating multiple worlds.
     ▪ How would you describe this based on your experiences and journey from childhood to adulthood?
     ▪ Was there a pivotal moment(s) in your life that brought clarity or confusion? Was it a particular event, experience, place, environment?
     ▪ What were the facilitators?
       • Internal-e.g. traits
       • External-e.g family
     ▪ What were the challenges?
       • Internal-e.g. traits
       • External-e.g family

4. *Supporting navigation in young children*

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- How do we support/nurture this in young children?
    - What did you find particularly helpful growing up?
    - What are the skills that children need?
    - What are the lessons they need to be taught?
    - What are the resources that children need to be successful?

E. Debrief and Close (10 minutes)

- Anything to add?
- Briefly explain what our future steps are and how are we using the information collected during focus group.
- Thank participants.

NOTES FOR US:

Things to Keep in Mind:
- Need to understand more about the assets/competencies/domains: Why and How, questions for each one.
- Need to understand more on how to support this in early childhood

Appendix B

Youth Information Letter

Dear Youth:

Today, I'm writing to ask for your voice. You represent the youth in our province that are growing up in an environment where on a daily basis you live within multiple cultures. You have specific skills that help you flow between cultures and you have done this successfully. A team of researchers and community organizations are interested in your experiences. You can teach us about the important social-emotional strategies and skills that helped/are helping you succeed.

It is very important for the researchers and community organizations to hear your thoughts and opinions about the multiple cultures you flow between and the skills that you developed that gave you a positive experience. We want this discussion to be as meaningful to you as possible, so we are open and excited to hear your thoughts on the best way for us to have a discussion.

This important research will benefit from your help. If you agree to take part, you will be asked to participate in a series of discussions with your peers. If at any point you'd like to stop participating, you can. It is **everyone's responsibility** that participates to respect the privacy of everyone in the group and not share what was said during the discussions. **None of the data will have your name on it.** Your group leaders and parents will not see your responses. Your name will never be used in connection with this study if it is published or presented.

You should only participate if you want to. If you'd rather not, your decision will not affect your participation in current groups. If you need some questions answered before you decide, you can contact me directly or talk to your group leader; all of my contact information is listed at the bottom of this letter. Keep in mind that even if you agree to participate now, you can stop at any time during the discussions. If you wish to have any of the information that you provided in the study removed, you will have up to 4 weeks after you signed the consent form to let me know (please see my contact information below).

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension, Augustana and Campus Saint Jean Research Ethics Board (EEASJ REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEASJ REB c/o (780) 492-2614.

Thank you for considering this request and I look forward to working with you on this fun and important project!
Sincerely,

Rebecca Gokiert
Principal Investigator
Phone: (780) 492 6297
Email: rgokiert@ualberta.ca

Youth Consent Form

Social-Emotional Developmental Competencies in a Multicultural Context

Are you willing to join in the discussion/ focus group?

If yes, please print and sign your name:

I_____consent to

             (First, Last)

join in the above study.

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

Please provide a phone number or email address where you may be reached to be invited to a discussion.

Phone Number: _____

Email: _____

Best Time to Reach You: _____ Mornings _____ Afternoon _____ Evenings

Two copies of the consent form are provided: one to be signed and returned and one for you to keep for your own records.

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Appendix C

Adult Information Letter

Title of Study: Social-Emotional Developmental Competencies in a Multicultural Context

Principal Investigator: Rebecca J. Gokiert, Faculty of Extension, Community-University Partnership for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families (CUP), University of Alberta.

What is the study?
We invite you to take part in discussions about the social-emotional skills that you have developed to enable you to positively cope with issues arising out of living within multiple cultures. The purpose of the discussions is to: (a) understand the different worlds you live within, (b) understand what social-emotional skills mean to you, and (c) discuss the strategies and skills you were taught as a young child that supported you to live in multiple cultures successfully.

Why are we doing the study?
Alberta is becoming increasingly multicultural and our children are growing up in a context where they need to be able to flow between multiple cultures and contexts. However, often tools that look at children's development do not consider the skills and strategies that children need to develop in order to succeed flowing between multiple cultures. We want to engage those that walk in multiple worlds – Aboriginal and Immigrant and Refugee youth, adults, and elders – so they can learn about the important social-emotional strategies and skills that children who need for healthy and positive development.

What and who is involved?
Aboriginal youth, adults, and elders as well as 1st and 2nd generation Immigrant/Refugee youth and adults will discuss their experiences living in multiple cultures. Each discussion group should take from 1 to 2 hours.

The study will benefit you by giving voice to your experiences and the opportunity to teach and inform the broader academic, government, and policy communities' about how to better meet the needs of children who live in multiple cultures. We do not expect any risks for being in this study. Your input is entirely voluntary. If you decide to take part, you can still change your mind and stop at anytime. You can choose not to be in the discussion/focus group and this will not impact any services you receive. However, for the discussions that happen in a group setting, it is not possible to withdraw your comments afterwards. For one-on-one interviews, if you wish to have your interview removed from the data this will need to take place no later than four weeks after your interview.

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How will we protect your privacy?

The information that you provide will be kept private. No names will be attached to the information or in any reports from the study. Since some of the discussions are happening in a group setting, confidentiality is a shared responsibility and is requested from all participants, but it cannot be guaranteed. The discussion/focus groups will be audio-recorded and/or type-recorded to ensure accuracy of the information and will remain anonymous and confidential at all times. The data from the discussions will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my office and will only be available to the research team. It is our intent to summarize the results from this study and share it with people in the early childhood community. We also plan to post a summary of the findings on our website (www.cup.ualberta.ca).

We may publish the overall results from this study in scholarly journals and present results at conferences, however, individual participant comments will not be identifiable because all focus group data will be combined. We will keep the data for a minimum of 5 years and then the data will be destroyed in a way that ensures privacy and confidentiality. If the data are used for other studies, such as for a students' thesis work, ethics approval will be obtained.

Contact Names and Telephone Numbers:

Thank-you very much for considering this request. If you have any questions or would like more information about the study please contact Rebecca Gokiert at (780) 492-6297, or at rgokiert@ualberta.ca

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension, Augustana and Campus Saint Jean Research Ethics Board (EEASJ REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEASJ REB c/o (780) 492-2614. If you consent to participate in the study, please sign the attached Consent Form.

Adult Consent Form

Social-Emotional Developmental Competencies in a Multicultural Context

Are you willing to join in the discussion/ focus group?

If yes, please print and sign your name:

I_____consent to

       (First, Last)

join in the above study.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Please provide a phone number or email address where you may be reached.

Phone Number: _____

Email: _____

Best Time to Reach You: _____ Mornings _____ Afternoon _____ Evenings

Two copies of the consent form are provided: one to be signed and returned and one for you to keep for your own records.

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