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# Quality and educator dispositions for indigenous families in the urban early learning and child care context: a scoping review

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## Abstract

This scoping review focused on the experiences of Indigenous families and their children in accessing quality early learning and child care in a Canadian urban context. This scoping review was conducted to contribute to the field and frame a more extensive study involving focus groups and case studies. The analysis revealed a range of quality indicators that included the following: (1) families, educators, and community members must establish a definition of quality that best reflects their personal life experiences and cultural context; (2) many families express a desire for child care focused on developmental milestones, social skills, and Indigenous knowledge; (3) families value connections made between the home and the center that foster identity, encourage child and family autonomy, implement programming relevant to culture, and stimulate learning within the context of family; and (4) families desire child care that focuses on relationship building increased cultural safety. Results from the scoping review related to quality educator dispositions found the following: (1) families seek centers that are flexible, family-focused, and culturally relevant; (2) families value educators who value diversity and decolonization; and (3) some families favor a cultural match with educators from similar backgrounds. These findings point to several areas for further consideration that can improve the overall experiences of Indigenous children and families accessing quality early learning and child care in a Canadian urban setting.

**Keywords:** Scoping review, Indigenous families, Early learning and child care, Quality, Dispositions

## Introduction

The lives of families are diverse in both form and structure, and many young children today spend a significant portion of their early years in some form of non-parental care (Beaujot et al., 2013). In 2008, UNICEF marked this transition to child care as a critical policy issue, declaring that this reliance on child care presents either an advance or a setback for the well-being of children and families, for today and for the future, that depends on the wisdom of a collective response. According to Statistics Canada,

almost half of Canadian families with children under four use child care. Despite what seems like widespread use, many families struggle to secure consistent child care for their young children that is of high quality, accessible, and affordable (Statistics Canada, 2016). Existing early childhood health inequalities in the social, political, and cultural realms result in some families holding the means by which to reconcile work and child care commitments sufficiently; others can experience challenges (Moore et al., 2015). The experiences of children during their early years stand as a global public policy focus (Britto et al., 2011).

Kemble (2022) shares that early learning and child care policies in the Canadian context, viewed through the lens of “the larger colonial enterprise of coercion and assimilation, continue to have a devastating impact on Indigenous Peoples” (p. 9). Since the signing of Canada’s historical treaties, Indigenous peoples have experienced a host of assimilative and discriminatory policies with profound effects (Armitage, 1995; Fast & Collin-Vézina, 2010). Reading and Wien (2009) emphasize challenges faced by many Indigenous peoples in Canada, including unemployment, poverty, high rates of teen pregnancy, high rates of suicide, and poor health conditions. The legacy of the residential school system, colonial policy frameworks, and the dearth of funding for services continue to impact Indigenous peoples through high rates of child poverty, housing and food insecurities, adverse health outcomes, and issues related to employment (7 Cities on Housing & Homelessness, 2016; Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2016).

While Indigenous peoples have faced a long history of colonialism, the inherent rights of Indigenous peoples, as outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2008, are recognized and expected to be upheld by all levels of government. In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) released findings and calls to action that included dozens of recommendations on topics related to child welfare, preserving language and culture, and strengthening information on missing women and children (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRC], 2015).

In the context of Indigenous young children and their families, Greenwood (2016) shares that “early childhood can be seen as a crucial site for reconciliation and cultural healing” (p. 1). Early learning and child care anchored in Indigenous community cultures can play a foundational role in supporting children’s cultural identities and broader collective well-being for Indigenous families and communities (Greenwood & de Leeuw, 2012; Government of Canada, n.d.; Smylie, 2009). Indigenous-focused early learning and child care programs have the potential to uphold long standing calls by Indigenous families and communities to assert government-obligated rights for quality care (Gerlach et al., 2021). Affordable and accessible quality early learning and child care can provide Indigenous families and children with additional support while parents choose to advance their education, obtain new employment, or maintain their current employment (Boulanger, 2018).

The steady increase of Indigenous families moving into urban settings has placed pressure on Indigenous-focused early learning and child care programs and highlighted the need for non-Indigenous mainstream programming to meet the needs of Indigenous families (Scott, 2013). Early learning and child care programs can facilitate long-term health and social outcomes and contribute to family and community well-being (Britto

et al., 2011). Furthermore, the TRC specifically recommends that federal, provincial, and Indigenous governments develop relevant early childhood education programs for Indigenous families (Taylor, 2017). Taken together, these elements indicate that early learning and child care access for Indigenous peoples is a critical consideration at this time.

What experiences do Indigenous families face when accessing early learning and child care programming in the urban context? According to Kemble (2022), the experiences of Indigenous children in mainstream early childhood education programs remain “largely uninterrogated as a site of oppression and assimilation” (p. 3). According to Hare and Anderson, the experiences of Indigenous families accessing formal early intervention programs in Canadian urban settings differ from non-Indigenous families as “the historical and social realities of Indigenous parents play a significant role in the process of coming to early childhood programs, and also in how parents navigate the transition” (2010, p. 26). Ball (2012) also emphasizes that the experiences of Indigenous families accessing early learning and child care vary greatly, especially when considering the differences that may exist between Indigenous communities and urban contexts. Indigenous children and their families live in various settings, including rural, remote, on-reserve, off-reserve, and urban communities (Ball, 2004). Thus, significant policy and practice-related gaps can exist, particularly in urban settings, in providing quality early learning and child care for Indigenous families in Canada.

In 2018, the Assembly of First Nations, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, the Métis National Council, and the Government of Canada released the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework (Government of Canada, 2018). The framework paves the way for Indigenous governance of early learning and child care and acts as a guide for those working in the field to ensure Indigenous children receive the opportunity to experience quality. The Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework.

*sees children and families supported by a comprehensive and coordinated system of ELCC policies, programs and services that are led by Indigenous peoples, rooted in Indigenous knowledges, cultures and languages, and supported by strong partnerships of holistic, accessible and flexible programming that is inclusive of the needs and aspirations of Indigenous children and families [and grounded in culture] (Government of Canada, 2018, p. 5).*

The Framework offers nine general principles as well as a “vision for happy and safe Indigenous children and families, strong cultural identity, and a comprehensive and coordinated system that is anchored in self-determination, centred on children and grounded in culture” (para. 2). One of the nine principles, quality programs and services, distinguishes early learning and child care as “grounded in Indigenous cultures and delivered through a holistic approach that supports the wellness of children and families in safe, nurturing and well-resourced programs and environments” (Greenwood et al., 2020, p. 22). This principle also emphasizes “culturally competent” educators working in healthy and supportive environments. The Framework was developed to act as a guide for those working in the early learning and care field to ensure that programs and services “built on a foundation of shared principles, rooted in Indigenous knowledge, cultures and languages, and supported by strong partnerships” (Government of Canada,

2018, para. 2). Despite its existence, the enactment of principles shared through this framework remains aspirational for many early learning and child care settings.

A supportive stimulating environment can meet a wide range of objectives, including care, learning, and social support for children and their primary caregivers (Friendly & Prentice, 2009). Ball (2005) claims that promoting early learning and child care can mobilize Indigenous family wellness and instigate a variety of community services. Thus, early learning and child care involving a focus on development in the early years can encourage the holistic health of the broader community. Furthermore, examining notions of quality and educator dispositions for Indigenous families can offer insight into the range of benefits that early learning and child care offers Indigenous children and families, including those families experiencing periods of vulnerability.

In response to the context and needs described above, a post-secondary institution in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada (MacEwan University) collaborated with a local non-profit, the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care (ECELC) to conduct a multi-step research project. The overarching goal of the research project was to more clearly understand the experiences of Indigenous families and their children in early learning and child care in Edmonton. To begin the project, researchers conducted a scoping review, reported here. Given that formalized early learning and child care environments can offer a range of beneficial outcomes for children and their families, this scoping review examines notions of quality for Indigenous families accessing early learning and care and the dispositions educators can demonstrate to meet the needs of Indigenous children and families.

### **Consideration of voice**

As non-Indigenous researchers, it is imperative to address the lens through which this study occurred. Absalon and Willett (2005) state that, at a minimum, any methodological approach through a non-Indigenous researcher lens should include “a critical analysis of colonization and an understanding of Western scientific research as a mechanism of colonization” (p. 120). They also argue that “identifying at the outset, the location from which the voice of the researcher emanates is an [Indigenous] way of ensuring that those who study, write, and participate in knowledge creation are accountable for their own positionality” and that “location is about relationships to land, language, spiritual, political, economic, environmental, and social elements in one’s life” (p. 99).

Rather than presenting presumptive narratives under the guise of knowledge regarding Indigenous experiences under historical and current colonization policies and practices and coming from a position of relative power and privilege, non-Indigenous research can also seek to contribute to the process of decolonizing and shaping a more socially just society. Through questioning whose voices are silent or buried and whose are represented, critically reflexive research may support efforts for redressing systems of oppression through critical theoretical and methodological lenses.

With that in mind, it is important to stress that this scoping review does not represent all Indigenous family experiences and is thus not indicative of all determinants of quality for Indigenous families. Moreover, information gathered is firmly situated in Eurocentric research, dominant languages, and non-Indigenous epistemologies. Nevertheless,

researchers intend to use this literature as a helpful starting point for considering what may be necessary to Indigenous families living in an urban context in Canada.

## Method

A scoping review can generate knowledge and map the existing and available literature related to Indigenous families' access to, and experiences with, early learning and care in the urban context. Mapping a synthesis of the literature helps determine key concepts, possible gaps in information, and the types and sources of evidence that may inform further research, practice, and policy making. This scoping review is reported in adherence to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analysis extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) (Tricco et al., 2018) and followed the methodological steps of the Arksey and O'Malley framework (2005). This methodology follows five key stages: (1) identifying the research question, (2) identifying relevant studies, (3) study selection, (4) charting the data, and (5) summarizing and reporting the results (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). The scoping review protocol predefines the objectives and methods as well as the proposed plans. Because existing literature was used, ethics approval was not required for this review.

### Scoping review research questions

The research questions served as a starting point for delineating the study's parameters, with concepts related to the research questions defined to ensure clarity. To confirm that the process captured a substantial range of literature relating to the aforementioned topic, the scoping review focused on two research questions: For Indigenous families, what are indicators of quality in early learning and child care? (RQA) and What are the essential dispositions child care educators demonstrate that meet the needs of Indigenous children and families? (RQB). The quality of many child and family experiences and opportunities in early learning and child care depends on the dispositions of educators, and thus, researchers sought to investigate both the indicators of quality as well as the essential dispositions of early learning and child care educators.

For this scoping review, researchers used the term *Indigenous* to signify "persons of First Nations, Inuit or Métis descent, regardless of where they reside and whether their names appear on an official register. Self-identification is a fundamental criterion for defining Indigenous peoples" (Government of Canada, n.d.). Additionally, *child care*, *child care center*, *center*, and *program* interchangeably refer to the out-of-home spaces where children under the age of six are cared for by adults other than their family members. The term *educator* denotes employed individuals who plan and care for children in child care centers. Different terms may be used in the works cited, but this study will use the defined terms for consistency.

The term *dispositions* refer to the tendencies of early learning and child care educators to respond to circumstances or situations in specific ways (Davitt & Ryder, 2019). The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) (2002) defines dispositions as "the values, commitments, and professional ethics that influence behaviours ... as well as the educator's own professional growth" (p. 53). According to the NCATE (2002), individual educator values, beliefs, and attitudes influence dispositions within a

sociocultural context. The term *quality* was not defined in advance of the scoping review but instead was defined through it, and this emergent definition is described below.

**Identification of relevant studies**

The two research questions directed the study protocol, including identifying search terms, data capture, and selecting databases to search. To cover a broad range of disciplines for peer-reviewed literature, and with assistance from a research librarian, initial searches in databases through the University of Alberta and MacEwan Libraries included Sociological Abstracts, SocIndex, ERIC (Ovid), Social Services Abstracts, CINAHL, PsychINO, iPortal, Bibliography of Native North Americans, Academic Search Complete (EBSCO), ScienceDirect, JSTOR, and Web of Science. Initial searches also extended to Google and Google Scholar. Due to the nature of scoping reviews in the comprehensiveness and breadth of initial searches, researchers only placed limits of language (English) and year published (between 2000 and 2020, the year the study began) during the initial database search. Criteria for inclusion/exclusion for scoping reviews involve post hoc specifics based on the research question and familiarity with the subject matter through the reading of studies, and discussions between researchers.

In order to be selected for inclusion, articles must have been published between the years 2000 and 2020. Additional inclusion criteria related to the topic of the article rather than the format; therefore, both theoretical articles (e.g., literature reviews, recommendations based on cited research, informal descriptions) and empirical articles (e.g., original qualitative or quantitative research studies) were included. An article was included if it addressed the topic of quality as related to the experiences of Indigenous children and families accessing early learning and care, or as related to the dispositions educators demonstrate that meet the needs of Indigenous children and families. Researchers were open to any existing definition of quality in the filtering process, allowing articles focused on policy and practice to be included as well as studies related to child and family outcomes.

Arksey and O'Malley (2005) suggest that scoping review searches include a broad definition of keywords to glean a wide coverage of available literature. Initial search terms included “child care,” “Indigenous,” and “quality” for RQA; the extended search applied the terms listed in Table 1. For RQB, initial search terms were limited to “child care,” “Indigenous,” and “educators,” but expanded to the terms listed in Table 1.

**Table 1** Topic searches (TS)

Key search terms
Search terms: RQA
TS= (“early learning” OR “child care” OR “childcare” OR “daycare” OR “preschool” OR “early childhood”)
TS= (“Indigenous” OR “First Nations” OR “Aboriginal”)
TS: (“quality”)
Search terms: RQB
TS= (“early learning” OR “child care” OR “childcare” OR “daycare” OR “preschool” OR “early childhood”)
TS= (“educators” OR “workers” OR “teachers”)
TS: (“dispositions” OR “competences” OR “qualities”)
TS: (“Indigenous” OR “First Nations” OR “Aboriginal”)

Techniques for searching included using search tools, such as subject headings and Boolean operators to narrow, widen, and combine literature searches. A subsequent investigation included gray literature and a hand search of the reference lists of initial, extended, and gray literature. To ensure a comprehensive search in identifying primary evidence and being cognizant of the practicalities of time, inclusion and exclusion criteria were further applied on extended keyword searches. The researchers divided and shared the work for the initial, extended, and reference list searches. All citations were imported into the web-based bibliographic manager Zotero. Researchers shared search results and used Zotero to identify duplicate articles.

### **Study selection**

Researchers utilized a screening process to assess the relevance of studies identified in the searches. For the first level of screening, only the title and abstract were reviewed in order to determine articles that met the minimum inclusion criteria. The first author then reviewed the modified article groupings for inclusion/exclusion. To ensure rigor in search selection, a full text article review happened next. The first author developed a form on a spreadsheet to confirm, exclude, and/or indicate any uncertainty of these articles, and all researchers contributed to supplying this information.

Exclusion criteria were further developed during the article filtering process to exclude articles without a clear focus on quality indicators and/or dispositions of educators in relation to the experiences of Indigenous children and families in an urban context. An article was excluded from review if it met any of the following exclusion criteria: (1) it focused solely on community-based (on-reserve) programs without consideration of how outcomes would apply to an urban environment, (2) the article focused solely on specific intervention strategies, (3) the article focused specifically on aspects of child development such as speech and language, (4) it was geo-situated in a context not applicable to the urban Canadian context, (5) the article focused on assessment practices, (6) the article was not retrievable online and/or translated into English, (7) the article provided an overview of early learning and care, (8) the article focused on generalized early learning environments without a focus on the Indigenous family experience, and (9) the article focused solely on topics of quality and care that did not specifically relate to the experiences of Indigenous children and families, such as outdoor play.

Researchers used a two-stage screening process to assess the relevance of studies identified in the searches. Using the key search descriptors, researchers initially identified a total of 1243 articles for RQA and a total of 1005 articles for RQB. For the first level of screening, only the title and abstract were reviewed in order to determine articles that meet the minimum inclusion criteria. A review of the abstracts revealed articles that were either irrelevant or duplicated, which narrowed down the total number for RQA to 1227 and 970 for RQB. To ensure rigor in search selection, researchers used Zotero to independently confirm, exclude, or indicate any uncertainty of these articles. Researchers met regularly during this screening process to resolve any conflicts and discuss any uncertainties related to the study selection. Studies excluded at this phase did not meet the inclusion criteria as previously outlined. Guided by the inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Table 2), following the screening of additional articles from reference lists and

**Table 2** Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Time period	2000–2020	Studies published outside of dates
Language	English	Non-English studies
Study focus	Quality in child care	Targeted interventions
Population and sample	Educator dispositions	Non-urban programming (in community)
Location	Indigenous families with young children accessing child care Canada, United States, Australia, New Zealand	Non-indigenous families Indigenous families living in community Countries not reflecting conditions considered similar to Canada in terms of indigenous family experiences accessing early learning and child care in urban contexts

gray literature, the total number of full text studies assessed and identified for eligibility equaled 638 for RQA and 362 for RQB.

### Charting the data

The three authors of this study completed data extraction using an online spreadsheet developed by the first author. Extraction fields included the publication location, authors, year of publication, country of origin, title, study purpose, study methodology, any theoretical framework used in the study, the population examined, the key findings of the study, conclusions, and any recommendations for future research or policy implications. The extraction fields also included a section for any additional comments on articles, including determining whether the article was eligible. Researchers then analyzed data for the generation of themes and results. The researchers populated a separate spreadsheet to capture the final collection of articles and created a chart to sort publications based on their thematic content.

### Summary of results

What follows is a numeric and descriptive summary of the different indicators of quality identified through the scoping review, followed by a similar summary of educator dispositions offered in the explored literature that support Indigenous children and families. Detailed characteristics of studies included in this scoping review can be found in the appendices following this paper. A total of 47 sources, including peer-reviewed and gray literature, met inclusion criteria for RQA, and 46 sources met inclusion criteria for RQB. Please refer to “[Appendix](#)” for PRISMA flow diagrams of detailed inclusion processes, and for the detailed study characteristics for RQA and RQB.

Below, the key findings from the scoping review are described. A thematic analysis of the articles was conducted and is presented below. For RQA, thematic results from quality indicators include the definition of quality, aspects of curriculum and programming, connections to cultures, family engagement, perspectives from stakeholders other than family, and barriers to quality. For RQB, thematic results from educator dispositions include engaging in a practice of relationships, cultural humility, critical pedagogy, honoring Indigenous family knowledge, having cultural matches between educators and children/families, and the importance of preservice education.

## Indicators of quality (RQA)

### *Defining quality*

In Canada, the notion of quality for Indigenous children and families in early learning and child care centers can vary, depending on how ideological, policy, and structural factors interact to influence Indigenous family choices and experiences, as well as how family determines indicators of quality. The dominant discourse for early learning and child care in Canada suggests that high-quality programs and services are key components in closing equity gaps for Indigenous children and families in Canada (Garon-Carrier, 2019; Greenwood et al., 2020; Landry, 2008; Niles et al., 2007; Yoshikawa et al., 2013); however, a dearth of explication exists regarding how high-quality is defined in this context. Although the impact of structural elements, such as policies and funding, can impact children's and families' experiences, there is no definitive, one-size-fits-all approach to defining what precisely constitutes quality "since systems are rooted in the articulation of ideas, concepts, values, and principles that differ across time and geographic location" (Greenwood et al., 2020, p. 26).

Quality in early learning and child care is not a separate concept for children and families accessing and experiencing care. Overall, for many families, quality early learning and child care environments safeguard children's well-being, happiness, positive experiences, and development. Quality is what they expect from early learning and child care. Moreover, children, families, and communities are diverse with varying needs, likings, and contexts, and these diversities can reflect varying concepts of quality. Early learning and child care deemed to be of high quality in one context may not necessarily present as high quality in all contexts and for all families. Quality of any form should be determined through impact for children and their families and based on families' definition of quality. Research and questions regarding evaluation should also be contextually determined, as these too can be subject to assumptions (Kral et al., 2021). Given that urban early learning and child care environments offer a range of outcomes for Indigenous families, including those experiencing periods of vulnerability, it is imperative to consider the indicators of quality that families share that don't necessarily overtly state quality as such, but address quality nonetheless. This includes notions of curriculum/programming in early learning and child care, cultural connections, observed family/center engagement, and educator dispositions.

Several articles sought to define specific elements of quality in the Indigenous family context (BC Aboriginal Child Care Society, 2005; Endfield, 2007; Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2008). Endfield (2007) reveals possible indicators of quality from both non-Indigenous and Indigenous lenses, including educator knowledge, the inclusion of culture and language, as well as communal values. The article suggests that "[child care] staff, parents, and community should determine their definition of quality as it applies in their community based on established best practices as well as their own cultural experiences" (p. 157). The author emphasizes that it is in the best interest of all child care centers to communicate and engage with families and communities to determine what fits best in terms of quality. Regardless, cultural contexts should and must be involved in the child care sector to ensure children and families receive the best experiences possible.

### ***Curriculum/programming***

According to some studies (Martin, 2017; Sims et al., 2012), a range of programming-related factors may impact early learning and child care experiences for Indigenous children and families. These include (but are not limited to) programmatic aspects, such as cultural inclusivity, a curriculum tailored to fit the needs of children and families in the program, and the potential role of community members in shaping and driving curricular decisions.

Although some Indigenous families seek out programming in an Indigenous-focused child care setting, in a longitudinal study of Indigenous children and their families from Australia, Martin (2017) determined that not all parents had an opinion on mainstream versus Indigenous services. However, the majority of parents expressed specific expectations for early learning and child care, including focus on child developmental goals (independence and physical skills such as tying laces), personal and social skills (confidence and happiness, socialization), academic knowledge (counting, spelling, reading, etc.), and some Indigenous values (learning language and culture) (Martin, 2017). Sims et al. (2012) emphasize that “for mainstream child care services to be a viable option for Indigenous families, they would need to learn from Indigenous examples of what works well, and to incorporate these core ideas into their [program]” (p. 103).

In findings from an extensive research project seeking to understand the child care choices of Indigenous families (Bowes et al., 2011), results reflect the values that families place on child care programming. These include the connection between child care programming and the valued learning taking place at home and in community, including with Elders; educators using Indigenous ways of knowing to influence their approach with children; and focus on the transition to schooling as part of child care programming. This study also found that families experienced a distance between themselves and the program related to a lack of communication and understanding of the curricular approaches.

As with the previous research project, several additional studies recognized the expertise of child-rearing knowledge within the home and community (Anderson et al., 2017; Bowes et al., 2011; Greenwood & Shawana, 2003; Nagel & Wells, 2009). According to Nagel and Wells (2009), honoring family and culture within the learning environment is further supported by curricular considerations, such as the inclusion of children’s cultural literature that reflects children’s community backgrounds, valuing and encouraging family contributions, and, when possible, using the child’s home language in the child care program.

Beaton and McDonnell (2013) also emphasize the significance of child care programming in addressing discontinuities in the transition between child care and the formal education system for children and families. They suggest a holistic approach starting with establishing partnerships with community programs and service providers to meet Indigenous families’ unique transition needs.

Finally, Kemble’s (2019) report on Talking Circles that took place in Edmonton with parents and caregivers of Indigenous children highlights several recommendations related to programming and curriculum in child care. These include, but are not limited to offering holistic programs for families to choose at very low or no cost; ensuring Indigenousization of programs that involves training for staff on Indigenous peoples’ histories,

child-rearing perspectives, and contributions; and the development of professional quality standards.

A range of programming-related factors can impact early learning and child care experiences for Indigenous children and their families. It is imperative to emphasize the role of family and community members in shaping and driving curricular decisions, and programming that is tailored to fit the needs of children and families attending early learning and child care.

### ***Cultural connections***

Many articles highlight the pivotal role that culture plays in child care settings for Indigenous children and families (Ball, 2012; Gerlach, 2015; Greenwood, 2001; Preston et al., 2011; Tremblay et al., 2013). In Greenwood's (2001) overview of academic and non-academic literature examining child care through an Indigenous lens, safe, nurturing, and developmentally appropriate environments that value cultures are something that was noted time and time again (p. 31). Furthermore, child care must occur in the context of families and the community (Greenwood, 2001). Specific indicators include "culturally sensitive, non-profit, comprehensive, accessible, of high quality, affordable and administered by appropriate Indigenous caregivers whenever possible" (p. 28). Overall, according to Greenwood (2001), child care offered to Indigenous children and families, needs to reflect cultural values, and be directed by Indigenous peoples' involvement (pp. 29–30). Many of the studies listed above note that this effort provides a unique opportunity to integrate quality indicators that may also reduce disadvantages for Indigenous children and families.

Desjardins (2018) mirrored this focus as well, highlighting key themes, including attention toward families, background knowledge on [Indigenous] history, culturally appropriate programming, empathy, respect, and intercultural understanding. The author's findings conclude that "incorporating [Indigenous] pedagogy enhances early learning programs" (Preston et al., 2011, as cited in Desjardins, 2018, p. 37). Indigenous cultures, knowledge, values, and contexts must be taken into consideration when implementing child care programming.

Anderson et al. (2017) focus on the role that Indigenous funds of knowledge play in a child care setting, and describe how valuing family voice is pivotal in uncovering and confronting the common practices that view and dismiss Indigenous families' funds of knowledge as "not valid and thus not worthy of being integrated into curriculum and pedagogy" (p. 27). The authors define funds of knowledge as the "knowledge and information that [families] use to survive, to get ahead, or to thrive" (p. 21). Recognizing funds of knowledge can thus be "a powerful way to showcase [families'] existing resources, competence and knowledge" (Anderson et al., 2017, p. 21). According to this study, a lack of integration of families' funds of knowledge, drawn from a deficit model, can also be met with an expectation that for children to have academic success, families must learn the dominant culture. For the authors, "even when diversity is recognized in [child care], culture is often reduced to compensatory, fragmented programs that focus on the 'Fs' (food, folklore, festivals and fashion)" (p. 27).

Aligning with a funds of knowledge approach, a number of studies emphasize the active engagement of Indigenous families in the curricular decisions surrounding their

children's education (Ball, 2001; Greenwood & Shawana, 2003; Greenwood et al., 2007; Mashford-Pringle, 2012). Greenwood et al. (2007), in their review of literature regarding the political, social, and historical structures that have influenced child care for Indigenous populations, determine that families must receive opportunities to influence the curriculum to ensure the integration of community and family-based values into child care programs (p. 15). As stated by the authors, both historically and in the present day, westernized child care perspectives primarily focus on the importance of the nuclear family and the individual. Indigenous perspectives of quality in child care are generally much broader: they are often concerned with extended family and communal participation. Moreover, the article concludes that "culture and language should permeate all aspects of [Indigenous]-specific programs and services" (p. 15).

Ball (2012) also discusses the role of culture and suggests that the purpose of education from an Indigenous perspective is to foster children's identity, initiative, and autonomy (par. 9). Early learning and child care leadership must consider the role of culture when implementing programming. As noted in the article by Boulanger (2018), language development is especially culturally significant as it strengthens bonds and fosters connections with the Creator. Nurturing a child's spirit is valued in many Indigenous cultures as a strong spirit will equip the child to face life's challenges. Furthermore, Ball (2012) also emphasizes storytelling and knowledge development occurring "at the right time" (par. 13). Finally, implications for learning involve addressing challenges faced by non-Indigenous educators when supporting young children in care. Ball (2012) states that "non-Indigenous teachers may underestimate Indigenous children's emerging bilingualism and bidialectalism, literacy of the land, and ability to take their place and perform rituals, songs, and dances alongside older children. They also may be unaware that many Indigenous children do not display emotions in the presence of Elders or when it is not the right time or place" (par. 15). Thus, educators must be mindful and attentive to the specific and community-based cultural needs of children to recognize strengths and encourage such values.

According to Hill and Sansom (2010), the rhetoric surrounding the representation of culture in child care settings may already be in place, but westernized and colonized views of learning and development still underpin the majority of programming and pedagogy in child care settings. Harald (2017) notes that it is not possible to simply "plunk" Indigenous culture into child care curriculum. Instead, reflection of culture must also relate to cultural resilience in children and families. According to Harald (2017), "cultural resilience is initially developed in the home and community environment. It is supported in the [child care] environment if [educators] and [programs] are culturally inclusive and supportive of Indigenous families and communities. [Programs] that seek to engage with Indigenous families and embed culture within the curriculum are more likely to support the development of cultural resilience" (p. 5).

### ***Family engagement***

According to Ball (2012), child care environments include a broad range of inputs ranging from food quality to government policies that can influence Indigenous families' access to and experience in programs. Family-focused approaches and the involvement

of families in various aspects of the child care environment can encourage continued access and reflect family voice and children's identities in programs. Ball (2012) further states that parent involvement must be a funded aspect of child care initiatives and that educators and decision-makers must work together to support parents' awareness of the role that child care can play.

How family engagement is defined and actualized can be problematic, as highlighted in Fler's (2004) article. Fler (2004) suggests that a fundamental shift in understanding needs to occur, where the child as part of an extended family and community, does not always match the beliefs of the child care center. Moreover, educator–parent relationships can be undermined by power imbalances. Although the involvement of families in programming and curricular decisions may on the surface seem to negate this imbalance, any power can be quickly lost if westernized approaches to programming continue to remain the norm. This “mono-cultural” environment can unknowingly silence other cultures, and “what is often silenced is the known socio-historical and cultural world of Indigenous families, the familiar signs and symbols, and established social and cultural practices and beliefs” (Fler, 2004, p. 65). Similarly, Gerlach et. al.s' (2017) study found that the initiative to create more power-balanced relations between child care and families is of great value. Providing voice to parents, families, and communities is one way to combat imbalances. The findings described in this article fill a gap in the identification of family engagement strategies that are, according to the authors, “tacitly aligned with the principles of cultural safety” (par. 7).

The effectiveness of early learning and care programs depend highly on relationship building between families, children, and community (Leske et al., 2015). In the Leske et. al. (2015) study on perspectives regarding effective child care programs and services for Indigenous families, educators stressed the importance of relationship building with families. Further, an awareness and ability to respond to dynamic family circumstances was a significant component to relationship building. Findings reveal that understanding of family agency strongly influences early childhood professionals' perspectives of effective child care provision and their reputation and ongoing relationship with families and community. The findings offer considerations on the “what” of effective service provision and have implications for policy and practice (p. 116).

### ***External perspectives***

Several articles shared external perspectives regarding indicators of quality child care for Indigenous families, without direct engagement of family voice in the research process (Beaton & McDonnell, 2013; Grace & Trudgett, 2012; Guilfoyle et al., 2010; Lee-Hammond, 2013; Martin & Rodriguez, 2007; Preston et al., 2011; Ritchie, 2008; Targowska et al., 2010). Although some considerations are shared below, it is important to note, as Martin (2017) showcases, the importance of data that emphasize Indigenous children and their families' voices as the central aspect of research.

Grace and Trudgett (2012) explored the perspectives of child care educators in supporting Indigenous families. Educators stressed the importance of building relationships with families as well as Indigenous communities in ways that recognizes strengths. According to the authors, essential is a strength-based approach that seeks

to understand the challenges facing each family, while at the same time seeking ways to build on strengths through an atmosphere of acceptance and non-judgement. Equally essential to effective communication is educators who build understanding among non-Indigenous educators of Indigenous peoples' socio-historical and cultural contexts. This perspective and understanding may further support relationship building with families.

Guilfoyle et. al. (2010) highlighted quality indicators for Indigenous children, families and communities as determined by key stakeholders in the child care sector, such as child care providers and government representatives. The research findings conclude that specific values are of considerable importance to Indigenous peoples concerning early learning and child care. These quality indicators include a focus on the child, collaboration with families, identity development, and space for Elders as educators. The article states that a significant theme emerging from the research is the ability of the child care environment to foster a safe atmosphere for children to be independent and grow. The authors state that "it is crucial that [child care] centers are built on what Indigenous families identify as approaches that work for them." (p. 75).

### **Barriers to quality**

Several authors describe the barriers that Indigenous families face both in accessing quality child care and in society at large. Grace and Trudgett (2012) discuss how educators identify three primary barriers to participation by Indigenous families they work with: a lack of transportation, a feeling of shame experienced by families, and community division. A prominent theme from interviews with early childhood educators focused on supporting families in any issues arising from transporting their children to and from early learning and child care settings. Educators also expressed concerns that children may not attend programs because of the possible shame felt by families in the provision of children's needs, such as food for snacks and lunches. Finally, educators interviewed in the study expressed that families may feel reluctant to engage in programming and services if they sense that other children attending care come from a different Indigenous community or group. Educators emphasized the importance of relationship building with families and local Indigenous communities with a focus on acknowledging strengths (Grace & Trudgett, 2012).

According to Halseth and Greenwood (n.d.), child care must address needed protective factors and increase the general health and development of children attending programs in order to push back against the systemic barriers that Indigenous peoples face in all aspects of life. The authors suggest that collaboration and funding are needed to move forward to create holistic programs for children (p. 37). Intervention that starts in the early years can significantly decrease the risks and barriers faced by Indigenous peoples.

Mulligan (2007) shared that matters related to Indigenous families' experiences and possible health issues, violence, abuse, and the criminal justice system dominate much of the research, creating a dearth of understanding regarding the complexities and insights that may further support Indigenous families, and in particular mothers. Mulligan's (2007) study focusing on the challenges that Indigenous single mothers overcome determined that a lack of culturally appropriate settings in child care was a significant concern for participants. Barriers also included a general lack of child care spaces available, affordability, accessibility, limited family support, and transportation. Furthermore, when mothers or children become ill, a critical gap in available child care emerges.

It is also important to note that Bowes et al. (2011) identify significant distrust in families for child care environments. According to the article, “families often felt judged and misunderstood by [educators]. As [educators] talked down to them, families felt intimidated and disempowered. They either persevered because they wanted their children to ‘survive’ in the education system, or avoided [accessing programs], especially when a parent was at home and could teach their children themselves” (Bowes et al., 2011, p. ix). In Greenwood and Shawana’s (2003) study focused on giving voice and choice back to Indigenous families in child care, Indigenous family participants further recommended that more authority over child care programs by Indigenous peoples is critical. The overall goal for early education moving forward should be to preserve and retain “values, beliefs and traditions of the community” (p. 73).

### **Educator dispositions**

#### ***Practice of relationships***

Numerous articles addressing educator dispositions focused on the importance of relationship building when engaging with Indigenous families, rather than just on specific curricular approaches (Ball & Lewis, 2005; Dockett et al. 2006; Fasoli & Ford, 2001; Gerlach & Gignac, 2019; Gerlach et al., 2019; Lampert et al., 2014; Leske et al., 2015). Aligning with this relational orientation, findings from numerous studies also highlight the deep connection between educators’ practice of relationships and the understandings of the historical and social complexities of families’ everyday lives (Gerlach & Gignac, 2019; Gerlach et al., 2017; Grace & Trudgett, 2012). This focus on relationships can also create opportunities for educators to challenge existing power structures and underlying assumptions that may influence educator decisions (Gerlach et al., 2019).

Practically speaking, a focus on relationships includes prioritizing time for building relationships between educators, children, and families (Gerlach & Gignac, 2019). According to Gerlach and Gignac (2019) in their qualitative study highlighting family engagement, additional considerations include meeting families where they already gather, being flexible to family circumstances, involving Elders in the practice of relationships and programming, supporting the whole family, and “deferring child development assessments until trusting relationships are well established” (p. 62). One study conducted in Australia (Leske et al., 2015) found relationships formed between families, children, and educators, and the relational reputation the program carried in the broader community impacted the sustained attendance of Indigenous families in child care programs.

Another significant theme explored by Trudgett and Grace (2011) is the notion of trust between educators and families. The authors identified trust as a significant factor for family engagement in child care settings: every family wished to be able to trust the educator working with their child(ren). Another overarching finding was that grouping Indigenous families together and assuming common elements in family cultural backgrounds and practices is not meaningful. In other words, a barrier for one family may not be a barrier for another and could potentially be a facilitator for another. Therefore, a personalized relationship built on trust is essential for family engagement. In child care, we cannot group families based on what we perceive as similarities, but instead must understand the needs, desires, and expectations of each family.

Bang et al. (2018) emphasize that before trust and a practice of relationships can happen between educators and families; educators must “explicitly and intentionally address deficit assumptions about Indigenous families” (p. 16). While continuing to challenge assumptions and stereotypes, educators must begin the process of reaching out to families and Indigenous communities to build trust. Building trust “could take the form of inviting family and community members into the classroom as teachers, collaborators, and decision-makers” (Bang et al., 2018, p. 18).

Day-to-day interactions between educators and children may also impact how relationships between families and communities manifest. A case study by Harrison et al. (2017) that recorded interactions between educators and young children captured many examples of children co-creating a culture of belonging with educators. The experiences exemplified specific, specialist practices grounded in “the strengths of Indigenous cultural traditions [of] family life and raising children” (p. 203).

### ***Cultural humility***

Many articles emphasized the importance of offering educators the opportunity to engage in cultural humility work, and in particular, knowledge development regarding the historical and current contexts for Indigenous families (Canadian Child Care Federation, 2008; Desjardins, 2018; Madden et al., 2013; Santoro et al., 2011; Sinclair, 2019; Stark & Fickel, 2015). According to Scott et al. (2017), “current childcare conversations must be infused with a framework grounded in the context of institutional racism and trauma, must include a discussion around funding streams and childcare barriers, and must ensure cultural competency by deliberately applying an equity framework” (p. 81).

A study by Hare and Anderson (2010) explored the perspectives of 25 Indigenous families in transitioning their children to a child care program in a large urban center. Making Indigenous knowledge a part of child care experiences for Indigenous children and families can be challenging in urban settings, as families have limited access to resources such as land, extended family, traditional practices, and languages. Nevertheless, educators are responsible to ensure that early learning and child care settings reflect Indigenous ways of knowing. According to the authors, educators working in child care settings should ensure that they learn about the history of residential schooling and forced child removal policies that disrupted Indigenous families in Canada for generations. In particular, educators may be required to address any parental fear regarding institutional forms of care that seem at odds with community values.

Another study highlighting five Indigenous Head Start educators also emphasized the need for decolonizing opportunities for educators in the field (Peterson et al., 2018). The authors emphasize the presence of “dominating spaces of Euro-centric ways”; thus, “decolonizing education must take place in [child care programs] across the country” (p. 45). Engaging educators in a practice of relationships with Indigenous families through a decolonization and cultural humility lens bodes well for transformative opportunities, especially in urban contexts.

### ***Critical pedagogy***

Some articles deeply explored specific aspects of pedagogy through a critical lens, closely related to decolonization practices (Herbert, 2013; Middlemiss, 2018; Miller,

2014; Ritchie, 2014; Ritchie et al., 2011). Some authors, such as Atkinson (2009), focus on challenging mainstream discourses on race and racism, while others, including Ritchie (2014), explore notions of “nomadic subjectivity,” enabling educators to “move across conventional categories and move against ‘settled’ concepts and theories,” offering incitement to shift beyond their previous boundaries and comfort zones (p. 123). Diaz-Diaz (2020) mirrors this sentiment by suggesting that, generally, educators may have yet to adopt in their pedagogy new conceptions related to diversity and social responsibility as multicultural pedagogies continue to prevent educators from learning about the impact of colonialism in Canada.

Ritchie et. al. (2011) examined pedagogy focusing on criticality, Indigeneity, and an ethic of care, expressing a need for educators to consider how they might foster experiences that may help develop conscientization. The authors proposed the “implementation of an ethic for caring for oneself, others and the environment. Fostering dispositions of empathy and caring through a pedagogy of listening: recognition that we are all members of the collective; includes listening to ourselves as well as listening to welcome and being open to differences” (p. 346).

A paper reporting on the findings of a critical qualitative inquiry within an Indigenous child care program (Gerlach et al., 2018) illustrates the possibility that educators, when supported in how to do so, can “develop highly contextualised, historicised, and nuanced understandings of families’ lives, through a relational process of inquiry.... These findings draw attention to the importance of understanding and addressing mutually reinforcing and intersecting structurally rooted social determinants on family wellbeing. They also emphasize the importance of legitimizing the time required for [educators] to learn from caregivers about their everyday lived realities and provide further evidence for the centrality of relationship-building to the success of Indigenous [child care]” (p. 118). Evidently, adopting a critical pedagogy approach may be supportive for Indigenous families, but requires thought and time to avoid generalizations or tokenism.

#### ***Honoring indigenous families’ funds of knowledge***

Many articles addressed the critical need for educators to engage with Indigenous funds of knowledge within a practice of relationships (Ball & Pence, 2001; Desbiens et al., 2016; Kitson & Bowes, 2010; MacDonald et al., 2010; Maher & Bellen, 2015; McLaughlin & Whatman, 2015; Miller, 2013). Places of learning for young children should thus, according to Hare (2011), avoid viewing Indigenous knowledge as just an “anthropological curiosity.” The author goes on to declare that “the challenge for educators who work with Indigenous children [is] to create space for Indigenous knowledge so as to support Indigenous children and families” (p. 408). This challenge requires engaging in a practice of relationships with Indigenous families and communities that may also require outreach efforts.

Acknowledging funds of knowledge includes engaging with both families as well as children. Maher and Bellen (2015) emphasize the importance of supporting children to engage in funds of knowledge in the early years and state that “initiatives that embody quality teaching with qualified educators who affirm children’s cultural knowledge play an integral role in supporting transitions to formal schooling” (p. 16).

In many Indigenous communities, cultural transmission from Elders and family members to children occurs with young children, as exemplified by MacDonald et. al.'s (2010) article. Following in-depth interviews and observations of community events tied to a Stó:lō Head Start Family Program, the authors determined that “children were not separated from events, and learned through active participation in cultural systems of practice” (p. 91). McLaughlin and Whatman (2015) further emphasize that “learning to see Indigenous funds of knowledge within the cultural interface—as a knowledge system in tension and agency with Western knowledges and one with equal value—is an important professional development requirement for all [educators], both beginning and experienced” (p. 16).

### ***Cultural match***

Some articles suggested that cultural match—the culture of the educator matching that of the child—is a factor worth exploring in child care settings (Ritchie, 2003; Sims et al., 2012; Webb & Williams, 2019). In Webb and Williams' (2019) study exploring children's interactions with educators of the same or different culture, the authors noted the impact on children's communication when culturally matched with an educator. The authors emphasize the relevance of considering cultural context for supporting Indigenous children's language skills. These insights provide a starting point for further research exploring cultural match between educator and child in early learning and child care as a possible factor affecting [Indigenous] children's communication and development (p. 59).

Sims et. al. (2012) share that many Indigenous families would prefer an Indigenous educator working with their children “in order for families to feel culturally secure in using services; for services to be culturally inclusive; that services are tailored to fit the specific needs of the community; and that family- and community-centred practice forms the basis of that service. For mainstream child care services to be a viable option for Indigenous families, they would need to learn from Indigenous examples of what works well, and to incorporate these core ideas into their services” (p. 103). Overall, a cultural match between educators, families, and children is an important consideration in child care and would benefit from additional research and exploration.

### ***Preservice education***

Some articles highlight the unique role of preservice education in developing educator dispositions to support Indigenous families (Mills & Ballantyne, 2008; Peltier, 2017; Whatman et al., 2020). Of significance is the act of embedding Indigenous knowledge across multiple preservice educational experiences, and in particular for Indigenous preservice educators. According to Whatman et. al. (2020), this includes post-secondary faculty actioning “their personal and professional commitment to embedding Indigenous knowledge,” resulting in “powerful learning and emancipatory experiences for preservice [educators]” (p. 178).

In an article exploring preservice educators' beliefs regarding diversity in Australia, Mills and Ballantyne (2008) determined that “all students who demonstrated commitment to social justice also demonstrated both openness and self-awareness/self-reflectiveness, and

all students who demonstrated openness also demonstrated self-awareness/self-reflectiveness” (p. 453). Thus, the analysis from the study suggests that “these dispositions may develop in a sequential fashion from self-awareness/self-reflectiveness; moving towards openness; and finally a commitment to social justice” (p. 453). Mills and Ballantyne (2008) state, however, that “if teacher education courses on diversity continue to operate in fragmented ways, rather than encouraging students to move from dispositions of self-awareness/self-reflectiveness through to a disposition of commitment to social justice” (p. 454), students may not be able to demonstrate this disposition later in the child care field.

Preservice educational institutions are sites for knowledge convergence, and decisions made regarding curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation occur on an individual (instructor) level as well as a program (faculty), university, and government decision-making levels. Decisions regarding what is taught, what is not taught, and how knowledge convergence occur for preservice educators reflects the extent to which Indigenous knowledges inform professionalization and future pedagogic practices. There exists significant potential for Indigenous worldviews to engage the professional development and pedagogical identity of future early learning and child care educators through the development of educator dispositions that support Indigenous children and families.

## Discussion

This scoping review provides an overview of quality indicators and educator dispositions for Indigenous families accessing early learning and child care in Canadian urban settings. Many Indigenous families seek early learning and child care that supports family and community culture and, while doing so, also seek autonomy and self-determination. Indigenous families, educators, and community members must be at the center of determining quality to ensure that experiences, perspectives, and cultural contexts are aptly reflected. In addition, the educator disposition of fostering trust in educator–family relationships is pivotal for some Indigenous families. Additionally, access issues, such as cost and transportation, impact many Indigenous families’ ability to engage in quality child care experiences.

Educators can seek to build unique relationships with children and families based on the desire to meet them where they are at. *Flight*, Alberta’s Early Learning and Care Framework (Makovichuk et al., 2014), explores the multifaceted and complex role of a practice of relationships with children and families. When educators can recognize that families are experts in their children and thus know them in ways that educators may not, educators may then view families and their relationships with them as pivotal in children’s early learning and care. Educators can also reflect on unique and individualized family practices that support children’s growing identity that can deepen their understandings of and relationships with children and families. A practice of relationships can recognize the complexities of experiences for children and families within a strength-based approach.

Most of the studies in this review highlight diverse viewpoints and the need for ongoing engagement with Indigenous families to center their voices in policies, programs, and practices. Gerlach et. al. (2017) state that “any initiative to create more power balanced relations between the early learning sector and families is of great value. Providing voice to the parents, family and community is one way they combat

these imbalances” (p. 1770). The varying strategies to realize quality suggest that both culturally focused programs and mainstream programs can achieve positive outcomes despite wildly divergent approaches. What remain critical in every context are educator dispositions such as cultural humility, seeking a practice of relationships with children and families, and reflective practices that consider Indigenous perspectives in their approaches. And what is needed to cultivate these dispositions is explicit support in the form of resources, time, and professional development—support that requires both center leadership and all levels of government to collaborate, identify how they may help, and act.

Over the past many years, rigorous evidence has consistently sought to demonstrate the characteristics and measures of quality in early learning and child care (Friendly et al., 2006). Many authors seek to define elements of quality in the Indigenous family context (BC Aboriginal Child Care Society, 2005; Endfield, 2007; Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2008). In particular, Endfield (2007) suggests that “[child care] staff, parents, and community should determine their definition of quality as it applies in their community based on established best practices as well as their own cultural experiences” (p. 157). Although some structural elements, such as policies and funding, can impact quality across all early learning and child care programs and services, no standard, one-size-fits-all approach exists for defining what constitutes quality (Greenwood et al., 2020). Instead, what is needed are programs and services that are built around the strengths of families and children, supported by policies and funding.

Taken together, these results reveal that research on early learning and child care can also benefit from a strength-based, relational approach. Many of the ideas expressed in research concerning child care providers can and should also be applied to those conducting this research. For example, research that centers and values family and community voice, knowledge, and participation can further contribute to a sense of belonging and can reveal the importance of family structures and perspectives beyond the westernized views that are currently the norm. What’s more, many of those who conduct research in this area are post-secondary instructors who support pre- and in-service educators in terms of professional learning, which means that those conducting this research are in a unique position to influence the perspectives of educators in planning and providing child care. Each researcher who shares these dispositions with their students and with the public can influence hundreds of educators, who in turn support thousands of children and families over their careers. In this way, research that centers Indigenous voices is essential for creating programming that supports Indigenous families.

### **Limitations**

Inherent in scoping review methodological approaches is the possibility that relevant literature may have been inadvertently excluded from the study. This limitation may be due to a number of factors, including database selection, possible exclusion of relevant gray literature that was not found through searches, and the exclusion of relevant studies not published in English. Due to its broader focus, it may be unrealistic to state that all relevant literature was retrieved through the scoping review methodological approach (Gentles et al., 2010). The balance between breadth and depth is indeed a factor given the large volume of articles identified in the initial searches.

Another limitation to this study may be the lack of critical analyses of included studies in the scoping review as related to quality. Indeed, one primary limitation of all scoping reviews is the identification of gaps in literature as related to quality of research, as this consideration has not received significant attention during the scoping review methodological processes (Feehan et al., 2011). This results in a limitation to offer fully comprehensive recommendations for policy and/or practice due to the lack of assessment related to quality of included studies. McColl et. al. note that the purpose of a scoping review is the focus on comprehensive coverage, and not necessarily on a particular “standard of evidence” (2009). Nevertheless, as the intent for scoping reviews is to offer a mapped overview of existing literature in a particular field, the intention of any review must as well be to identify any limitations so as to ensure opportunity to determine the value of both findings and possible recommendations (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005).

### **Future directions and conclusion**

Children can be a catalytic factor in strengthening communities, and there is compelling evidence that quality early learning and child care, including educator dispositions that recognize child and family strengths, can have a positive and longitudinal academic and social impact (Landry, 2008; Niles et al., 2007). A supportive, stimulating environment can meet a wide range of objectives, including care, learning, and social support for children and families (Friendly & Prentice, 2009). Quality in early learning and child care for Indigenous children and families may encompass a broad range of programming, the inclusion of cultures, and relationality. By focusing on the needs of Indigenous young children and their families and addressing barriers to achieving quality and educator dispositions in early learning and child care, social ties and community development can strengthen.

Overall, no “one size fits all” approach exists when considering aspects of quality for Indigenous children and families accessing child care. The varying strategies to realizing quality suggest that both mainstream programs and those catering to Indigenous children and families can achieve positive outcomes despite divergent approaches. Endfield (2007) emphasizes that it is in the best interest of all early learning and child care programs to communicate and engage with families and communities to determine quality by recognizing diversity within those with which they work. Hare (2011) suggests that “rather than seeing Indigenous knowledge and its various forms as an anthropological curiosity or even entertainment, places of learning should come to see Indigenous knowledge as a legitimate source of knowledge” (p. 408). As such, and given the varied findings described above, a more specific exploration of the beliefs and values of Indigenous families in urban centers would support the opportunity for families to share their knowledge and understanding of indicators of quality and educator dispositions. To respond to this need, the researchers built on this scoping review with a series of focus groups and case studies centered on the ideas and experiences of Indigenous families, reported elsewhere.

Regarding dispositions, educators must continually seek opportunities for learning, reflection, and curiosity. Recognizing that families are the experts in their children and hold rich funds of knowledge regarding child rearing, educators must consider families

and their relationships with them as vital in the care of children in early learning and care settings.

Following their pre-professional education, educators must engage in opportunities to further their professionalism and reflect on their practice. A foundational educator disposition includes the active learning alongside children and families to inform curricular decisions (Makovichuk et al., 2014). Such desires to learn can only be realized with the full support of and strategic decisions from a strong leadership team in the early learning and child care center.

Quality early learning and child care can encourage the holistic wellness of entire communities; government investment in quality early learning and child care for Indigenous children and families can play a critical role in optimizing Indigenous children's health and development and mitigating intergenerational impacts of social and structural inequities on Indigenous children and families (Halseth & Greenwood, 2019). Gerlach et al. (2017) state that "any initiative to create more power balanced relations between the early learning sector and families is of great value. Providing voice to the parents, family and community is one way they combat these imbalances" (p. 1770). To tackle potential despotic policies and practices, reconceptualizing equity will require more than an occasional professional development workshop or webinar (Allen et al., 2020; Rodriguez & Morrison, 2019). Examining policy choices in early learning and child care can help unravel affiliations between marginalized social identities and how oppression can shape ways of knowing and being. Additionally, an examination of policies can encourage decision-makers to critically consider how disparities impact Indigenous children and families.

The potential positive impacts of engaging Indigenous families in quality early learning and child care programs are contingent on programs having access to sustainable funding to retain professional staff, offer ongoing staff professional development, and foster long-term relationships. According to Gerlach et al. (2021), "when ELCC programs have adequate and secure funding, qualified staff are likely to retain long-term positions that provide 'a solid foundation for families' grounded in sustained, trusting relationships" (p. 14). Challenges related to urban early learning and child care programs remain in part due to a failure of governments to implement legislated obligations to UNDRIP (United Nations, 2007) and the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC, 2015) (Gerlach et al., 2021). Enacting obligations requires a greater investment in programs and Indigenous families raising their children in an urban center.

With strong funding in place and policies to support the early learning and child care workforce, programs working with Indigenous children and families can achieve positive outcomes with diverse approaches. Recognizing that families are the experts in their children and thus know them in ways that educators cannot, educators view families and their relationships with them as pivotal in the care of children. What remains critical is center leadership support and broader policy support for developing educator dispositions, such as co-learning with families, seeking a practice of relationships with children and families, and educator reflexivity.

**Appendix**

**RQA detailed study characteristics**

Authors	Year	Country	Study design	Purpose	Theme
Anderson et al.	2017	Canada	Secondary analysis	How ELCC can be facilitated through engagement with Elders	Curriculum
Ball	2001	Canada	Theoretical	Review of generative curriculum model for ELCC programming	Curriculum
Ball	2010	Canada	Qualitative (case studies)	Culturally congruent services in early learning and child care	Reflection of cultures
Ball	2012a	Canada	Theoretical (Chapter)	Need to ensure access to ELCC and engage parents	Family engagement
Ball	2012b	Canada	Secondary analysis	Ways in which children learn through family and community	Reflection of cultures
Ball	2014	Canada	Qualitative (interviews)	Gain insights into family views and goals for children's development	Reflection of cultures
Beaton and McDonnell	2013	Canada	Theoretical	Significance of early experiences for Indigenous children	External perspectives/curriculum
Boulanger	2018	Canada	News article	Connection between Indigenous language revitalization and ELCC	External perspectives/reflection of cultures
Bowes et al.	2011	Australia	Qualitative (interviews)	Identify policy direction and guidelines that support families	Curriculum
BC Aboriginal Child Care Society	2005	Canada	Report	Elements of quality rest on laws of the Creator and sacred responsibility of family/community	Defining quality
Cheah and Chirkov	2008	Canada	Qualitative (interviews)	Parenting beliefs regarding culture and child socialization	Reflection of cultures
Colbert	2000	Kenya, Canada, N.Z. & U.S	Secondary analysis	Roel of contextual factors in provision of quality services for children and families	Curriculum
DeRiviere	2016	Canada	Qualitative (interviews)	Determining connection between attendance and programming	Curriculum/family engage
Desjardins	2018	Canada	Literature review	Ways to implement Indigenous pedagogy in ELCC	Reflection of cultures

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Study design</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Theme</b>
Endfield	2007	U.S	Quantitative (survey)	What quality may mean for Indigenous families	Reflection of cultures/defining quality
Fenech	2011	Australia	Secondary data analysis	How quality has been conceptualized through discourse	Defining quality
Fleer	2014	Australia	Qualitative (filming)	Filming of family interactions with preschool children	Family engagement
Greenwood	2001	Canada	Data analysis	Analysis of development of Indigenous early childhood services	Reflection of cultures
Greenwood	2003	Canada	Report	Ensuring adequate and quality programming that supports cultures	Curriculum
Halseth and Greenwood	n.d	Canada	Literature review	Overview of knowledge and gaps for ELCC programs	Barriers to quality
Hutchins and Frances	2009	Australia	Qualitative (focus groups)	Engagement with stakeholders in child care sector to examine quality	External perspectives
Hare	2011	Canada	Qualitative (focus groups)	Contributions of family funds of knowledge to literacy learning	Reflection of cultures
Gerlach	2015	Canada	Qualitative (interviews)	Determine how urban home visits responds to needs of families	Workforce
Gerlach et al.	2017	Canada	Qualitative (interviews)	Analyze how workers support families involvement in programs	Workforce
Grace and Trudgett	2012	Australia	Qualitative (interviews)	Indigenous ELCC educators identifying family barriers	External perspectives
Greenwood and Perry	2002	Canada	Qualitative (focus groups)	Recommendations for services reflecting home environment	Curriculum
Greenwood and Shawana	2003	Canada	Qualitative (interviews)	Giving voice/choice back to families in ELCC curriculum	Curriculum
Greenwood et al.	2997	Canada	Theoretical	Indigenous ELCC site of potential transformative change	External perspective/curriculum
Government of Canada	2019	Canada	Proposed act overview	Affirm the right of self-government for Indigenous peoples	External perspective/reflection of cultures

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Study design</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Theme</b>
Guilfoyle et al.	2010	Australia	Qualitative (interviews)	Determining culturally strong child care programs (stakeholders)	External perspectives
Harald	2017	Australia	Thesis	Belonging and identity as the overarching factor in cultural resilience	Reflection of cultures
Hill and Sansom	2010	New Zealand	Theoretical	Responsibility for all peoples to acknowledge Indigeneity in ELCC	External perspectives/reflection of cultures
Kemble	2019	Canada	Qualitative (talking circles)	Guidance for the design of ELCC that responds to the needs of Indigenous children and families	Curriculum
Lee-Hammond	2013	Australia	Qualitative (interviews)	Challenges in providing integrated services for Indigenous families	External perspectives/barriers
Leske et al.	2015	Australia	Qualitative (interviews)	Identification of features of ELCC that engage family attendance	Family engagement
Mashford-Pringle	2012	Canada	Qualitative (case study)	Role of Aboriginal Head Start in families' health and well-being	Curriculum
Mashon	2010	Canada	Literature review; interviews	Successes and challenges to reflect Indigenous culture and values	External perspectives/reflection of cultures
Martin	2017	Australia	Qualitative (interviews) and quantitative	Choices made by families regarding early childhood education	Curriculum
Martin and Rodriguez	2007	Australia	Theoretical	Programs that emphasize need for holistic approach	External perspectives/curriculum
Mulligan	2007	Canada	Qualitative (talking circles)	Indigenous long parent families and their struggles to ensure well-being	Barriers to quality
Nagel and Wells	2009	New Zealand	Theoretical	Overview of Te Whāriki and diversity of cultures in ELCC	External perspectives/curriculum
Pence and Pacini-Ketchabaw	2008	Canada	Theoretical	Investigating quality in ELCC within national and international discourses	Defining quality
Preston et al.	2011	Canada	Literature review	State of quality Indigenous ELCC in Canada	External perspectives/reflection of cultures

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Study design</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Theme</b>
Ritchie	2008	New Zealand	Theoretical	Responding to challenges of bicultural curriculum in ELCC	External perspectives/reflection of cultures
Sims et al.	2012	Australia	Qualitative (focus groups)	Determining role of culturally relevant child care in mainstream ELCC	Curriculum/reflection of cultures
Targowska et al.	2010	Australia	Qualitative (focus groups)	Factors that contribute or create barriers for quality ELCC	External perspectives/barriers to quality
Tremblay et al.	2013	Canada	Qualitative (focus groups)	Identify elements of healthy development of Indigenous children	Reflection of cultures

### **RQB detailed study characteristics**

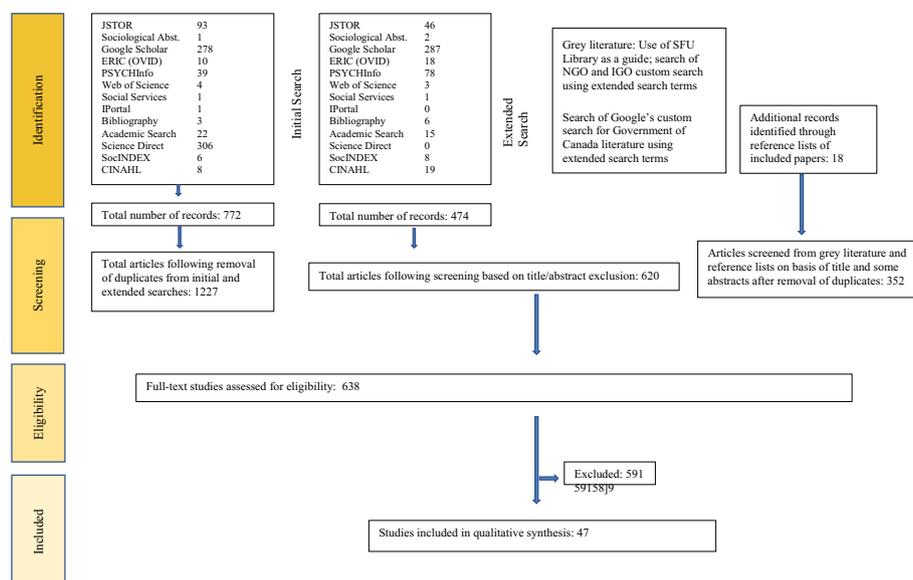
<b>Authors</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Study design</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Theme</b>
Atkinson	2009	Australia	Qualitative (interviews)	Indigenous and non-Indigenous children's exposure to colonial concepts	Critical pedagogy
Ball and Lewis	2005	Canada	Data analysis	Using Indigenous families' goals to guide practice and policy	Practice of relationships
Ball and Pence	2001	Canada	Theoretical	Generative curriculum model for ELCC in Indigenous communities	Funds of knowledge
Bang et al.	2018	U.S	Theoretical	Argue for amplification of Indigenous family leadership and engagement	Practice of relationships
Canadian Child Care Federation	2008	Canada	Theoretical (resource sheet)	Encouraging Indigenous cultural identity at home and in ELCC	Decolonization
Desbiens et al.	2016	Canada	Quantitative (survey)	Dimensions of Indigeneity and role of child care in construction of citizenship	Funds of knowledge
Desjardins	2018	Canada	Theoretical	Ways to implement Indigenous pedagogy in ELCC programs (website)	Decolonization
Diaz Diaz	2020	Canada	Qualitative (witnessing)	Examines children's relationships with place in child care center	Critical pedagogy
Dockett et al.	2005	Australia	Qualitative (interviews)	Indigenous families' issues and concerns related to school start	Practice of relationships
Fasoli and Ford	2001	Australia	Qualitative (narrative inquiry)	Emphasis of importance of relationships between educators and children	Practice of relationships
Gerlach and Gignac	2019	Canada	Qualitative (interviews)	Exploring family engagement and well-being in head start programs	Practice of relationships
Gerlach et al.	2018	Canada	Qualitative (interviews)	Relational perspective of family well-being in ELCC	Critical pedagogy

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Study design</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Theme</b>
Gerlach et al.	2019	Canada	Qualitative (interviews)	How structures are currently shaping relationships in urban ELCC programs	Practice of relationships
Hare	2011	Canada	Qualitative (focus groups)	Examine contributions of Indigenous knowledge to literacy learning	Funds of knowledge
Hare and Anderson	2010	Canada	Qualitative (focus groups)	Factors affecting the transition to formal ELCC settings	Decolonization
Harrison et al.	2017	Australia	Qualitative (interviews)	Relationships to family, culture and community as seen in educator interactions	Practice of relationships
Herbert	2013	Australia	Theoretical	Role of social justice in preparing Indigenous children in learning	Critical pedagogy
Kitson and Bowes	2010	Australia	Literature review	Incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing by Indigenous ELCC educators	Decolonization/cultural match
Lampert et al.	2014	Australia	Qualitative (interviews)	Demonstrate participation in reflexivity in pedagogic work and relationships	Practice of relationships
Leske et al.	2015	Australia	Qualitative (interviews)	Perspectives of ELCC professionals working with Indigenous families	Practice of relationships
MacDonald et al.	2010	Canada	Qualitative (ethnography)	Language and cultural transmission within Aboriginal Head Start	Funds of knowledge
Madden et al.	2013	Canada	Qualitative (talking circles)	Community voices and experiences of Indigenous education and community engagement	Decolonization
Maher and Bellen	2015	Australia	Data analysis	Disjuncture between literacy experiences as children enter formal schooling	Funds of knowledge
McLaughlin et al.	2015	Australia	Qualitative (interviews)	Embedding of Indigenous knowledges into preservice education	Preservice education

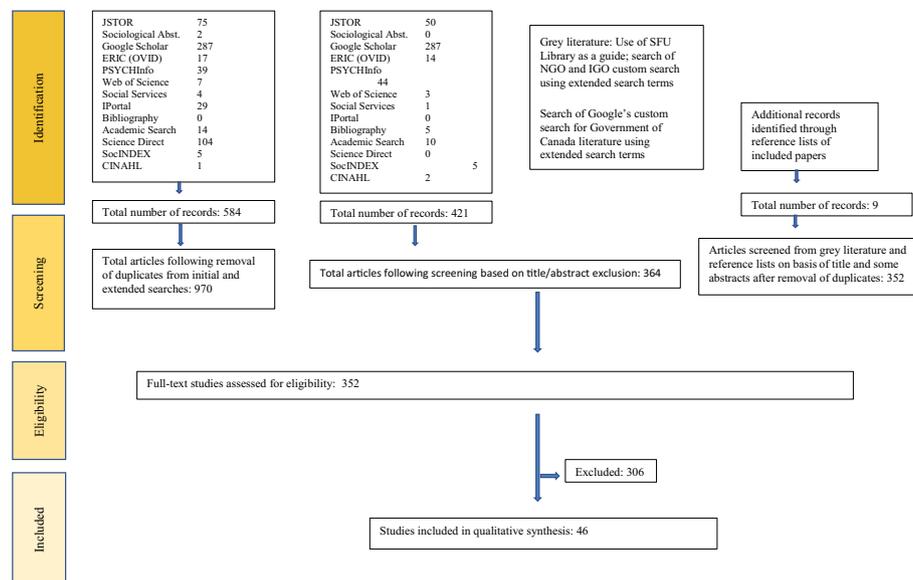
Authors	Year	Country	Study design	Purpose	Theme
Middlemiss	2018	Canada	Qualitative (case study)	Decolonizing pedagogy and practices—Indigenous kindergarten teacher	Critical pedagogy
Miller	2013	Australia	Qualitative (action research)	Impact of whiteness on non-Indigenous educators' work	Decolonization/critical pedagogy
Miller	2014	Australia	Qualitative (action research)	Understand how racializing practices are mobilized in professional practice	Critical pedagogy
Miller	2015	Australia	Qualitative (action research)	Embedding Indigenous perspectives in ELCC curricula	Indigenous funds of knowledge
Miller et al.	2011	Australia	Qualitative (interviews)	Perspectives of key stakeholders in cultural support program in an ELCC	Decolonization
Mills and Bal-lantyne	2008	Australia	Qualitative (auto-ethnography)	Preservice teachers' beliefs about and attitudes toward diversity	Preservice education
Peterson et al.	2018	Canada	Qualitative (interviews)	Indigenous pedagogy and ways to inform non-Indigenous educators' learning	Decolonization
Peltier	2017	Canada	Qualitative (case narratives)	Examination of mismatches between Indigenous children's home and school	Preservice education/funds of knowledge
Ritchie	2003	New Zealand	Qualitative (interviews)	Views of educators on role of ELCC settings in delivering cultural programs	Cultural match
Ritchie	2012	New Zealand	Qualitative (story-telling)	Enactment of counter-colonial renarrativism within ELCC settings	Practice of relationships
Ritchie	2013	New Zealand	Qualitative (ethnography)	Enactment of relationality within ELCC and education practice	Practice of relationships
Ritchie	2014	New Zealand	Qualitative (interviews)	Facilitation of educators with Indigenous families in mainstream ELCC	Critical pedagogy
Ritchie et al.	2011	New Zealand	Theoretical	Pedagogical considerations in the development of a curriculum in ELCC	Critical pedagogy
Ryah and Kantor	2017	Canada	Theoretical	Working with Indigenous communities through a practice of relationships	Practice of relationships

Authors	Year	Country	Study design	Purpose	Theme
Santoro et al.	2011	Australia	Qualitative (interviews)	Highlighting teacher knowledge regarding Indigenous epistemologies	Decolonization
Scott et al.	2017	U.S	Theoretical	Applying an equity lens in the ELCC context (cultural competence)	Decolonization
Sims et al.	2012	Australia	Qualitative (focus groups)	High-quality ELCC must include culturally relevant pedagogy	Cultural match
Stark and Fickel	2015	New Zealand	Qualitative/theoretical	Indigenous contexts of teacher education—cultural pedagogy	Decolonization
Teather	2008	Australia/Canada	Literature review	Indigenous ELCC training developed to work with Indigenous families	Critical pedagogy
Trudgett and Grace	2011	Australia	Qualitative (interviews)	Barriers and facilitators of engagement for Indigenous families	Practice of relationships
Webb and Williams	2019	Australia	Qualitative (observation)	Children’s communication with educators differed in cultural match	Cultural match
Whatman et al.	2020	Australia	Qualitative (case study)	Examine factors that support practicum journeys of educators	Preservice education

**RQA PRISMA flowchart**



**RQB PRISMA flowchart**



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### Author contributions

CF and AM-B conceived of the presented idea. CF and AM-B developed and conducted the methods. CF, AM-B and CS analyzed the data. CF wrote the manuscript with support from AM-B. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

### Authors' information

At the time of writing, CF was a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Alberta who recently worked as an instructor and researcher at MacEwan University in the Early Childhood Curriculum Studies program. At the time of writing, AM-B was an assistant professor at MacEwan University in the Early Childhood Curriculum Studies program. At the time of writing, CS was a fourth-year student at MacEwan University and was a research assistant in this project.

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### Availability of data and materials

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no datasets beyond the collection of articles were generated or analyzed during the current study.

### Declarations

#### Ethics approval and consent to participate

Ethics approval and written informed consent were not required for this study as no participants were involved in the scoping review.

#### Consent for publication

Consent for publication was not required for this study as no participants were involved in the scoping review.

#### Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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