

Culturally Appropriate Practices for Facilitating Early Language Development of Indigenous Children

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HELP Mandate:

To create, promote & apply new knowledge through interdisciplinary research to help children thrive.

ECDIP Mission:

To expand knowledge & capacity for supporting indigenous children's health and development in community contexts

Our focus in this project:

To expand knowledge & capacity for facilitating young indigenous children's language development in community contexts

* Thanks to SLP respondents, Sharla Peltier, Patricia Carey, Dr. Judith Johnston, Dr. Ken Moselle, Anne Hanson-Finger, Christina El Gazaar, and Deanne Zeidler.

Previous research has shown:

Facilitating language development is a key to facilitating cognitive & social development, school readiness, literacy & developmental outcomes across several domains.



Roles of speech-language specialists in the early years

- Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) provide education, assessment, & a range of intervention services to facilitate language development in children/youth referred to them as well as on a population-wide basis
- often work with children identified in ECE settings



Survey of 'SLP reflections on practice'

SLPs across Canada were asked to complete a survey if they had experience serving indigenous children. The survey was designed to learn more about:

- access to services?
- appropriate training?
- appropriate 'tools' (assessment methods, service delivery models...)
- readiness to work 'in' or 'with' community?
- perceived efficacy?
- needs?
- recommendations?



Survey respondents were recruited through SLPs national professional organization (CASLPA) and through provincial representatives.

Respondents

- 70 completed surveys were submitted on-line or by mail
 - 27 long, 43 short
 - 2 First Nations
 - 3 visible minorities

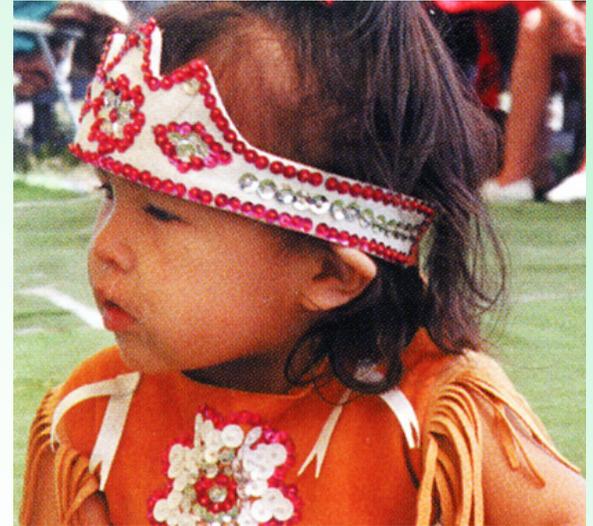


Respondents Place of SLP Work with Indigenous Children



Age and location of children served; amount of service

- With regards to age, all respondents had some experience working with indigenous children under nine years of age
- 84% had worked with Indigenous children 0-5 years
- 37% reported spending 'All' or 'A lot' of their time working with indigenous children in the past two years
- 29% reported spending 'Some' of their time in the past two years working with Indigenous children
- With regards to location, respondents provided services almost equally in rural and remote communities and a bit less in urban communities



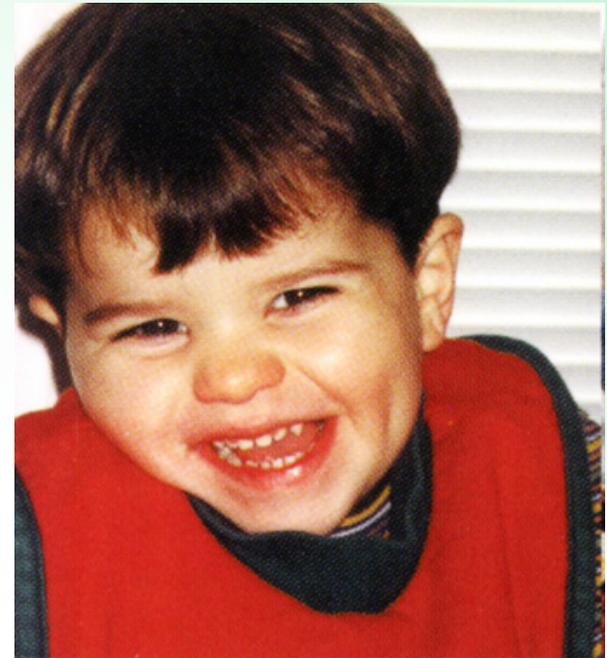
Findings - Caveat

- Generalizations must be taken cautiously
- lots of variability across children, families, Indigenous communities with regards to language development, experiences, beliefs, values and traditions
- This is a study of SLP perceptions; a 2nd concurrent study involves interviewing First Nations Elders and parents for their views on supporting language development in ways they think are best



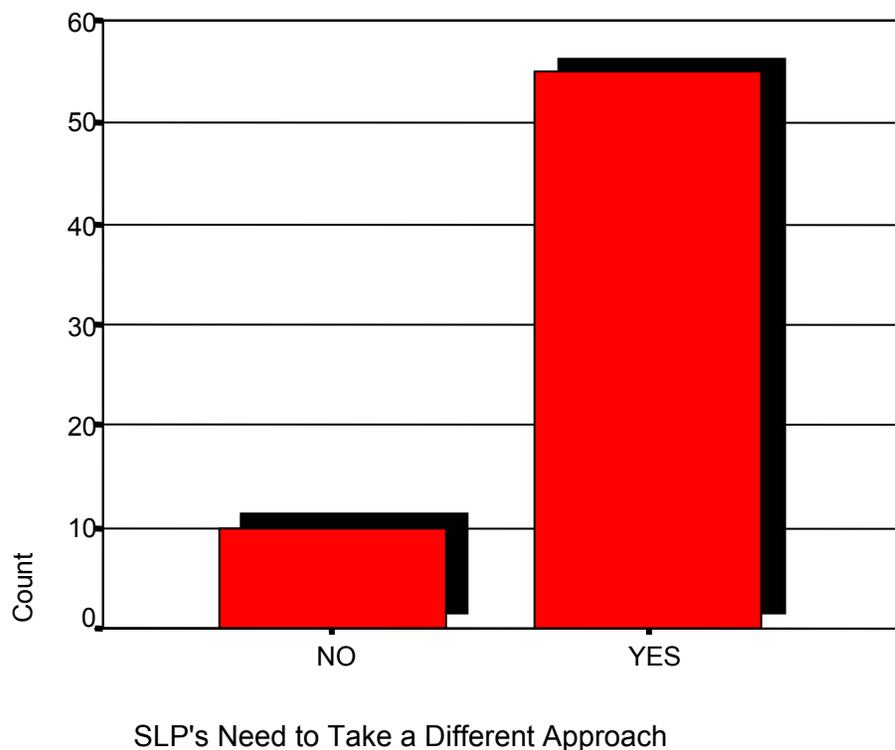
Readiness to work 'in' or 'with' community

- SLPs have unique knowledge and skills in facilitating skills in:
 - language
 - social communication
 - pre-literacy
 - early literacy
- In principle, SLPs are well-suited as a profession to support Indigenous parents' goals and needs regarding their children's language development including:
 - normatively developing children
 - children with delayed and disordered language
 - children learning their Mother Tongue language
 - children learning English as a second language and as a second dialect.



Overall Approach

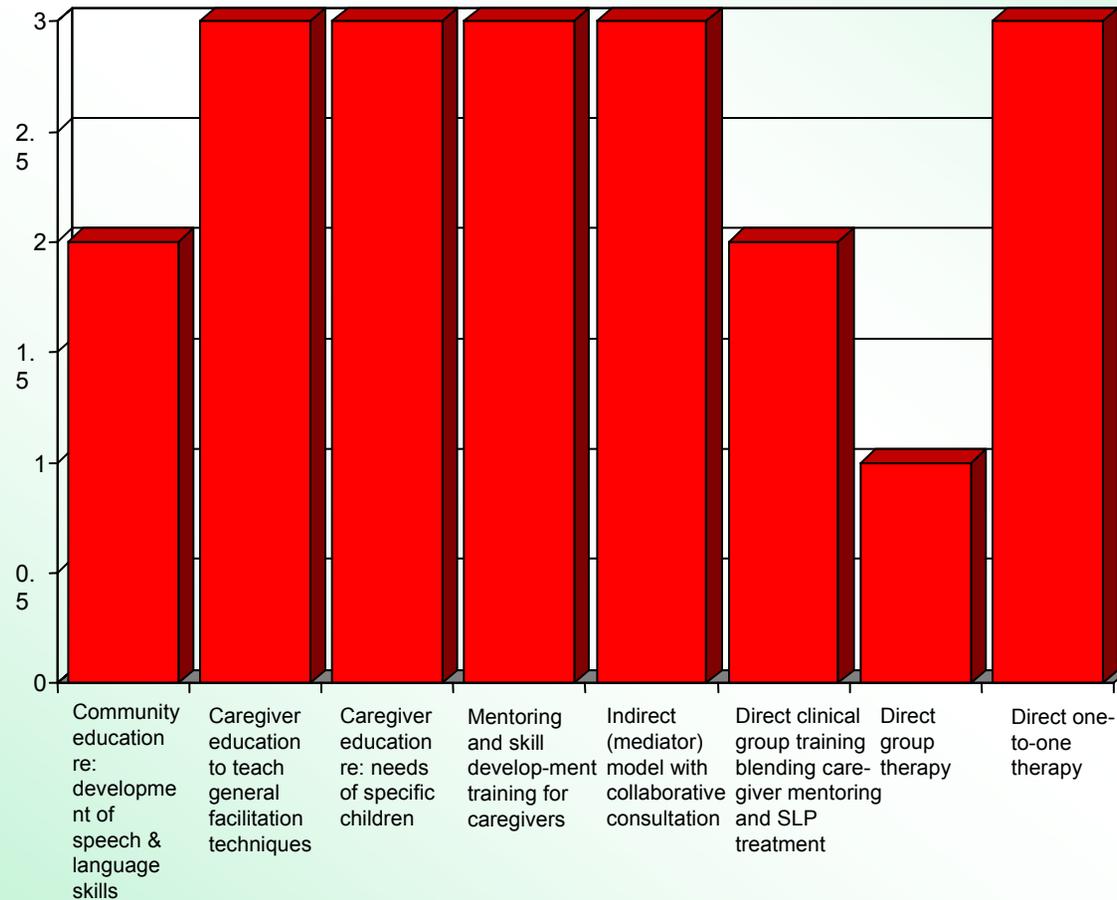
SLP Evaluation: “Do you think SLP’s need to take an altogether different approach when serving Indigenous communities?”



However 79% of respondents perceived a need ‘to **take an altogether different approach**’ when serving Indigenous communities

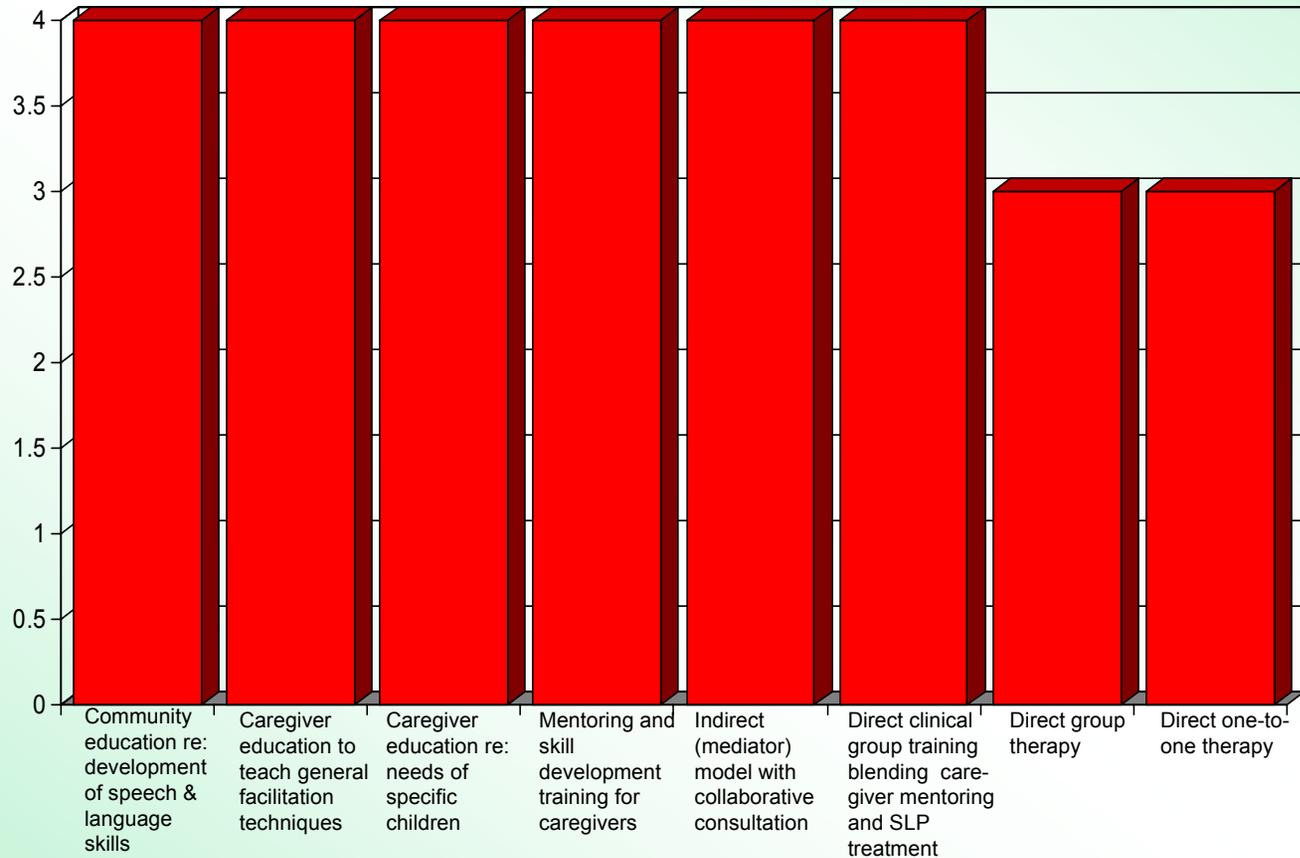
Population-based, capacity building approach favored over direct clinical services

Amount of Time Spent in Different Types of Interventions with Indigenous Children and Families



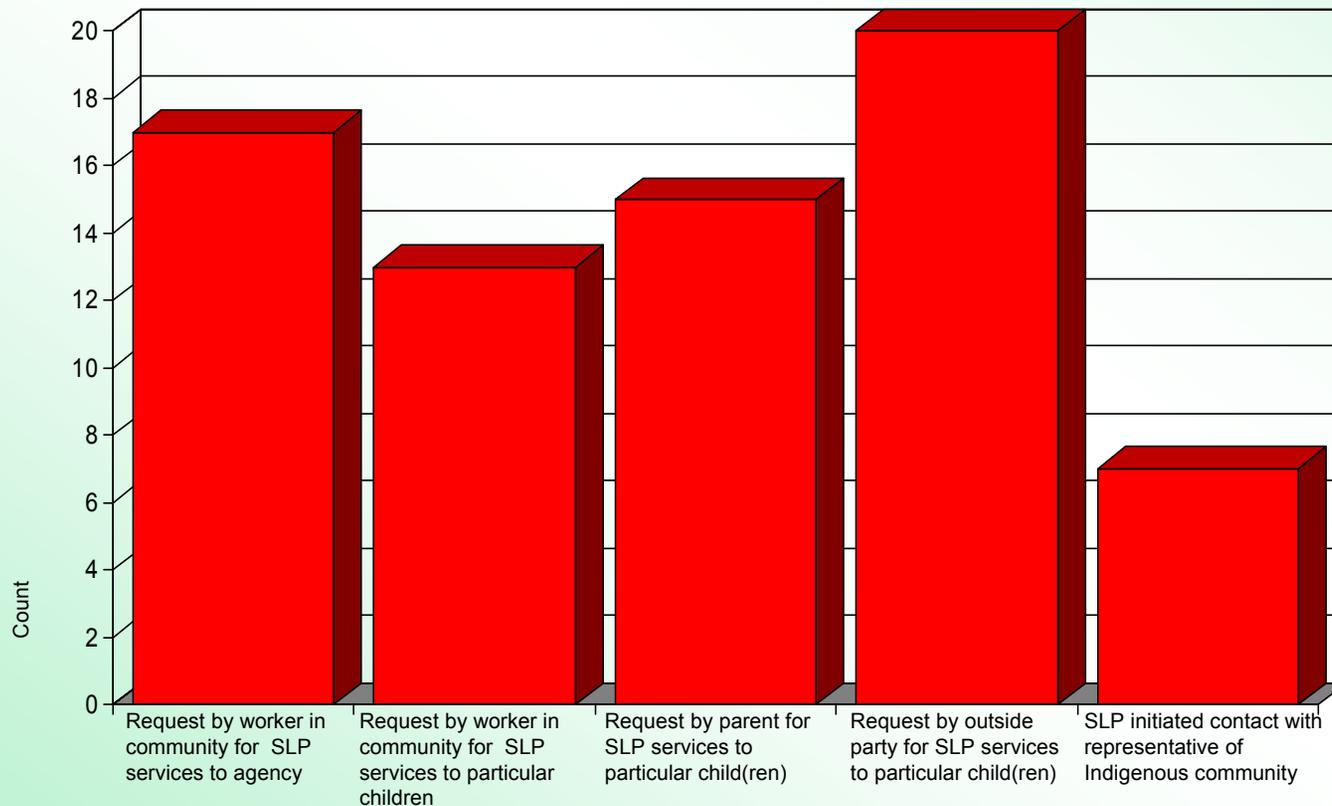
Median ratings on amount of time and effort: 1 = None / 2 = Little / 3 = Some / 4 = Major

Recommended Educational/Intervention Approaches to Best Suit Cultural Values, Beliefs and Priorities of Indigenous Families



Median ratings on most appropriate educational/intervention approaches
1 = least suited/ 5 = most suited

How SLP Became Engaged with Indigenous Communities



SLP respondents were usually engaged in providing services as a result of referral for individual children (69%);

Reflects perhaps a limited understanding in communities and agencies of the potential benefits of SLP contributions at a population-based, capacity-building level.

Family and community driven programs and services

64% of respondents reported on importance of:

- developing and providing programs and services that are family and community driven
- learning about cultural beliefs, practices and way of being of the families and communities served
- being aware of diversity



Perceptions of the value of talk and language socialization practices

Recurrent themes in the perceptions of SLPs regarding distinctive features in the social use of language were:

- a quiet and reflective nature in children appears to preferred by caregivers
- children present as quiet and reflective
- talk appears to be reserved for important matters in social interactions



- a lot of talking as well as children initiating talking or asking questions is discouraged
- children reluctant to talk with adults
- reticent about answering questions
- unlikely to talk about themselves
- make minimal eye contact
- appear to have limited experience with verbal dialogue and turn taking





- listening and observing appear to be highly valued
- children learn through listening, observing, doing and being included in family and community activities, more than by verbally processing their experiences and asking questions.

- parents hover less and encourage pre-school children's self-directed play and peer group socialization more than language mediated adult-child interactions
- children respond well to interactions involving doing things together, and to peer interaction
- they respond well to slower talk, more pausing, sharing information and storytelling



- characterized by some respondents as ‘late talkers’
- parents believe that children will talk *when they are ready*
- content, goals and fast-paced atmosphere in mainstream preschool and school settings seem mismatched with Indigenous children’s experiences, understanding and expression



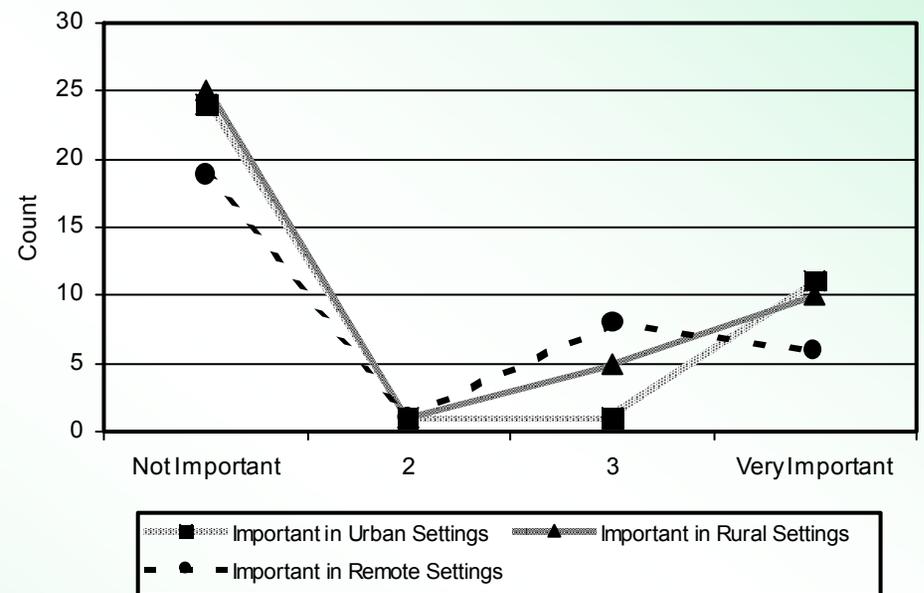
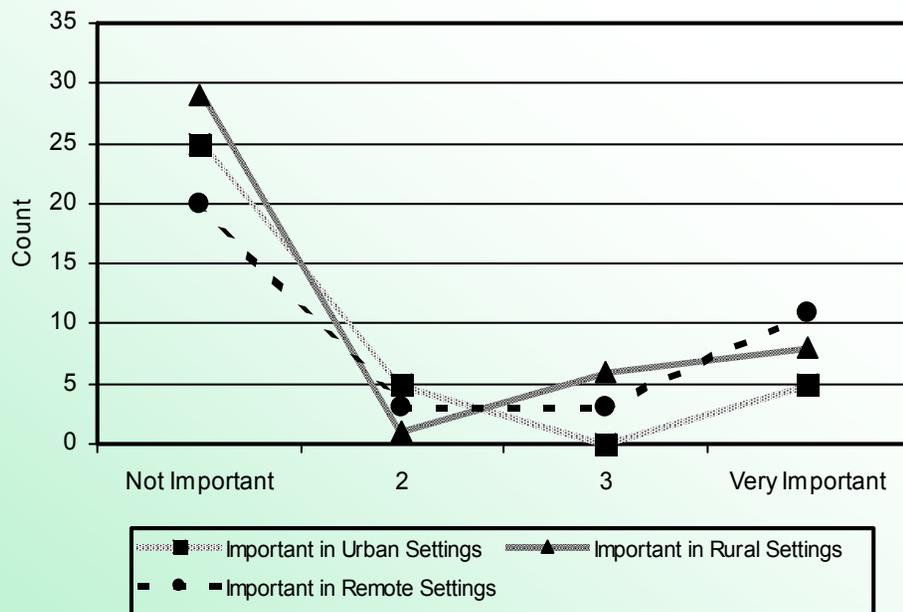


These perceptions are evocative of a conceptual distinction made between societies in which children are thought to ‘grow up’ and those in which children are ‘raised’ or ‘brought up’

- parents who believe children must be ‘raised’ engage in a distinct set of verbalizations with their children
- parents who believe children ‘grow up’ make fewer attempts at dialogue with their young child, and are less likely to prompt their child to recount events in order to practice verbal communication

SLP Evaluation: “How important is it for Indigenous parents and other caregivers that their young children learn their Mother Tongue?”

SLP Evaluation: “How important is it for Indigenous parents and other caregivers that their young children learn English or French?”



- possible that SLPs infer low value on language learning as an interpretation of differences in the value of talk and socialization of language use (eg. high contrast, low frequency activity)
- Other evidence about Indigenous people's language use suggests that talk is highly valued in particular contexts, by particular people, with particular intentions
- European-heritage parents tend to utilize and encourage frequent verbal discourse, including child-initiated discourse with adults, to serve a variety of functions (eg. low contrast, high frequency activity)



- If there are indeed significant differences between indigenous and non-indigenous parents' language socialization and expectations for their children's talk, then some respondents' comments that the content, goals and fast-paced atmosphere in mainstream preschools & school settings are mismatched with indigenous goals for children's language use and indigenous children's quietness, are particularly meaningful.



- Indeed, there may be a strong cultural bias in mainstream SLP practice, early childhood education programs and school-based practices
- appreciate risks some Indigenous parents may feel in accessing mainstream education, speech-language programs, and other services.

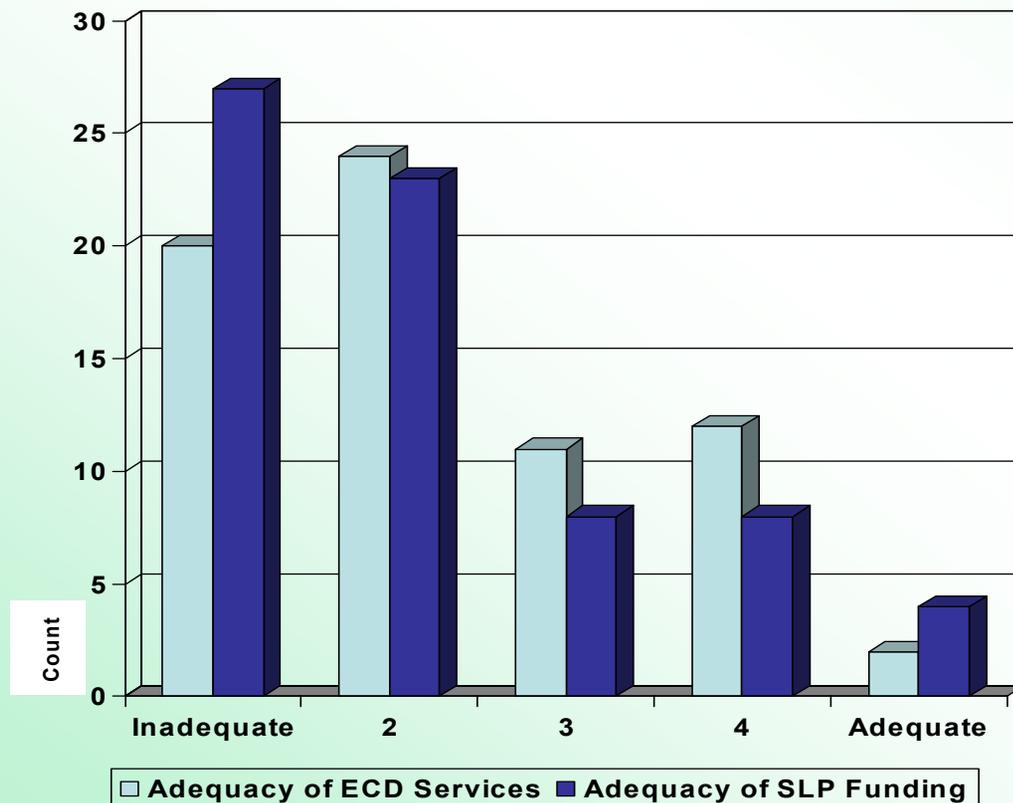


Mother Tongue Language

- Mother Tongue typically not incorporated into SLP services
- if given help from speakers of a child's Mother Tongue, would be eager to incorporate it and could have a role in supporting children learning and using their Mother Tongue
- encourage parents to maintain their dominant language used at home; often is Mother Tongue, especially in rural and remote areas
- cited positive contributions that learning Mother Tongue can make to a child's sense of connection to community and to self-esteem.



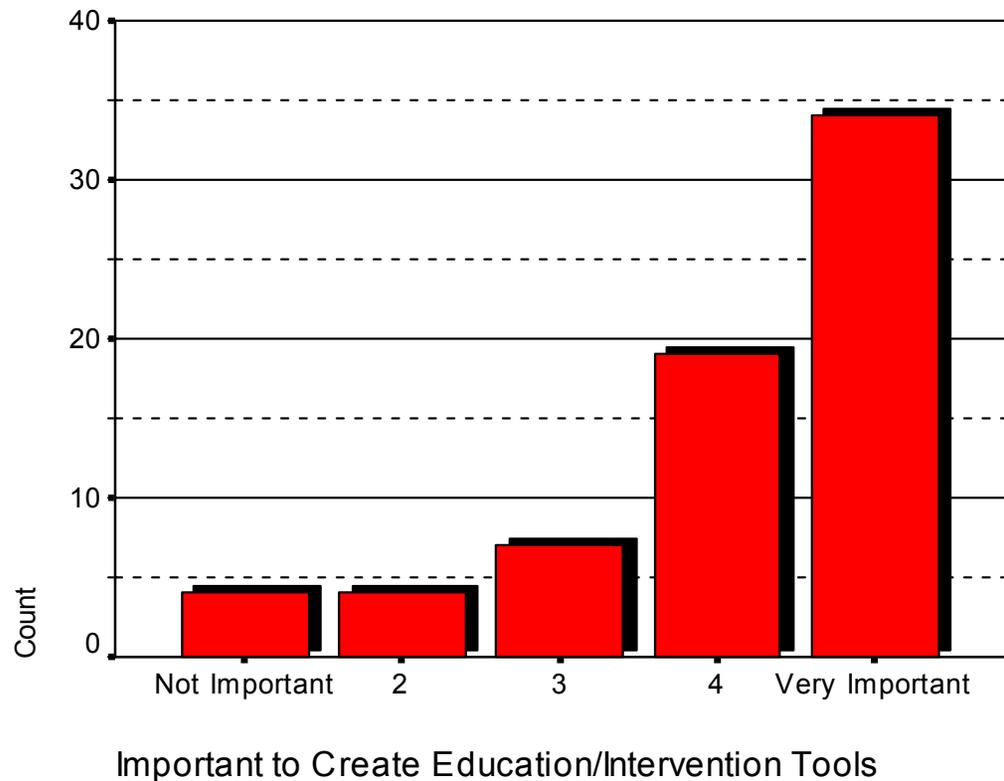
Inadequate funding and inappropriate services



Respondents overwhelmingly indicated that funding for Early Childhood Development services and for SLP services are ‘inadequate’ in the settings that they have observed.

Need for new education and intervention strategies

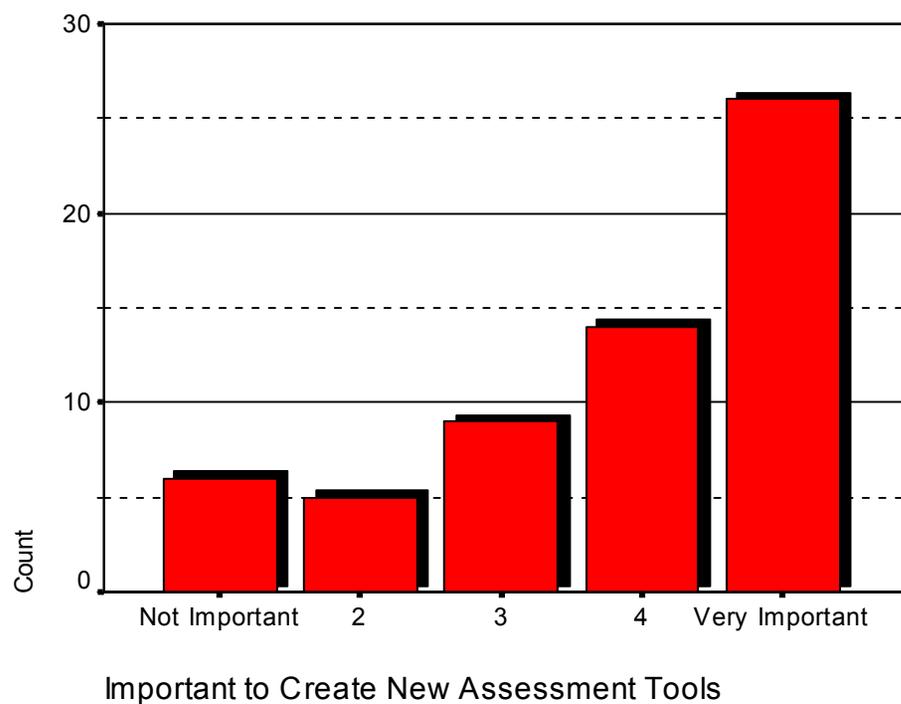
SLP Evaluation: “How important is it to create new educational/ intervention tools specifically for Indigenous children?”



76% of the respondents perceived that it is very important to develop **new education and intervention strategies** specifically for Indigenous children

Need for new assessment tools

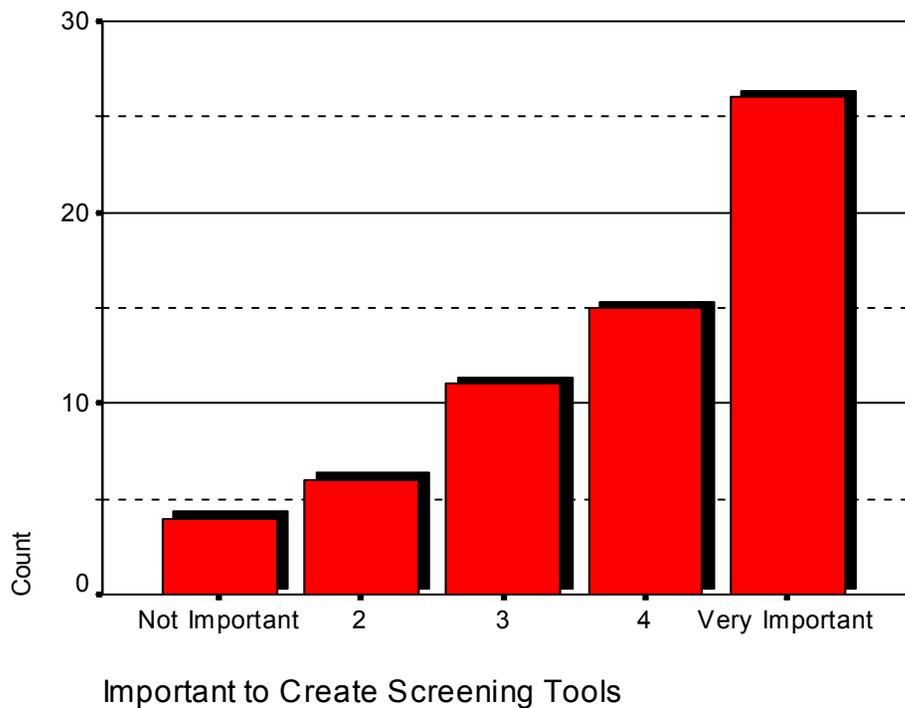
SLP Evaluation: “How important is it to create new assessment tools specifically for Indigenous children?”



70% of respondents reported that it was important to develop **new assessment tools** specifically for Indigenous children.

Need for new screening tools

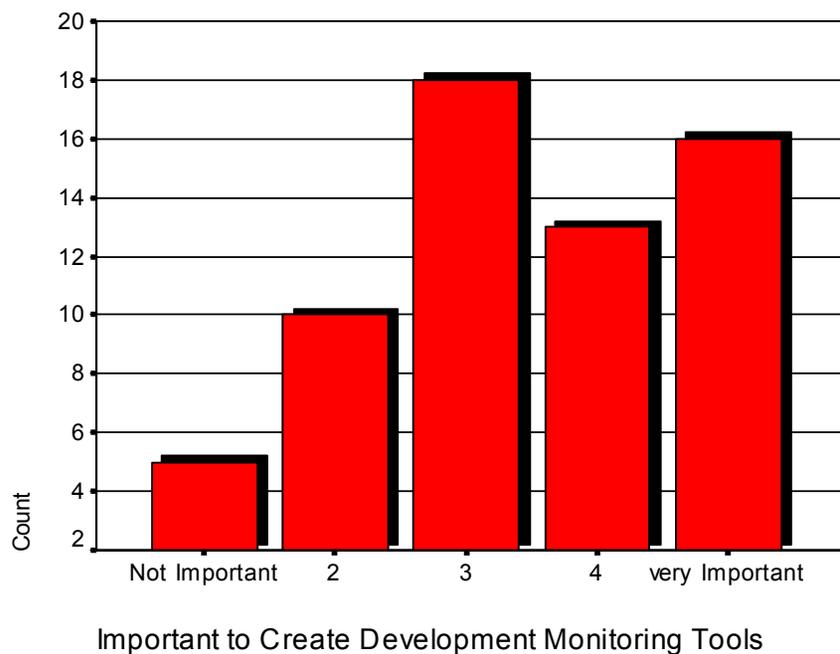
SLP Evaluation: “How important is it to create new screening tools specifically for Indigenous children?”



74% of respondents reported that it was important to develop **new screening tools** specifically for Indigenous children

Need for new tools to monitor overall child development

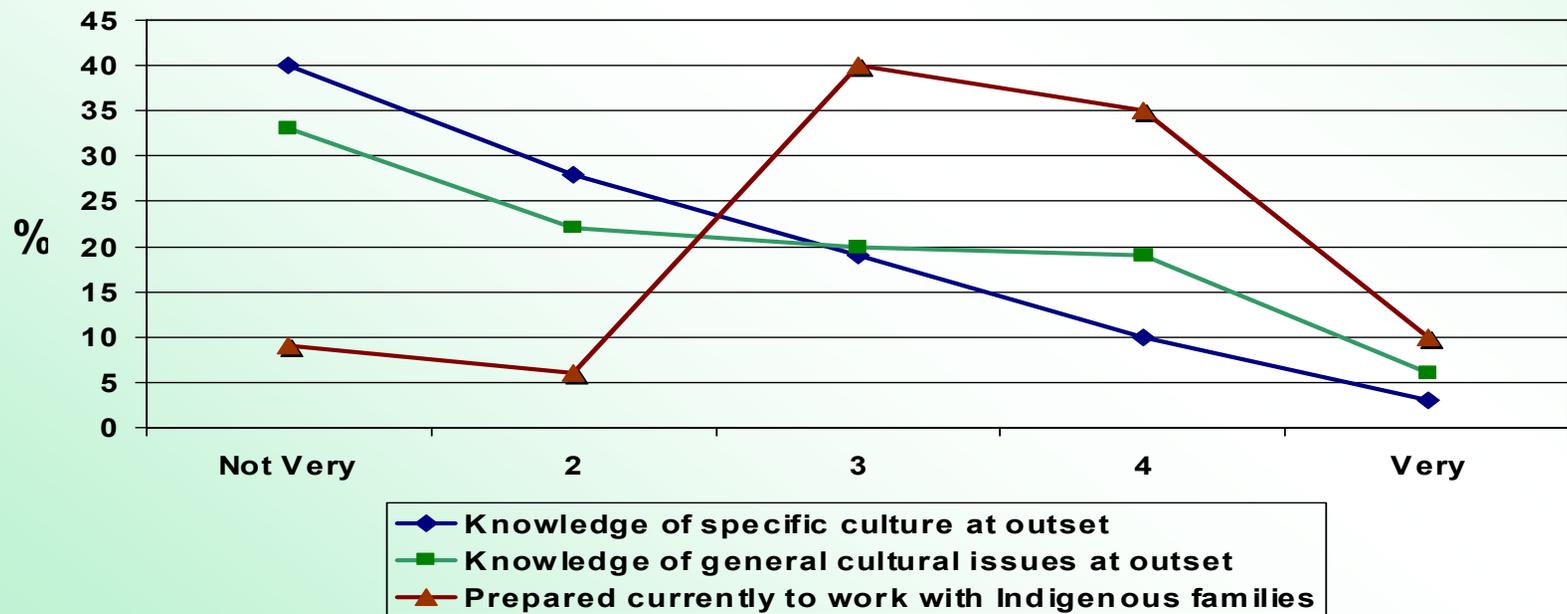
SLP Evaluation: “How important is it to create new tools for monitoring overall child development specifically for Indigenous children?”



67% reported that it was important to develop **new tools for monitoring overall child development**

Knowledge capacity to serve Indigenous families and communities in culturally appropriate ways

Cultural Knowledge of Indigenous Families and Communities

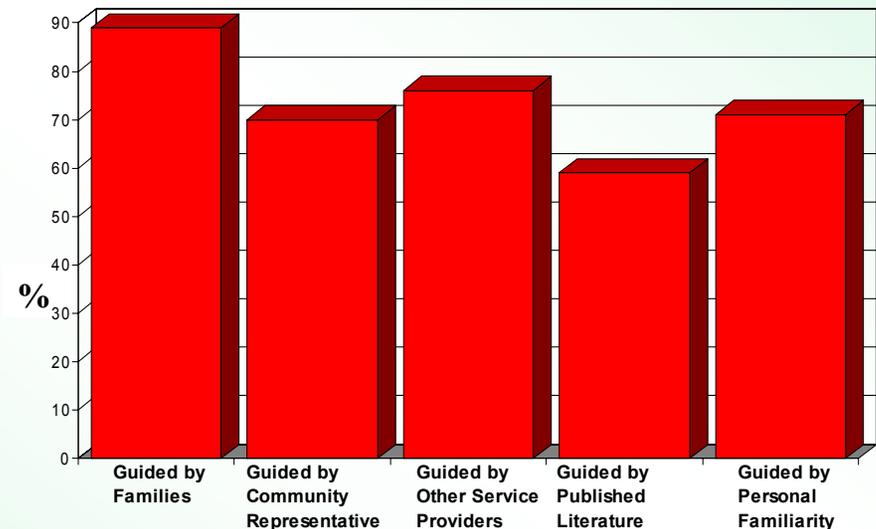


Improving knowledge to serve indigenous families and communities in culturally appropriate ways

To deliver more culturally appropriate services, respondents believed that it was:

- most important to learn from the families being served
- also very important to learn from representatives, Elders, indigenous mentors within the indigenous community as well as conferences and workshops

“Who and/or what has guided you in developing culturally appropriate services for Indigenous children and families?”



Summary and Conclusion

Taken together, descriptions by SLP respondents conveyed a clear impression of the importance of:

- learning about and understanding the culture
- building capacity within families and communities
- providing services that are driven by the values and wishes of the families and communities in which the children live
- establishing positive and trusting relationships with Indigenous parents, caregivers and people trusted in the child's community

Positive and Trusting Relationships

The theme of 4th Early Years conference is ‘Relationships.’ SLP respondents in the current study consistently pointed to the importance of establishing positive and trusting relationships with Indigenous caregivers of Indigenous children, and with people who are trusted within the Indigenous community to which the child belongs. This requires:

- a consistent presence in the community
- patience
- time
- flexibility
- understanding
- a desire to learn.

