

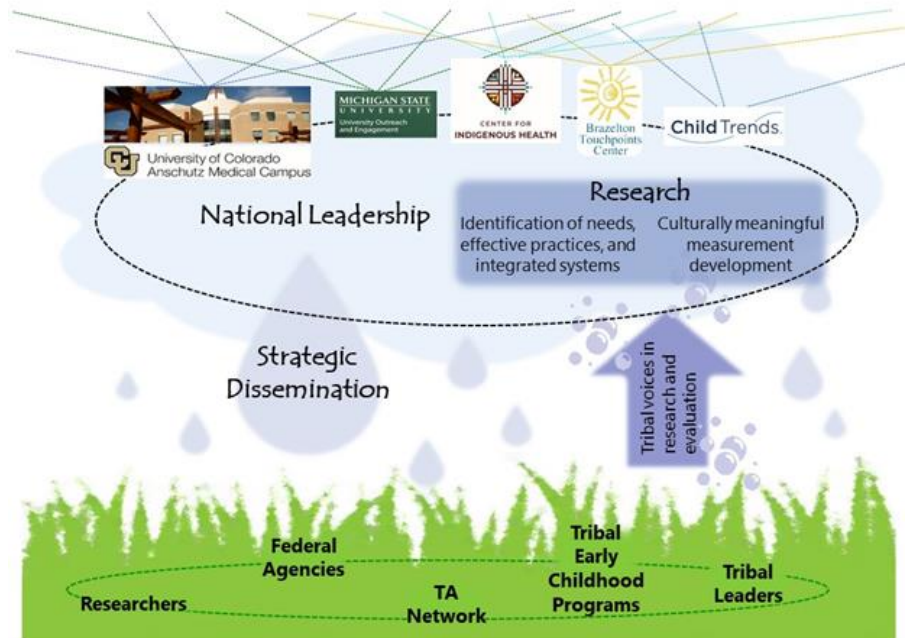
Tribal Early Childhood Research Center

Growing the field with Virtual Learning Circles



About the TRC

The mission of the **Tribal Early Childhood Research Center (TRC)** is to grow the field of early childhood research in partnership with American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) Head Start, Home Visiting, Child Care, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Family program leaders, community partners, early childhood and family economic wellbeing researchers, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) federal staff, and a broad network of ACF-supported and other early childhood initiatives and national centers serving AIAN communities.



What are TRC Virtual Learning Circles?

The TRC uses Virtual Learning Circles to provide an opportunity for us to gather and discuss emerging or highly relevant topics of interest with those engaged in research and practice focused on Tribal early childhood development. We use readings to spur conversation and reflection and invite special guests to deepen learning and connection to the topic. Past recordings and materials are available on our [website](#). Sessions have addressed:



Indigenous Research Methodologies

TRC partners and participants working in Indigenous early childhood research convened in three sessions from October to November 2021 to discuss a curated [list of readings on Indigenous Research Methodologies](#) and engage in dialogue with Shawn Wilson.



Indigenous Land-Based Learning

TRC partners and educators working in Indigenous early childhood settings convened in May 2022 for three sessions that highlighted land-based learning initiatives in Ontario, Canada; Ojibwe communities in Wisconsin and Minnesota; and in early education programs in California.



Indigenous Food Sovereignty

TRC partners and educators working in Indigenous early childhood settings in Michigan, New Mexico, and Minnesota convened in May 2023 for three sessions on food sovereignty, sharing strategies they've used to create curriculum and establish planting and harvesting practices.



Indigenous Language and Culture

The TRC and educators working to sustain Cherokee, Mashpee Wampanoag, and Hawaiian languages convened in May 2024. In the three sessions, presenters detailed the steps they've taken to ensure the vibrancy of Indigenous languages in early childhood program settings.

More about the Knowledge shared in the TRC's Virtual Learning Circles



Indigenous Research Methodologies

This series encouraged participants to consider the role of Indigenous Research Methodologies in growing our understanding of Indigenous child development, learning, and flourishing. How do Indigenous methodologies help us conceptualize and contextualize the development of young children and their families? The series began with a review of the history of Indigenous research and key constructs, drawing on readings from Shawn Wilson and his approach to ontologies, epistemologies, ethics, and methodologies. Next, participants focused on Indigenous research methods and key elements, including learning about Margaret Kovach's conversation method and the importance of orality, relationships, respect, reciprocity, land contexts, and community participation and benefit. The series concluded with a special session with Shawn Wilson where the group discussed critical reflections and what's ahead for Indigenous Research Methodologies.



Indigenous Land-Based Learning

Practitioners in this series shared how they are educating young children through connection to the land. In the first session, presenters working in First Nations communities in Canada highlighted how they are reclaiming ancestral knowledge by engaging children in the practices passed down by their Elders, such as harvesting moose and fish. The presenters noted they feel at home using these methods and enjoy bringing children and families together. The next session focused on early education settings that engage Ojibwe communities in Wisconsin and Minnesota. Speakers shared the importance of letting children begin to connect with nature and encouraging them to focus on sight, touch, feel, and taste to bridge their development and connection to culture and traditions. The final session focused on integration of land-based learning in diverse Indigenous early childhood settings in California. Speakers shared how they engage young children in growing traditional medicine, learning the stories of the medicine, and practices for respectfully gathering medicine.



Indigenous Food Sovereignty

This series brought together speakers from Wiba Anung (Early Stars, Michigan), Keres Children's Learning Center (New Mexico), and Wicoie Nandagikendan (Minnesota). Wiba Anung (Early Stars) shared how they have developed health-focused curricular materials for Indigenous foods within the Tribal Home Visiting and Head Start programs. The Keres Children's Learning Center described how they are engaged in food sovereignty by working with the land to self-sustain planting, growing, and harvesting. They connect these activities to their Keres language and cultural immersion Montessori program to promote child, family, and community well-being. In the final session, the Wicoie Nandagikendan Sacred Foods Program reviewed how they grow their own food and engage families and community to support food sovereignty within the city of Minneapolis, MN.



Indigenous Language and Culture

Language champions came together as presenters and facilitators to highlight the comprehensive efforts needed to ensure young children have access to Indigenous languages for generations to come. This series brought together Howard Paden (Cherokee Nation) and Mike Richardson (AIAN Head Start Collaboration Office), Nitana Hicks Greendeer (Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe) and Lana Toya (Walatowa Language Immersion Head Start Program), and Walter Kahumoku (University of Hawaii) and Chris Sims (University of New Mexico). The sessions provided dialogue and reflection on the ways Indigenous languages and cultures are supported and contribute to the health, wellbeing, and thriving of Native children, families, and communities.

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tribalearlychildhood@cuanschutz.edu

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