

All Relatives Share Empathy: A Reciprocal Empathy Model



By the Deepening Empathy Community of Practice

Fouzia B. Bhat, Alexis Bruno, Haley Diem, Dr. Julie Ernst, Mikayla Falteisek, Kalina Groothuis, Desiree Hagenbeck, Melanie Michaels, Meghan Morrow, Thelma Nayquonabe, Ahna Neil, Emma Richtman, Moss Schumacher, KrystalLyn Tomlinson, Claire Underwood, Sarah Walker-Davis, Laura Whittaker, Sarah Wilcox, and Mandi Wojciehowski.

**Duluth, MN
2023**

Preface

This work is the culmination of seven months of shared inquiry and learning by a group of fifteen practitioners in Northern Minnesota. These practitioners working at the intersections of early childhood, nature-based learning, and empathy came together to deepen our understanding of empathy through engagement with Indigenous perspectives and building capacity to foster empathy with wildlife and people. Taking a Community of Practice (CoP) approach valuing storytelling and knowledge co-construction, we offer the following with humility and gratitude for all who shaped and shared in this work.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, we give deep thanks to land Mni Sota Makoce (Minnesota), which has been cared for and called home by the Anishinaabe, Dakota, Northern Cheyenne, and other Native peoples from time immemorial. To all our relatives, from earth to sky, the winged, the hoofed, and the finned ones (LaDuke, 2014), we give thanks.

We are deeply grateful to our co-facilitator and mentor, Thelma Nayquonabe, a lifelong educator and Anishinaabe elder who generously shared her stories, wisdom, experience, and community. Thank you to the guest speakers Thelma invited into our circle, whose vulnerability, humility, and empathy deeply impacted this work: Sara Balbin, George Morrow III, MacKenzie McShane-Cadotte, and Randy Cadotte.

We also share gratitude for the planning team: Dr. Julie Ernst, Claire Underwood (co-facilitator), Thelma Nayquonabe (co-facilitator), and Sarah Wilcox, who brought forth this project, held space for this work and organized the many logistical details.

We are deeply grateful for ACE-Advancing Conservation through Empathy and the Lake Superior Zoo for seeing the value of this work and generously supporting it. We also express sincere gratitude to the Great Lakes Aquarium for generously hosting our gatherings.

This work would not have been possible without *Natural Curiosity 2nd Edition: the Importance of Indigenous Perspectives in Children's Environmental Inquiry* (Anderson et al., 2017), which we used to guide our sessions. Chi miigwech to everyone at the Natural Curiosity program, based at the Dr. Eric Jackman Institute of Child Study (JICS) Laboratory School at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education - University of Toronto.

Most of all, to the 15 participants who deeply committed themselves to this work, listened with their whole bodies, shared from their hearts, and whose insights make up these pages: Fouzia B. Bhat, Alexis Bruno, Haley Diem, Mikayla Falteisek, Kalina Groothuis, Desiree Hagenbeck, Melanie Michaels, Meghan Morrow, Ahna Neil, Emma Richtman, Moss Schumacher, KrystalLyn Tomlinson, Sarah Walker-Davis, Laura Whittaker, and Mandi Wojciehowski.

For all this and more, we give deep appreciation and hope this work will inspire and support you in your own teaching practice and empathy journey.

Introduction

For seven months, we deeply explored empathy through engagement with Indigenous peoples and perspectives. We have sought to take a *Two Worlds Approach*, which acknowledges the differences between Indigenous and Western knowledge systems and avoids knowledge domination and assimilation by engaging in a learning philosophy based in equitable inclusion. This approach embraces storytelling as pedagogy and enables the heart, brain, body, and spirit to collaborate to evoke an outpouring of critical thought and personal transformation (Kapyrka & Dockstator, 2012). We offer this work with humility, gratitude, and respect for the Indigenous traditions we have had the privilege of learning with and from.

This work has impacted every part of our lives, professional and personal. These pages are our attempt to synthesize that learning, with practitioners in mind. Perhaps you are a nature-based educator looking for resources to support your teaching practice, or a parent curious about how to nurture your child's emerging empathy, or an administrator wondering about how to support a more empathetic work and school culture. This learning is offered in the spirit of an Indigenous view of knowledge, wherein knowledge flows without end: it is not owned, but shaped by community (Anderson et al., 2017). We hope you will take what is offered here and build upon it, joining in the flow of knowledge.

This resource is organized into six sections. First, we explore **what empathy means** and then its **importance**. We share **grounding concepts** from Indigenous perspectives that have guided this work. Then, **strategies** informed by the grounding concepts are shared, and **challenges** to empathy from our own experience. Finally, **several stories** are shared as concrete examples. Throughout, we have offered reflection questions to guide your own thinking and join in the co-creation of knowledge.

What Empathy Means

Empathy is often defined as the understanding and sharing of others' emotions (Knafo-Noam et al., 2009). Empathy includes cognitive (understanding or knowledge), affective (sharing or feeling with), and motivational (care or action) components. **What, then, does empathy mean when informed by a Two Worlds approach?**

Empathy is Active.

Empathy is *active* but does not always require action.

Empathy requires presence and active listening. Empathy is a choice to hold space and listen to another's experience. There is power in being heard and acknowledged. In this way, true empathy is not about fixing a problem. Empathy is a way of being through which we show understanding, compassion, and vulnerability.

Empathy is not only something that we feel, it is something that we do. Empathy is shared.

Empathy is Collective & Individual.

Empathy can be a collective experience, as well as an individual one. Empathy is a bridge to understanding different perspectives and different people. Everyone, human and more than human, deserves respect, empathy, and care. When we see empathy from this collective perspective, we can empathize on a grander scale: new possibilities emerge, and healing begins. This collective perspective nurtures movement for change and right relationship with all our relatives.

Empathy is a Reciprocal Cycle.

Empathy is a circle of reciprocity. Empathy feeds us and others, it is an endless cycle of giving and receiving: seeing and being seen, hearing and being heard, caring and feeling cared for. The empathy cycle is a circle that includes all beings that share our Earth: from rocks to the sky. All beings are active in sharing empathy, and we have much to learn from them. Empathy is not uniquely human, but it is essential to our human experience and part of the evolution of our species. Primatologist Frans de Waal has found evidence of empathy in rodents, apes, elephants, and dolphins (Waal, 2010). We have much to learn from nature and our more-than-human relatives about sharing empathy and engaging in the empathy cycle.

Empathy is not an unlimited resource. Throughout our lives, there are seasons of giving and receiving empathy. There might be seasons where your empathy is growing and blossoming. And there are also seasons where you need more empathy than you're able to give. That is completely natural and appropriate in everyone's life. There is no shame or guilt in having a lower capacity. Instead, we offer ourselves grace, acknowledging the ebb and flow of our own empathy and the wider empathy cycle.

All of life exists in a web of reciprocal relationships. We connect to Earth by giving and receiving, not by taking or controlling. When we acknowledge that reciprocal web and grow it with practice and experience, we enter into a deepened relationship with nature as teacher, and our own empathy is sustained and nurtured.

Empathy is Noticing.

Empathy is noticing: noticing others, noticing how the self is in relationship with others, noticing the capacity you have to give empathy. Through curiosity, we cannot help but notice, care, and act. When we notice the fullness of another being, we cannot help but love: kindly, openly, humbly, and empathetically.

Empathy is Humility, Vulnerability, & Humanity

Offering and receiving empathy requires deep humility and vulnerability: humility in knowing that we do not have all the answers and vulnerability in sharing our personal experiences. We each add an important piece to the wider collective. No one can offer everything, but we can each offer something. Often, what we can offer is simply our presence. When we empathize, we become a student with the opportunity to learn and relearn, growing deeper in our own understanding of self and others.

Pause & Reflect:

- Think of a time you offered empathy or a time you received empathy. What was that like? How did it impact you?
- How does what is offered here deepen or shift your understanding of empathy?

Why Empathy is Important

Empathy is a basic building block of connection.

Empathy is a basic building block of human connection. We want community and connection, in fact, we need it for our survival. As adrienne maree brown has articulated, “We know how to connect, we long for it” (brown, 2017).

Through the work of this Community of Practice, we have come to deeply understand how empathy carries us through our lives: we each are held within the empathy reciprocity cycle, and it is vital for us to connect to others and ourselves. With empathy comes connection, and with connection comes love.

In the absence of empathy, when we are disconnected from the truth of our connection, our world deteriorates. Instead of knowing our world, our relatives, and our place in the circle, we exploit it. In

the presence of empathy, healing is possible. Through empathy, we understand the truth of our connection, and our place in the circle of life.

Empathy weaves a collective, reciprocal community that allows us to heal and move forward together. As we confront the truth of intergenerational trauma and the impact of settler colonialism, we know: history is not long ago, history is perspective. Empathy takes both looking behind & looking ahead. We cannot change the past, but we can impact the future using empathy as a tool for healing.

Pause & Reflect:

- Why does empathy matter? To you? To your work? To the world?

Grounding Concepts

Empathy is the way of life of the teacher.

The way of life as a teacher is to model empathy for children. In every interaction, children are watching us and learning from our behavior how to be in community. We can reflect and ask ourselves: what do they see? What do they learn from what they see? Sharing and modeling empathy supports children's own developing empathy.

How we teach is, in fact, what we teach. We can spark connections through stories and play, and lead them toward understanding by authentically exposing them to place through play, learning with Mother Earth and the natural world. This active practice of empathy is the way of life of the teacher: modeling empathy to children and to the world.

Aki - Everything is Connected.

Empathy is about connection, and everything is connected. We are of this Earth, we are of this place, not above it. The Earth is alive, and the creator's spirit is present in all. As we have learned:

The Anishinaabe work *Aki* is often translated as 'the land' or 'Earth,' but this is just a translation of the word into English thinking. Some Anishinaabemowin speakers say *Aki* can translate as 'everything,' An Indigenous sense of place extends to anything conceivably related to a place: The waters around us and the blood in our bodies, which are, of course, both connected with Grandmother Moon; all the stories of place that sing in local ways to

the mysteries around us; all the dead and unborn who have walked or will walk where we do, and who once breathed or will breathe the same sacred molecules of air; the dew at our feet, which speaks with the star beings above us, and so on, in every direction and in relation to everything (Anderson et al., 2017, pg 82-83).

Everything is related. Nothing exists in isolation. Understanding how the world is deeply connected allows us to learn from our nonhuman relatives and experience the challenges and joys of existing together in this place and time. We are all connected on this Earth, and we need to honor one another and heal together.

7 Generational Thinking.

We are all connected to each other: not just in this space and time, but in the future and in the past, as well. The teaching of 7 generations, the instruction in the Creation story to care for Mother Earth for the next 7 generations, reminds us of our obligation to take a longer view, prioritizing the needs of the Earth beyond what we will ever see (Kirmayer et al., 2011).

As we empathize, we think of not only this moment but of 7 generations and the wider collective. To be deeply connected to the past, present, and future, to see through a 7 generational lens, changes the way we look at empathy and how we interact with the land. Our impact ripples through the generations. We are touched today by those who have gone before. We touch those who have yet to come.

Children are Capable - We Can Learn From Them.

We have a lot to learn about empathy from children and the ears they have open to nature. Children are tremendously capable, and we affirm and honor that capability by supporting children in learning that they can help heal and help each other. It's not just the responsibility of the caregiver or the teacher to offer empathy - children are also part of the community and capable of offering empathy to one another. We see the ways children already do this: they contribute their unique strengths, offer care to one another, and help their peers resolve conflict, in doing so, they build community.

Indinawemaaganidog - All Are Related. All are Respected.

Indinawemaaganidog, the Anishinaabe word for all our relations, speaks to the deep interconnection between humans and the more-than-human world. The living world is our relative: plants, animals, and rocks, are all our relatives. As we have learned:

Everything is alive with Spirit, we are related to everything, and our relatives include animals, plants, the elements, past and future beings, subtle levels of being, and the spiritual world beyond time and space (Anderson et al., 2017, pg 82-83).

All life is sacred, whether plants, animals, or humans. Even beings that are no longer living still have value, they still deserve respect. We honor all our relatives through our way of life of modeling empathy, not formal teaching.

Within this acknowledgment that all are related is an inherent respect. This respect is not the dominating, oppressive “respect” used to reinforce the status quo. This respect is rooted in mutuality. It seeks balance, a give and take, and awareness of the life and spirits around us.

Not Everything Can Be Fixed.

We cannot fix everything, and true empathy does not require that we do. Oftentimes, when we are in need of empathy, we simply want to be seen and heard, to feel our feelings with someone close by supporting through their presence. The same is true for children. Often, they will come to their own solution simply through having the space to share with a trusted adult. You can't fix everything, but you can be present. This is essential to remember in our teaching.

We Are Not Meant to Do This Work Alone.

In a Western mindset, we are often isolated. We have forgotten the truth that we are not meant to do life alone. We need community. This community and connection free us. We do not have to know everything or be everything, and yet we each have something important to contribute. When we see ourselves and others in this way, we understand there is no need to compete or compare, when we all bring a valuable contribution.

When we apply this framework to a school community, it creates a spaciousness where each person, child, and grown-up, are valued, respected, heard, and seen. From this place, we can build an egalitarian, supportive, empathy-building community, that is not hierarchical but mutually supportive.

Pause & Reflect:

- Which of these grounding concepts resonates with you? What would you add?
- What grounds or shapes your understanding of empathy?

Strategies

Take an Indigenous P-A-U-S-E.

We have become used to interrupting or talking over someone. This is not how it has always been. We can learn from our Indigenous siblings and take an Indigenous pause, where we pause to fully hear someone, fully taking them in, absorbing what they have to say. We listen not to prepare our response, but to fully hear one another. When we pause, our response is genuine. We have stopped to listen deeply to another, and to ourselves.

Practice Embodied Authority.

As grown-ups, it is our role to offer an embodied authority to the children in our care that is steady, safe, and predictable. This embodied authority looks like establishing clear expectations and holding clear boundaries that express care for the children. Through these boundaries, children come to understand that it is not only their parents who care for their well-being and safety, they are held and cherished in a wider web of community. Depending on age, clear expectations can be co-created, affirming children's belonging to the community. Within this safe container, children are simultaneously held and free to be themselves.

One way we can practice embodied authority is by meeting them where they are. Through this experience of the embodied authority of their teacher, the child experiences the truth of a community who loves them. In this nest of closeness, security, and safety, children's empathy can flourish.

Listen and Speak with an Open Heart.

There is deep power in listening to each other. When we listen deeply, we don't try to solve the problem or think about how we'll respond back. When we "listen with the ear of our heart," we are able to be fully present. Through presence and active listening, we can honor the experience of another without judgment or comparison. This allows us to experience life through an open lens and

share our experiences through our whole hearts. The Anishinaabe word *Debwewin* teaches us to speak from the heart (Goulais & Curry, 2005). It is our responsibility to share our inner truth: to listen with our whole body and speak from our heart.

Seek out Stories.

Over time, stories build empathy and connection. Sharing our own stories, fiction, and nonfiction, as we speak with an open heart builds connection. Sharing the stories of the land roots us in our place. “The life of the land is embedded in stories from where we live” (Anderson et al., 2017) p 86). We must seek out, listen to and learn from the Indigenous peoples where we live, remembering that “stories and knowledge of our place ultimately live in people, not books” (Anderson et al., 2017, p 87). Stories are embedded in place, they bring us together in our place.

Hold Open Space & Time.

Many children are in tune with nature, and so at home in their play and in their world. Our job is to hold open that space for their unfolding connection. We sense and know that some children are often closer in their connection to spirit. We can hold open space for them to grow in that connection and live with an Indigenous sense of place.

It has been said that children have 100 languages (*Reggio Children - 100 Languages*, n.d.), but nature also has hundreds of languages. When we give children time and space to relearn the language of the relatives that we as adults may have lost, it can feed and support children’s natural tendency to build relationships with place. We know children are ready and can enter into a deep sense of place more quickly than adults may think (Anderson et al., 2017).

We know not all children have been supported in their connection to nature and may have cultural or systemic barriers to nature. Children may need support, guidance, opportunity, exposure, and modeling to connect comfortably with nature. We remember that it is our role as teachers to meet children where they are and support them in their journey.

Children, and adults, need space to identify and feel their feelings. When we hold open space for feeling and reflection, we support children’s regulation and their developing empathy. We can do this by giving children time to decompress, acknowledging and validating feelings, and listening at their level when they are ready to talk.

Model.

Children learn by watching how we live, they watch us to see how we treat other people and learn from our example. The teacher guides, models, and sparks connections for children to nature, community, and history. Together we can learn the land's history, asking: who has played here, learned here, breathed here, grown here? What has happened: for them, the forest, and you?

There are infinitely many ways we can model empathy: through art, stories, reciprocity, listening, apologizing, making repairs, and speaking our truths as teachers. In speaking our truth, in developmentally appropriate ways, we show them that adults have feelings too! We model in every moment, whether we like it or not. We can and should model empathy in many different ways, always striving to meet the children where they are at. Hopefully, by watching us, children learn that empathy and emotions are shared by all of our relatives: it's everyone's job to contribute to the empathy reciprocity cycle.

Support Children in Sharing Empathy

Children are remarkably capable. They have a natural curiosity and desire to care for one another and our Earth. We can give them the language and confidence to support and respond to each other. In supporting their skill development and offering opportunities to practice, children can respond to one another. This is so much more powerful than an adult responding! By responding to one another, they build emotional connection and resilience; they know they are capable and do not need to rely on us as teachers. We are there to support them, but we step back so they can feel good about responding to one another. In doing so, their empathy, confidence, and connection flourish.

Honor Differences + Hold Similarity.

Honor and acknowledge everyone's different backgrounds. Exposure to other ways of doing and knowing cultivates empathy and deepens understanding. Teaching and showing that there is more than one answer and so many ways to do things helps us remember that within the collective, we are each unique individuals. We remember: everyone is related, and everyone deserves respect and care.

Sometimes empathy may not make sense to you, but it matters. We do not have to understand another fully to be present and hold space with them without judgment or shame. We can trust and believe their experience without fully knowing or understanding.

Honor Trauma.

Honoring trauma is vital. Everyone has traumas, whether it's in this lifetime or in their ancestors. We are here, in this place and time, to heal together. Through presence and listening, we can be someone children know they can come to when they're hurting.

Nurture Our Self-Knowing and Connection to Nature

Self-awareness and self-knowing are central to empathy. In the spirit of the reciprocal cycle of empathy, we must each take space for deep reflection on our own journey. A key way we can do this is by taking time in nature to nourish ourselves. Nature is a teacher and a healer. Each of us can create a practice that supports our own empathy work by making space to listen, learn, and be in relationship with nature. In doing so, we will remember, we are not separate from nature we *are* nature.

Pause & Reflect:

- What strategies are you already practicing? What is new to you?
- How might these strategies shift or support your work?

Challenges

We Don't Always See Our Impact.

Every day, we are working to build growth in children that we may never see. We ask ourselves, am I reaching them? Am I supporting them in the ways that they need? Those questions may never be answered.

Though we may never see the impact of our work, it is still valuable, it matters. It is our role to plant the seeds in children to grow a beautiful, empathetic life, and to support them in responding to and nurturing one another.

One Size Doesn't Fit All.

We've noticed that for some people, for some children, it seems inherently harder to practice empathy than for others. This could be for many reasons and is unique to each child. Everyone moves at their own speed, it's our job to meet them where they're at. We can do this by continually offering empathy to them and trying new approaches that are responsive to the needs of the child.

For children who have not experienced empathy from their caregivers or who struggle with their empathy development, nature can be an especially important outlet and source of empathy that we can support their connection to.

Feeling Outnumbered.

Sometimes we as adults feel outnumbered by the level of needs and support of children and their families. We try to adjust and meet every need as best we can, and sometimes we simply can't. In those moments, we remember: children are capable! Empathy can be shared by teachers but also by students. One of the most powerful things we can do is support the children to respond to one another. This might not always solve the problem but it is helpful to remember: we can't fix everything, and we are not alone in the work of empathy.

Filling Our Own Empathy Tanks.

As we've noted, empathy is not a limitless resource. When we give so much of ourselves, we also need to receive. This is easier said than done! It is vulnerable, but not weak, to need empathy and support from our community. While it may feel uncomfortable, vulnerability isn't a bad thing. Being vulnerable is, in fact, an act of strength and courage.

Pause & Reflect:

- What challenges to empathy do you experience?
- How might the strategies shared above support you in navigating those challenges?
- What support can you draw on - from the earth, from your community?

Stories

Voices of the Forest

In the winter, of course, we're kind of the only ones in the woods, and it's easy to yell and be super loud. It's just us, and it just echoes down the hillside. But as the leaves started to come in, and the birds started to come in this spring, the children's volume started to bother me. And from our time together, I started realizing that the other beings in the forest are probably bothered by their sound too.

And so I started talking about the work that the birds have to do and the way that they need to communicate with each other and that this is their forest as much as our forest. And so it's been really neat to watch how the children have responded to this idea that the bird calls need space. So I started sharing this, and my co-teachers started sharing this.

Today we were in the white pines playing. And when we came in, the children were so excited to be there, they were very loud. And Lexi brought everyone together and said, 'I can't hear the Ovenbird anymore. When it was here, it was calling out 'Teacher, Teacher, Teacher,' and I love to hear it because it's singing my work, and I can't hear it, it stopped talking.' And the children started getting quieter and quieter. And then we could hear the bird call again. And it just is like a way that these teachings have kind of gone through the filter of what we are doing and starting to come out in lessons that are connected to this learning.

It Doesn't Happen Overnight

These children deserve that connection point with me and for their needs to be seen and heard with their big feelings. And that this ripple effect, of all this energy and time that we put in, we might not see it. And you have to accept that because you still know that you're modeling it, that you're showing up for this child. And it can be very taxing. And you try to find ways to do self-care when the day is done because in the moment, you can't always give yourself that grace when it's just like something immediate that needs you.

But one of the children in particular, like, there was a softness to him really coming out, particularly the last month of school, and this connection with me that was really deep trust, and to get to that point. And even if it was just the last month of school, it was like we were seeing evidence of the hard work that we were putting in. And there's just this reminder that a child's ability to show empathy just doesn't happen overnight, and it might not happen in our time with them. And it was really helpful because I felt like there's a lot of pressure like, oh my gosh, like, why, what, how can what I'm saying isn't sinking through? But it doesn't happen overnight and to keep trying.

Teaching the Honorable Harvest

As new things are coming up: green things, flowered things, all wonderful things that children just want to have. We're teaching the honorable harvest, using Robin Wall Kimmerer's, guidelines of the honorable harvest, and I felt the part that is always tricky for me is having the children ask permission. You need to ask permission. They're like, 'Yep, it said yes. It said yes, it said yes, it said yes.' And, it's always such a tricky one to give to them to be like, Okay, how do I give you this information and to have you actually listen to the answer and slow down?

And so I was thinking of all of our conversations, that the way to connect people is through empathy. So how can we ask permission and really listen to the answer through empathy? And so we introduced all of the Honorable Harvest principles kind of loosely. Okay, first things first, greetings and gratitude. When you give a greeting, you need to know the plant. So if you greet a dandelion, you need to say hello to the dandelion, not just like, 'Oh, hey, there thing.' No, you give greetings and offer gratitude. And you never pick the first, and we pick the last - all of these wonderful ones. And they were really getting the idea of 10, ok there has to be many in order for me to pick one. But then it started to be like, 'Okay, there's 10!' So now I'm just gonna start going at it. And if there are 10, then one person picks one. And then, 'well, if you picked one, then I can pick one. And I saw that you counted 10. So I'll pick one.' And so we started thinking about how can we listen to the plant? How can we listen to that answer?

And so we started to then dive deeper into, well, we don't speak the same language, but the plant has a language. And we can listen to it by what we know of that plant. So, what do we know about

a dandelion? Well, we know that they have a blossom. So should you pick a dandelion before it blossoms? No, certainly not, they decided. And we know that it's one of the first flowers for the pollinators. So if there's only a couple, should you pick them? No, because they haven't done their job in the forest yet, which is to provide a safe haven for the pollinators in those early years. And then once you've asked all of those questions, and really thought about, what is the role of that plant in, in this ecosystem, then if you can answer all of those questions, and like hear all of those questions from the plant, and the way that I phrased it kept being like, 'Okay, well, what are you hearing from the plant?' And then they would say, 'Okay, well, I'm hearing that the apple blossoms, there are many, but they want to become apples. So we can't pick any.' And 'well, I'm hearing that, that the dandelions are many. And they've had many days of being open. So the pollinators have had a lot of opportunity, and they are ready to share a dandelion with me'. And so then they would pick one, and it was just such a full circle of, how can I do this? What would the group say if I asked the group: How do I make this connection more tangible for them? And so that was really, it was really fun.

And today, I watched a couple of kids go by a dandelion and look at it. And then like, Uhhhhh, and look around, and then shake their heads and keep on going. And I was like, it's working!!!! They realize that there was enough that they could have picked one, but they really listened to the dandelion and realize, No, there aren't very many dandelions right here, or this particular dandelion is saying no. And so that was, that felt really good because that one's always tender for me working with preschoolers that just want it all.

Reciprocal Empathy Model

We have strived to summarize this learning in the form of a conceptual model. This model depicts the core themes and learning of this work.



The moon phases represent the cycles of empathy: it is natural and appropriate to experience different phases along our empathy journey. Sometimes we are the full moon, offering empathy brightly, sometimes, we are a waning moon, in need of empathy ourselves.

The circle represents the reciprocal empathy cycle within which all our relatives are held and active. The landscapes and ecosystems depicted are reflective of the land on and with which this work was created: the North Shore of Minnesota. Red-tailed hawk flies above, rainbow trout swims below. Humans are also part of this empathy ecosystem. A teacher shares empathy with a child on the bottom left, an elder watches on from a log, offering their insight and wisdom, and two children delight in the natural world and share empathy with the creatures they find (butterfly and sprouting plant). All relatives share empathy, and all relatives are held within the empathy cycle.

Closing Thoughts

We have learned through this work that we are deeply not alone here on Mother Earth. We are surrounded by a world that is alive. Our hope is that you know you are not alone - but held within the empathy reciprocity web.

Sources:

Anderson, D., Comay, J., & Chiarotto, L. (2017). *Natural Curiosity 2nd Edition: A Resource for Educators: Considering Indigenous Perspectives in Children's Environmental Inquiry*.

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

brown, a. (2017). *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*. AK Press.

Goulais, B., & Curry, D. (2005). Debwewin: Three City Anti-Racism Initiative. Debwewin Canada.

<http://www.debwewin.ca/intro.htm>

Kapyrka, J., & Dockstator, M. (2012). Indigenous Knowledges and Western Knowledges in Environmental Education: Acknowledging the Tensions for the Benefits of a “Two-Worlds” Approach. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education (CJEE)*, 17(0), Article 0.

Kirmayer, L. J., Dandeneau, S., Marshall, E., Phillips, M. K., & Williamson, K. J. (2011). Rethinking Resilience from Indigenous Perspectives. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 56(2), 84-91.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/070674371105600203>

Reggio Children—100 languages. (n.d.). Reggio Children. Retrieved March 30, 2023, from

<https://www.reggiochildren.it/en/reggio-emilia-approach/100-linguaggi-en/>

Waal, F. de. (2010). *The Age of Empathy: Nature's Lessons for a Kinder Society*. Crown.