

**Learning from Indigenous Perspectives**  
Land-Based Learning in the Early Years

# Appreciation vs. Appropriation



## How Can Educators Support Appreciation and Avoid Appropriation of Indigenous Cultures?

These ideas were developed as part of the research project, *Designing and Implementing Environmental Inquiry Strategies in Early Years Programs 2020-2024* under the guidance of team member Lori Budge, a member of the Wikwemikong Unceded First Nation.

To be inclusive and to work toward decolonization and reconciliation, you should teach about Indigenous cultural practices. However, it is important not to mimic Indigenous cultural practices, clothing, or objects. It is not appropriate to practice or perform them yourselves if you are non-Indigenous or are not being led by an Indigenous person.

For example, you can prepare a discussion, read a book by an Indigenous author, or show a video of Indigenous dancing, drumming, and singing and tell the children that these are important practices for Indigenous people to communicate things such as gratitude, healing, or to celebrate being together after a long absence. Then, non-Indigenous people can adapt these concepts, for example gratitude for the gifts of the earth, and create their own songs or dances or other ways of expressing gratitude.

However, these experiences will not be the same as they are for Indigenous people because they have a special relationship with the earth through these ceremonies. The idea is to provide a context where you make your own meaning about what you are doing. This ensures that you are not mimicking or appropriating Indigenous culture. Non-Indigenous educators should not refer to these activities as if they are doing “Indigenous dancing” or “Indigenous drumming”.

Regalia (traditional clothing) and cultural objects are sacred to Indigenous Peoples and need to be treated with respect. Just as educators would not promote children playing with objects or practices that have sacred significance for some Christians, such as crucifixes or rosary beads, or pretending to serve communion, it is not appropriate to play dress up with clothing that is meant to look like regalia or use Indigenous cultural objects like replica totem poles as props in games or lessons.

