In these reflections that I am contributing to the Indigenous Early Learning Collaborative (IELC) you, the reader, will notice that I lean my understanding into the wisdom of the land. Indigenous knowledges and lifeways have always been inherently connected to the land, guiding our relationships with each other and our more-than-human relatives (e.g. plants and animals). For this reflection I’d like to talk about our relative that is often seen in the early Spring, Dandelion.

In my last post I reflected on the idea that Spring reminds us of the beauty and value of change, that growth can come with change. Sometimes we’re ready for this change, sometimes we’re not, and other times we have no choice. Change is also about possibilities and options, and these are two different concepts: possibilities are things we can envision as being true, and options are what we decide from our choices. (I hope that makes sense!)

There have been many times as an early childhood educator where I felt stuck, as if I was going to be making a meager wage in a high-stress, high-expecting, at times back-breaking job until I could no longer physically do it. I had a handful of times when I wanted to walk away from the field, my joy and energy sapped and the glass ceiling slowly coming down. My choices felt limited, but it was small moments with colleagues and coworkers that helped me dig deep and persevere. I had to keep an openness toward possibilities to come.

Dandelion is often seen in patches, but they are also seen solo away from others like them; still, you know them and their persistence. Dandelion reminds us of the importance of being in community to strengthen our identity, that even though we may find ourselves alone, our connection to our communities keeps us strong and resilient. When Dandelion is alone, say growing in isolation in asphalt, their very nature urges them to create possibilities to create community. Those little puffy seeds parachute somewhat randomly wherever the wind takes them, but they carry an intention of flourishing away from their original space. The key to Dandelion's thriving lies in their ability to adapt with their new possibilities and to problem solve through challenges. I call this the Pedagogy of Dandelion inspired by a book called Plant Teachings for Growing Social-Emotional Skills a collaboration between GRuB and Northwest Indian Treatment Center. This book is also accompanied by a set of cards for quick reference to our plant relatives' wisdom. On Dandelion's card there are three questions posed:

- What are some creative solutions to my challenges right now?
- What are my forgotten strengths and how can I cultivate them?
- How can I break through obstacles and flourish?
In early learning there is never a shortage of needing to problem solve and to adapt. In fact, I feel successful early childhood educators can adapt, respond with flexibility, and pivot to make the best out of a situation, especially when choices are limited. Self-reflective practice can aide spur-of-the-moment quick thinking and adaptation, revealing new possibilities to options presented, and remaining open to the perspectives of others allows us to find a space of flexibility and innovation. I didn’t always have this perspective. It took a lot of mistakes to arrive here, and I had to identify what was getting me stuck and slowing my own growth. I’ve named this my “teacher ego.” Maybe you know someone who is well experienced and has strong opinions and viewpoints on how something should go with curriculum implementation, the flow of the day, parent interactions, etc., and perhaps they are a unwavering in their know-how, and may not always be open to trying new approaches. This experience and know-how are extremely valuable to a teaching team, but it must always be kept in mind that there are other ways to pedagogy.

The land teaches us this. Indigenous knowledge systems have always been inherently tied to the land, and they are the dynamic structures in which the production of know-how ebbs and flows. They are not static and are “diverse and are constantly adapting and changing in response to new conditions” (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2008, p. 238). Embracing this idea of constant change and that knowledge doesn’t have to be fixed, how might you see yourself finding a space of flexibility and adaptation? What might this do for the children you teach and play with when this is modeled with co-teachers? What values of Dandelion will you bring into your practice? What possibilities will you create for yourself?

References:

About the Indigenous Early Learning Collaborative
Together, First Light Education Project and the Brazelton Touchpoints Center (BTC) lead the Indigenous Early Learning Collaborative (IELC), a national Institute envisioned and developed to support Indigenous Communities of Practice engaged in cycles of inquiry to strengthen early learning systems of care and learning. In 2021 the IELC launched, with Native educators, early learning professionals, and leaders from four tribal partner communities learning how to implement Community-Based Inquiry (CBI). Today, the IELC is an Institute, expanding its work to include more partners to generate local solutions to their most pressing questions and dilemmas of practice.

The Brazelton Touchpoints Center (BTC) was founded in 1996 by world-renowned pediatrician T. Berry Brazelton, MD, and colleagues and is based in the Division of Developmental Medicine at Boston Children’s Hospital. Together with families, providers, and communities, BTC develops and applies knowledge of early childhood development to practice and policy through professional and leadership development, organizational learning and change, research and evaluation, advocacy and awareness, and serving as a resource for proven practices. BTC is home to the Touchpoints Approach, the Brazelton Institute (Newborn Behavioral Observations and Neonatal Behavioral Assessment Scale), Family Connections, and the BTC Research and Evaluation team. For more information, visit www.brazeltontouchpoints.org

About First Light Education Project, LLC
Guided by the principle, “Starting with What Works,” First Light Education Project, LLC, is a consulting and collaborative initiative, providing leadership on projects of practice and inquiry in community and educational contexts. The company’s two founders and principals, Dr. Tarajean Yazzie-Mintz (Diné) and Dr. Ethan Yazzie-Mintz, bring extensive expertise and experience working with and within communities; Tribal nations and Indigenous communities; K–12 schools; nonprofit organizations and foundations; and higher education institutions across a variety of social, political, and educational domains. Conceptually grounded in the idea that education is a fountain of enormous possibility and immense potential from prenatal development and continuing through adulthood, First Light Education Project uses a strengths-based and question-driven approach to create relationships, processes, and knowledge that lead to collective, transformative outcomes. For more information, visit www.firstlighteducationproject.org

For more information about the IELC, contact:
Dr. Joshua M. Sparrow, Executive Director, Brazelton Touchpoints Center
Dr. Tarajean Yazzie-Mintz, IELC Project Director, First Light Education Project, LLC

Or visit the Indigenous Early Learning Collaborative website:
www.brazeltontouchpoints.org/programs-services/indigenous-early-learning