



University of Victoria School of Social Work
Indigenous Specialization

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CULTURAL PLANNING, ABORIGINAL CHILDREN AND ADOPTION

Final Report Prepared by
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We wish many blessings to everyone who supported this project.

¹ Carter's photo was reproduced with permission from his mother, Robin Massey and his grandmother, Jeannine Carrière.

BACKGROUND

In 2007, the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) Adoption Services management team provided funding to explore how the *Cultural Planning Policy* (MCFD, 1996) has impacted the adoption of Aboriginal children into non-Aboriginal families. The policy outlines a process by which adoption workers present a plan of action on behalf of an Aboriginal child that supports an exception to the practice of placing an Aboriginal child in an Aboriginal family. This plan, as presented to the Exceptions Committee, provides details in how the child's culture will be encouraged and maintained throughout the child's life. Since the inception of the *Cultural Planning Policy*, there have been over 450 Aboriginal children adopted into non-Aboriginal homes (MCFD, 2007).

This project had the following objectives as parameters for the research:

1. Conduct a literature review.
2. Develop a research model for Ministry approval.
3. Upon approval of the research model, contact and interview adoptive families and Aboriginal community representatives.
4. Conduct an analysis of the interviews.
5. Submit a final report of findings and recommendations.

Over a decade has passed since the inception of the *Cultural Planning Policy* and it is timely to reflect on the recommendations provided in this report, which begins with an introduction of the research team.

RESEARCH TEAM

Principal Investigator

Dr. Jeannine Carrière is Métis and originally from the Red River area of southern Manitoba. She has been teaching social work since 1994 in Alberta and at the University of Victoria, School of Social Work in the Indigenous Specialization since 2005. Her research interests include Aboriginal adoptions, identity issues and advancing Indigenous knowledges. Dr. Carrière has been a practitioner in Aboriginal child and family services for over twenty years and has conducted several research projects including her PhD work entitled *Connectedness and Health for First Nation Adoptees* (2005).

Research Assistant and Collaborator

Kim Grzybowski has ancestry from Peguis First Nation and is currently a Master of Social Work student at the University of Victoria. Kim's thesis is focused on cultural planning for Aboriginal children and adoption. Kim has several years of experience as a front line child protection worker for First Nation agencies in British Columbia and is currently a delegation trainer for the Caring for First Nation Children Society on Vancouver Island.

LIMITATIONS

The writers wish to outline limitations early on in the report as part of the context for the recommendations that follow. The first limitation was the timeframe for signing the contract between the University of Victoria and the Ministry of Children and Family Services as it was somewhat of a precedent to engage in such a contractual arrangement with these two institutions. Although it was hoped that the contract would be signed in early August 2007, it was not signed until late September, almost two months past the anticipated start up date. A support letter from an Aboriginal organization, the First Nation Directors' forum was not provided until November 13th, 2007, which meant that the application to the Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) at the University of Victoria was submitted in late November. The normal waiting period for any contact from the HREB can be up to six weeks and revisions to the application are normally required. In this case there were some minor revisions and the approval certificate from the HREB was provided January 31st, 2008. Complexities around the human research ethics process at the University provide both strengths and limitations to a research study. The strengths include the assurance this process provides to participants that ethical procedures are being used in the research. The required sanction by an Aboriginal organization for this type of research is also a strength. The limitations as they pertain to this study were that the process of recruitment and interviewing was restrained until these tasks were completed. Another limitation resulting from a short time frame was that recruitment through third parties was constrained. For example, the research team hoped to interview some youth for the study however the recruitment through identified youth groups was not successful. A longer time frame would have given the time it takes to form stronger relationships with organizations, attend some youth conferences and examine other methods of recruitment. This has resulted in two sets of participants for the study: adoptive parents and Aboriginal community representatives. What was achieved in a short period of time however provides some rich data, which can be replicated or built upon in future research. From our understanding this contract was a precedent between the University of Victoria and MCFD and we hope that there were valuable teachings learned from our experiences for future research partnerships between the two organizations.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this research project is a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is particularly suited for interpreting a phenomenon in terms of meanings that people bring to that phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Newman and Kreuger, 2003; Lather, 1995; Olesen, 1994; Yegidis and Weinbach, 2006). Newman and Keuger (2003) state: instead of converting ideas or aspects of the social world into general variables to form hypotheses, qualitative researchers borrow ideas from the people they study or develop new ideas as they examine a specific case in its context or particular natural setting. (p. 158)

Participants involved in this study were asked to reflect on meanings attached to cultural planning and the adoption experience. The strength of this type of qualitative approach is described as emancipatory social research (Lather, 1991) in which both the researcher and participants become changed. Olesen (1994) describes it as “giving voice to the voiceless” (p. 169). One strength of qualitative research is a focus on how humans make sense of their surroundings and interpret phenomena to provide the context, and help to create a complex and holistic picture of an event or situation (Creswell, 2007; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Patton, 1990). Creswell (2007) informs us that the goal of qualitative research is “to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation” (p. 20). As Yegidis and Weinback (2006) point out, “the researcher is really the primary instrument for data collection” (p. 21). This phenomenon however can pose some problems for the researcher who is seeking funding for qualitative research. Yedidis and Weinback (2006) warn, “it is often difficult to convince people who control the awarding of grants and contracts in a foundation or government institute of the merits of a qualitative study” (p. 23). Qualitative studies however are empirical. They involve “documenting real events, recording what people say (with words, gestures and tones), observing specific behaviours, studying written documents or examining visual images,” which are all, “concrete aspects of the world” (Newman and Kreuger, 2003, p. 158).

The shared personal experiences of adoptive parents and Aboriginal community members provided valuable insights for this report and their voices will resonate within the research team in their future work and discussions around adoption. The methods used to elicit this information are described as follows.

METHODS

Inclusion Criteria: Participants

Participants for this research were selected according to the design of cultural plans that affect a circle of participants, adoptive parents, adopted youth and Aboriginal community members. Although many voices can inform this work, the priority was as follows:

Group 1: Adoptive parents

- Non-Aboriginal
- Adopted an Aboriginal child: First Nation, Inuit or Métis
- Living in British Columbia
- Have signed a cultural plan in the adoption of an Aboriginal child

Group 2: Adopted youth

- Must be Aboriginal: First Nation, Inuit or Métis
- Adopted into a non-Aboriginal family
- Living in British Columbia

Group 3: Aboriginal community member

- Must be a member of an Aboriginal community: First Nation, Inuit or Métis
- Living in British Columbia
- Be related to an Aboriginal child who has been adopted or be affiliated with an Aboriginal community agency or community where the adopted child is from
- Has been involved in a cultural plan

Hearing the Stories

Qualitative interviewing has been described as the favourite methodological tool of the qualitative researcher, which guides a conversation through the art of asking questions and listening that produces a substantial amount of information (Creswell, 2007; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Marshall and Rossman, 1995; Rubin and Rubin, 1995). There are several types of interviewing, but the one selected for this study was informal, semi-structured interviewing facilitated by the use of an interview guide to help interviewees focus on specific topic areas (see Appendix 1 - Questions). The interview questions were pre-tested by the research team with volunteers who have similar characteristics and experiences to participants prior to the interviews and changes were made accordingly. Semi-structured interviewing can be used for what Rubin and Rubin (1995) refer to as *cultural interviewing* (p. 175). For cultural interviewing, they recommend that researchers specifically ask *main* questions and subsequent *probing* and *follow-up* questions. According to Rubin and Rubin (1995), this approach is the key to effective qualitative interviews.

Trustworthiness refers to conditions designed to ensure that the theory produced by the researcher is dependable. Crabtree and Miller (2000) describe trustworthiness as a process by which several checks and balances occur to ensure that the presentation of the findings is an

accurate description of what has occurred. In this study there were points of validation to ensure trustworthiness was achieved.

Validation

Creswell (2007) described several methods for the validation of qualitative research and refers to Whittemore, Chase, and Mandle (2001) who developed primary validation criteria: *credibility, authenticity, criticality* and *integrity* (as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 206). The following describes how each of these factors were addressed in this study.

Credibility

Whittemore et.al described this as ensuring that results reflect an accurate interpretation of the participants' meaning. In this study, the interviews were recorded through a tape recorder and transcribed. Transcriptions were sent to each participant with an opportunity to make any corrections and ensure their stories were reflected accurately. An Executive Summary Report of recommendations will be provided to each participant as another means of credibility and a gesture of appreciation.

Authenticity

Authenticity is the use of various voices to support a study. In this study the researchers identified the need to hear from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants who had some experience with cultural planning. Representatives of both groups were involved in the study.

Criticality

The question posed here is, "Is there a critical appraisal of all aspects of the study?" (Mandle, 2001 as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 206). This study had a number of checkpoints for appraisal. First and foremost was the review by the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board with follow-up revisions and granting of the approval certificate in January 2008 (Appendix E). The use of constant comparison in grounded theory requires a systematic critical review of data in order to produce categories, sub-categories and a theoretical preposition from the findings. These findings were compared to the literature review to provide recommendations for practice in cultural planning.

Integrity

This requires that researchers engage in self criticality. The background of the research team in this study includes a strong record of personal and professional experience related to the

issue of cultural planning and Aboriginal adoptions. The principal investigator has a record of accomplishments in adoption research including her PhD dissertation in which she employed grounded theory with an Indigenous methodology of ceremonies, talking circles and gifting. The Research Assistant/Collaborator has a background in front line child protection with Aboriginal children and families. The engagement in self criticality for this study involved identifying biases for each of the researchers which began by having discussions around this to clarify each other's position in this field of work. The use of journal notes during interviews was used to "bracket" information or biases for the researcher during this process. Bracketing is a process by which a phenomenon is studied and defined without interference of preconceptions by "an informed reader" (Patton, 1990, p. 408). For the research team, this process was facilitated by extensive training and work in the field of child welfare. As trained social workers, the research team members were able to be objective and empathetic listeners. Miley, O'Melia, & Dubois (2004) describe the importance of empowering communication in social work practice which demonstrates acceptance while being accountable. Accountable social workers "act with professional integrity and impartiality, and they utilize sound protocols in practice and research" (p.57).

The literature review was another source of validation and opportunity for critical reflection by providing some alternative reference points for consideration in the principal investigator's interpretation of interview results.

Sample Size

Statistics from MCFD (2007) inform us that non-Aboriginal families have adopted over 450 Aboriginal children since 1996. Sandelowski (1995) states that "determining adequate size in qualitative research is ultimately a matter of judgement and experience in evaluating the quality of information" (p. 179). In grounded theory, Creswell (2007) recommends approximately twenty individuals in order to reach saturation. Due to the limitations addressed above, we reduced our original sample size to the recommended size and we were pleased to interview twenty participants who provided rich observations of their experiences with adoption and cultural planning for Aboriginal adoption. The sample was *purposive* as participants were selected for their ability to "give the researcher access to some unique approach to a problem or a situation or a special perspective, insight, expertise experience, characteristic, or condition" (Yegidis and Weinbach, 2006, p. 208).

Triangulation

Triangulation, as a technique for verifying research results, is achieved when researchers make use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigations and theories to present a single point (Creswell, 2007; Kimchi, Poliyka and Stevensen, 1991; Marshall and Rossman, 1995). In this study, in depth interviews were the primary data collection method. Interview participants were provided with the opportunity to check and revise transcripts. As well, memo

writing and a literature review to support the research supplemented the data. All of these methods compliment one another and act collaboratively to strengthen research results.

Cultural Considerations

It is important to acknowledge that for an Indigenous research team, the cultural protocols are critical. This includes the personal and spiritual preparations to undertake this research and the acknowledgements that are required in gathering the information. The research team members shared their personal visions with each other and prepared themselves in their own personal ways to be respectful in doing this work “in a good way.” Gifts were provided to participants once they completed their journey with the research team.

Sinclair (2004) explains the importance of these gifts: “Gifts are highly significant to Indigenous culture and symbolize the philosophy of interconnectedness through generosity and sharing of material wealth” (p. 124). This is a small gesture of respect considering the gifts provided to the research team, the Ministry of Children and Family Development and all those who become enriched by the findings of this research.

Analysis

The analysis of information collected through the interview process was examined through a *grounded theory* method. Grounded theory, as described by Rubin and Rubin (1995), is “based on exchanges in which the interviewees can talk back, clarify and explain their points” (p. 4). Rubin and Rubin further explain that this process has practical implications, such as informing best practices. Creswell (2007) reminds us that in grounded theory, “the questions that the inquirer asks of participants will focus on understanding how individuals experience the process and identifying the steps of the process” (p. 66).

In the grounded theory method, the data analysis is not a separate process from data collection (Guba, 1990; Miles and Huberman, 1994). Miles and Huberman (1994) explain that, “from the start of data collection, the qualitative analyst is beginning to decide what things mean and is noting regularities, patterns, explanations, possible configurations, causal flows and prepositions” (p. 11). Similarly, Guba (1990) suggests that the first step in the analysis of qualitative data is to look for patterns or what she describes as “convergence;” this is the task of identifying how the data fit together and how they can be sorted into categories (p. 153). In particular, the *constant comparison method* uses a process of coding, sorting and integrating data to arrive at emerging theory (Charmaz, 1990; Creswell, 2007; Glaser, 1978; Strauss and Corbin, 1997). Grounded theorists advise that this process begins with eliminating information that is inappropriate and limiting the existing information into categories (Creswell, 2007; Monette, Sullivan and DeJong, 2004).

However, caution must be exercised during the elimination of data process. In using grounded theory as a method of analysis with Indigenous or tribal people, it is essential for researchers to be critical of what is often viewed as *anecdotal* or *irrelevant stories*. This is an area of Western scientific research that has been perceived as offensive to Aboriginal people. In

many instances, these stories have not been understood and/or are dismissed as being anecdotal. However, stories, as a form of knowledge transfer, are important elements in Indigenous epistemology. In fact, according to Sinclair (2004), storytelling offers an advantage by using a narrative method. Silverman (1997) places storytelling within categories, such as *cultural* or *collective* stories, which “privilege the social world under discussion and its stories over the stories of the larger society” (p. 109). For the present study, the stories that participants shared inform a more authentic narrative as opposed to being interpreted as confirming prevailing assumptions about adoption and Aboriginal children. Silverman (1997) further observes that the challenge to researchers is “to understand how and where the stories are produced, which sort of stories they are and how we can put them to honest and intelligent use in theorizing about social life” (p.111).

Coding was used to organize information into *categories*. Sub-categories will eventually emerge from categories and patterns of information were organized into themes until a theoretical framework emerged from the information, which eventually became a theory around cultural planning and Aboriginal children. Themes and categories will be conceptualized later in this report.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review enhances the findings of the interview process by providing a context in which they exist. For this study, the literature was examined as broadly as possible within a limited timeframe. This included journal articles and manuscripts as well as secondary data such as thesis, dissertations and government reports. The research team examined materials from an international perspective to provide a comprehensive annotated bibliography and literature review as part of this report.

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the literature on cultural planning for Aboriginal children who are adopted into non-Aboriginal homes. In British Columbia, social workers must develop a cultural plan aimed to preserve Aboriginal children's cultural identity when being adopted by a non-Aboriginal family. The policy does not apply to Aboriginal adoptive parents. While a child is in care of the Province, their First Nation, Inuit or Métis community is to be actively involved in a meaningful way in all areas of the child's life. Some information that is gathered to develop cultural plans are: the child's heritage, genealogy, language, traditional foods, spiritual practices, extended family and access to traditional teachings to ensure there is a continuity of the child's culture while in foster care.

The areas that were explored for this review include a historical overview of adoption, transracial adoption, race theory, attachment theory, cultural identity and the Aboriginal child. Search threads included, "Adoption," "Aboriginal," "Native," "Transracial Adoption," "Identity," "Child Welfare" and numerous combinations of these terms. Search engines included: Ebscohost, Psychinfo, Academic Search Premier, Proquest Dissertations and Theses, Social Work Abstracts, First Nations Periodical Index and Google.

The literature was reviewed from diverse disciplines including social work, psychology, law, Native studies and political studies spanning from the years 1969 to 2008. In the more current years, there is interest in transracial adoptions and identity issues, however the literature on cultural planning is extremely limited.

This review of the literature first examines the historical context of adoption in North America. Next, transracial adoption in North America with an emphasis on Aboriginal adoption and then the context for cultural planning for Indigenous children was reviewed. Attachment and identity are explored to examine the impact of disconnection from a child's Aboriginal culture. Though minimal, we reviewed the existing research literature on cultural planning, statistical data on adoption and provided recommendations for further research to support the well-being of Aboriginal children/youth and adoptive families.

Historical Context of Adoption

Adoption is the legal transfer of custody and guardianship or customary placement of a child from the biological parents to the adoptive parent(s) and siblings. Within dominant Canadian child welfare, there are two kinds of legal adoption: domestic (within a country) and international (outside of the country). Yet within Indigenous communities, custom adoption plays a significant role that is culturally relevant to Aboriginal peoples. This type of adoption

centers traditional customs that can be conducted privately with no legal agreement or can be recognized legally (under Canadian law) through an Adoption Commissioner such as in the North West Territories. Currently, in Alberta, the Yellowhead Tribal Services Agency (YTSA) has placed First Nation children within First Nation adoptive families since 1999 in their *Open and Customary Adoption Program*. Traditionally, in some Aboriginal cultures, grandparents would be given the first-born grandchild to raise as their own child.² Custom adoptions vary based on the traditions of each Nation, but it is noteworthy to identify custom adoptions as rooted in Indigenous cultures.

Adoption has been recognized in European law since early Greek, Roman and near Eastern civilizations. Indications are that adoption was practiced to support heredity, family name, wealth and culture. Numerous researchers and writers (Baran, Pannor and Sorosky, 1976; Kirk and McDaniel, 1984; Rosenberg as cited in Krichbaum, 1993) suggest that adoption, as a practice, existed since the beginning of humankind. Adoption regulations can be found in the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi (Lifton, 1988).

From the beginning, adoption has fulfilled multiple objectives, such as nurturing and providing supervision for children whose parents have died (Bolles, 1984). Even mythology provides accounts of adoption in which babies are “found” and taken care of by an alternate caregiver for a lifetime. For example, Moses is a biblical reference to the first well-known adoptee. However, the central theme in these ancient parables and myths is that these children typically are from poor backgrounds, “abandoned” by their mothers, and taken in by adoptive parents who are viewed as compassionate, charitable people.

Moving away from these early adoptions, the turning point in adoption history occurs in feudal England where poor houses were set up for orphans. The charitable model of parental and private care found in earlier adoption citations is now replaced with a model which is public in nature and with the objective of extracting payment from these children to society for looking after their needs. Church parishes were responsible for food, clothing and shelter until the child was old enough to be indentured or put to work. This approach was essentially an apprenticeship program where a child was trained to work as an alternative for families without children (Klibanoff and Klibanoff, 1973).

The child care model of the colonial system was based on a value that taking care of dependent children needs to be done as cheaply as possible. In other words, children are not valued for being human beings but are considered as property to be maintained in exchange for service. Several programs, such as putting out, farm almshouses, orphanages, rural free foster homes, and supervised boarding homes were the beginnings of legalized adoption in America (Krichbaum, 1993). The early statutes regarding adoption resembled a property deed or bill of sale (Lifton, 1988). It was not until the 1920s that the notion of the best interests of the child became part of the public position of child welfare agencies in the United States and Canada (Howell as cited in Lifton, 1988).

² While working in the field of child protection services, a Coast Salish woman had shared with Kim that as part of her traditional culture, she was to give her first-born child to her parents to raise as their own child.

The concern for child welfare in America during the 1800s led to government ward-ship and adoption legislation to prevent the use of children as cheap labour (Crosson-Tower, 2005). In Canada, child poverty and homelessness were municipal issues until the 1940s and 1950s. Foster (2007) reminds us that in British Columbia for example, “during the second part of the twentieth century, changing financial relationships between the province, municipalities, and the federal government undoubtedly had a major impact on child welfare practice and policy in the province,” because, “costs of children in care were more affordable for municipalities and also for CAS, [Children’s Aid Societies] (p.39). In 1966 and 1967, the *Child Welfare Act* and the *Canada Assistance Plan*, respectively, institutionalized child welfare and jurisdiction was transferred to the provinces (Levitt and Warf, 1985).

During this time, provincial adoption practices were considered ‘closed’ with adoption records being sealed and never made available to the adopted child. This closed adoption practice (now declining in popularity) promoted total confidentiality with no communication between the adoptive and birth families. This can present particular problems in transracial placements where children are being placed with an adoptive family from another race (Sinclair,2007).

Transracial Adoption

Spears (2003) states that “transracial adoption of Native children is more complex than anyone who has not lived through the experience can imagine” (as cited in Anderson, 2000, p. 81). Richard (2004) proposes that Aboriginal children should always be placed in an Aboriginal family and if Aboriginal children are placed in non-Aboriginal homes, the child welfare agencies are continuing a practice of “acculturation” and causing identity confusion for children. In 1972, the National Association for Black Social Workers in the United States developed a position paper denouncing black children being adopted into “white” homes reporting children will not develop a psychological sense of their identity nor develop a positive sense of their own culture. In short, the paper concluded that having black children adopted into white homes was an act of genocide (The Adoption History Project, 2007). Native Americans agreed that Native adoptions into non-Native adoptive homes were not a valuable outcome for their children. From 1972 to the mid 1990s, there have been several studies on transracial adoption focusing on concerns about identity and adjustment (Fanshel, 1972; Ladner, 1977; Bagley, 1993). It is interesting to note that in some research findings, children who were transracially adopted adjusted well and their success is comparable to same race adoptions with the exception of transracially adopted children in Feigleman’s 2001 study, whom only 50 percent adapted well into their new families.

There are definitely some differences in opinions in the positive and negative outcomes for transracial adoptions and one must look at all the factors to truly understand why many Aboriginal adult adoptees are coming forward recently to share their stories of trying to search for their identity, family and community. The Southern Manitoba First Nation Repatriation Program Evaluation (2001), which included interviews with First Nation adoptees who used the program for search and reunions, found that a majority of the adoptees interviewed indicated that

they connected with the agency in order to meet their need for knowledge about their ancestry. It appeared that the loss of identity was a compelling reason for them to continue their search for their birth family or information about their background. Despite literature that indicates adoption breakdown rates of 85-95 percent, recent research with adults adopted as children indicates that some adoptees have found solace through re-aculturating to their birth culture and contextualizing their adoptions within colonial history (Sinclair, 2007).

Context of Cultural Planning for Indigenous Children

There has been minimal research in relation to cultural planning for Aboriginal children in North America. Spence (2007) prepared a report for the MCFD and Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society focussed on developing “new approaches to benefit service deliver to Aboriginal children” (p. 4) by enhancing the Comprehensive Plan of Care with a cultural plan for when children enter care. The main goal of the cultural plan was to boost Aboriginal children’s positive sense of identity.

Similarly, in Australia in 2005, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders implemented a ‘Cultural Support Plan’ for Aboriginal children. A *Cultural Plan Support Guide* was developed to encourage workers to know who the children are and that they maintain connections to the tribal lands of both parents. This guide was developed to ensure child protection workers are keeping Aboriginal children connected to their culture, family and community when they come into state care (p.5) The plan includes details around ‘cultural links’ to Elders and extended family. The plan is signed by the child and parents to demonstrate “they have participated in the process and have received a copy of the plan” (State of Victoria, 2005, Government Department of Human Services, p.17).

Attachment and Identity

John Bowlby (1969), a psychoanalyst, has been recognized for the formulation of attachment theory. The worldview on attachment theory is a child needs to develop a healthy relationship with one primary caregiver in order to have healthy relationships later on in life. Bowlby theorizes that the interruption and loss of primary caregiver will cause emotional damage to the child. Breaking from accepted psychoanalytic thought, Bowlby recognized that in order to understand people and their behaviour, one needs to understand their environments (social and physical) and how people have adapted to them to survive (Gerhardt, 2004) and theorizes that the interruption and loss of primary caregiver will cause emotional damage to the child. Bowlby (1979) also discussed the significance of affectional bonds and of the dangers of permanent detachment and the loss of the ability for intimacy:

Many of the most intense of all human emotions arise during the formation, the maintenance, the disruption, and the renewal of affectional bonds...In terms of subjective experience, the formation of a bond is described as falling in love, maintaining a bond as loving someone and losing a partner as grieving over

someone. Similarly, threat of loss arouses anxiety and actual loss causes sorrow; whilst both situations are likely to arouse anger. Finally the unchallenged maintenance of a bond is experienced as a source of security and the renewal of a bond as a source of joy. (p. 130)

Using a Darwinian-influenced framework, Bowlby posited that infant proximity to its primary caregiver represents survival: safety from predation, starvation, variation in temperature, etc. (Karen, 1994; Main, 2000; Schore, 2003). Thus, in human beings, attachment behaviours such as crying, clinging, and smiling are intimately associated with fear, security, and survival (Main, 2000; Schore, 2003). As Main (2000) states “the infant’s insistent concern with maintenance of relations to the attachment figure represents its primary solution to situations of danger and fright” (p. 290). This solution is considered to be a necessary evolutionary adaptation.

Neckoway, Brownlee and Castellán (2007) challenge Bowlby’s theory, explaining that secure attachment in Aboriginal structures, environments and shared parenting styles can assist children to attach to shared parenting styles with extended family members. The authors explained that they “could not find research” analyzing secure attachment using Bowlby’s strange situation procedure with Aboriginal parents and children. They had researched four cultural groups Japanese, African, Germans and Israelis and from their findings there are no reliable models to measure secure attachment. Thus describing Aboriginal parenting is not a linear order that the biological mother is the sole provider to their child’s physical and emotional well-being and does not include a theory extended to extended families, clans, kin, Elders and the community. In Canada, it is not uncommon for Aboriginal families to include more than one family as residents in one home, especially on reserves due to housing shortages. Due to the number of adults residing in the home, the mother is able to rely on other adults to attend to the child’s physical and emotional needs therefore providing structure of security and belonging. The authors recommend an attachment model needs to be developed that is culturally specific to the group because not all cultures are consistent with Bowlby’s theory of secure attachment. In Thompson and Carter’s (1997) book, they introduce Helm’s concept of racial identity as, “a sense of group or collective identity based on one’s perception that he or she shares a common heritage with a particular racial group” (p. 1-2). It is important to conceptualize the psychological understanding of race is a lifelong process as it is with culture. Thompson and Carter (1997) use Landrine and Konoff’s (1996) definition of culture: “...a highly specific pool of information, categories, rules for categorization, intersubjective meanings, collective representations, and ways of knowing, understanding, and interpreting stimuli, as a result of common history” (p. 4). This implies that racial identity is an important factor in exploring transracial adoption.

Locust (2002) revealed through her study that Aboriginal children placed in non-Aboriginal foster or adoptive homes put children “at great risks for experiencing psychological trauma that leads to the development of long-term and psychological problems later in life”

naming this resulting trauma “Split Feather Syndrome” (p. 11). People identified with this syndrome demonstrated five key factors: 1) loss of Indian identity; 2) loss of family, culture, heritage, language, spiritual beliefs, tribal affiliation and tribal ceremonial experiences; 3) experience of growing up different; 4) experiencing discrimination from dominant culture and; 5) the different cognitive learning processes (Locust, 2000).

Daniels (2005) discusses the history of Aboriginal people and how adoption has impacted her family through the sixties scoop. Her qualitative study focused on three Aboriginal women, her mother, auntie and herself who have been affected by colonization in Canada. She describes how child welfare has created identity confusion for many Aboriginal people (p.49) because adopted children were placed outside of their community. This premise is also supported by Marie Fox Belly, founder of the Lost Bird Society in the United States who reports that when adoptees return to their communities they feel like outsiders and do not know their language and their heritage (Arrillage, 2001).

In Nuttgens’ (2004) research, he concluded that if children were connected to their family, community and culture, they would have positive racial identity if a non-Aboriginal adoption placement was made. Participants’ individual identities were negatively impacted if they were not connected to their culture. Connection to one’s family and community is not only essential for racial identity formation, but also for one’s development of identity in general. Berge, Mendenhall and Wrobel’s (2006) research study presents 152 adopted American adolescents and their satisfaction with openness in adoption arrangements with their biological mothers. Even though the majority of adoptees were white they stated they had wanted more contact with their birthmothers and extended family members, which “contributed to their understanding of who they are” (p. 1034).

Attachment from an Indigenous Perspective

Greenwood and de Leww (2006) state “Indigenous philosophies are underlain by a worldview that recognizes interrelationships among the spiritual, the natural and the self” (p. 178). A number of Indigenous scholars have explored processes of attachment theory from this worldview to encourage practitioners to expand their assessments in decision making for Indigenous children involved in child welfare services (De Aguayo, 1995; McCormick, 1997a; Neckoway, Brownlee and Castellan, 2007; Richard, 2004; Trevethan, Auger, Moore, Macdonald and Sinclair, 2002; Yeo, 2003). Brendtro, Brokenleg and Bockern (1990) and Rod McCormick (1997a), for example, have provided templates for a more interactional approach to belonging for the Indigenous child. Brendtro et al. (1990) include value-based interventions that inspire qualities in the child or youth that are constitutive of a more Indigenous, collectivist worldview (qualities such as generosity, belonging, mastery and independence). De Aguayo (1995) contributed research to Canada’s *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (Government of Canada, 1996) to inform public policy on adoption and First Nation children. Her research included a background paper on customary adoption that reviews the “limited ethnographic literature” concerning Aboriginal customary adoption in Canada (De Aguayo, 1995, p. 1). She

found no discussion about attachment in customary practice that “emphasizes the sentiment, authority-structures, symbols, and networks of family rather than the procreative functions of family” and cautions about the dangers of reformulating customary adoption practices within a Eurocentric framework in which issues such as attachment are highly valued (De Aguayo, 1995, pp. 31-32).

McCormick (1997b) has analyzed attachment theory as it relates to First Nation children. He concludes that First Nation people do not share the same concepts of attachment as those of Western culture, First Nation childrearing practices have changed and traditional family structures have been eroded through colonization. He encourages the use of traditional ceremonies, such as a vision quest, to encourage young people to attach themselves to nature and to a higher power such as the Great Spirit (McCormick, 1997b, p. 6). Richard (2004) observes that the literature on attachment is “reinforced by a generic knowledge base informed almost exclusively through the study of non-Aboriginal children and families” (p. 104). Importantly, he suggests that “while bonding is believed by many to be an accurate predictor of adoption success, no studies carried out with Aboriginal children in adoptive homes can be referenced to substantiate this belief” (p. 104). Neckoway, Brownlee and Castellan (2007) state that attachment theory has played

a central role as a model that informs social work practice with Aboriginal parents even though the applicability of the model for working with Aboriginal peoples has not been established. This raises the question of whether Aboriginal parenting practices are congruent with attachment theory. (p. 65)

Trevethan, Auger, Moore, Macdonald and Sinclair (2001) conducted a study with Aboriginal inmates in seven prairie institutions. Their study, “The Effect of Family Disruption on Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Inmates,” examines attachment to a primary caregiver as a preventative factor in maladaptive and antisocial behaviour. Based on interviews with Aboriginal inmates and extensive file reviews, Trevethan et al. (2001) conclude that attachment to a primary caregiver did not prevent or decrease criminal activity. However, the researchers found that “63 percent of Aboriginal inmates interviewed said they had been adopted or placed in foster or group homes at some point in their childhood compared to 36 percent of non-Aboriginal inmates” (Trevethan et al., 2001, p. 18). This experience set the context for many factors that influence criminal activity, such as the number of placements, abuse suffered in these placements and exposure to other youth involved in criminal activity. Trevethan et al. (2001) report that the research on attachment as it relates to Aboriginal children is limited. While adoption or foster care separates Aboriginal children from their family, they believe this experience also involves “separation from the Aboriginal culture and community” (p. 8), which to date, has not been explored in the literature on attachment. Yeo (2003) conducted a study on attachment and Aboriginal children in Australia and concludes that assessment is one problematic area with attachment and adoption. She states that “current assessments of the

bonding and attachment of Aboriginal children have provided an ethnocentric view based on Anglo-Celtic values” (Yeo, 2003, p. 293).

To examine some parallels with other cultures, the literature on international adoption is reviewed for its content on attachment theory. Experts on international adoption (see Groza, 1997; Horner, 2000) concur with researchers who have explored attachment theory and Aboriginal children. Groza (1997), a leading expert on international adoption, explains that attachment theory leads to an inaccurate set of diagnoses and treatment programs when children are labelled with conditions such as reactive attachment disorder (RAD) or a host of other attachment problems. These disorders are described mainly in terms of the child being unattached to parent figures, with no consideration of a broad spectrum of other issues that impact attachment (Groza, 1997, p. 9). Groza (1997) argues that simply labelling children as “unattached” places adoptive parents on the defensive, leading them to believe there is something wrong with their child and with them (p. 9).

Groza (1997) also concludes that children who suffer with attachment problems tend to be from other countries, have been institutionalized at an early age or suffer from prenatal drug or alcohol exposure. Horner (2000), taking a stronger position than Groza, disputes the whole notion of RAD finding very little empirical evidence for the ways in which attachment and bonding between adopted children and their adoptive parents can be facilitated. Horner (2000) further notes that “the literature seems limited to suggestions that parents can better meet the needs of their child by being more sensitive, accepting and caring” (p. 476). Horner’s conclusions offer some insights into the needs of Indigenous children who have been adopted. Some non-Indigenous adoptive parents may feel inadequate and question themselves, wondering what else they could have done when their relationship to their adopted child was difficult. The inabilities to answer these questions or to provide alternative strategies for parents are, as Horner observes, weaknesses in the current research on attachment.

According to Yeo (2003), “most cross-cultural attachment research has used the ‘etic’³ approach” (p. 295), meaning that it is considered culturally neutral. The notion of a culturally neutral perspective is debated and contested from many points of view, including in cultural psychology (Kagitcibasi, 1996; Pike, 1993) and in postmodernism (Berger and Luckman, 1966; Derrida, 1988; Foucault, 1980; Gergen, 1985; Rorty, 1991); it is even discounted in the original work of Pike (1993), the linguist who created the term. Once an idea has gained the status of cultural neutrality – a problematic position defined by writers of White privilege (Frankenberg, 1993; Jensen, 2001; McIntosh, 1989) – dominant culture human service professionals in search of useful culturally appropriate tools to guide their work tend not to critically examine it further.

³ Emic and etic are terms used by some in the social and behavioural sciences to refer to two different kinds of data concerning human behaviour. An emic account is a description of a behaviour or belief in terms meaningful (consciously or unconsciously) to the actor; that is, an emic account is culture-specific. An etic account is a description of a behaviour or belief by an observer, in terms that can be applied to other cultures; that is, an etic account is culturally neutral. The terms were first introduced by linguist Kenneth Pike, who argued that the tools developed for describing linguistic behaviours could be adapted to the description of any human social behaviour. Emic and etic are derived from the linguistic terms *phonemic* and *phonetic* respectively. (Wikipedia, 2008).

With the exception of a limited number of studies including Mary Ainsworth's attachment investigation in Japan and Uganda (Ainsworth, 1963; Ainsworth, 1967; Bowlby, 1969), attachment theory was not developed or researched in collectivist cultures. In particular, attachment research has not been conducted in Canadian Indigenous communities, which are founded upon different values about identity, security, family, care giving and community.

Sinclair (2007) reports adoption breakdown with Aboriginal children happens when children are getting older into their adolescence and there is confusion pertaining to their sense of identity, which damages their self-esteem. Carrière (2005) reports children need to have a connectedness to their community if child welfare is going to reduce the number of suicides and high-risk behaviours of Aboriginal adoptees.

Statistics

In the recent 2006 Canada census, statistics for domestic adoption is unattainable and provinces are held responsible to sustain their own adoption statistics (Government of Canada, 2006). More and more Canadian families are choosing international adoption. Recent statistics show that 40 percent of Canadian families adopt children from China; however in a 2006 report, there has been an 18 percent decline since 2005 (Adoption Council of Canada (ACC), n.d., 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006). According to the ACC 2006 statistics, Ontario is the leading province for international adoption with Québec being second.

Beginning in the era of residential schooling, adoption practices across Canada removed Aboriginal children from their families, communities and their culture causing cultural disruption and cultural genocide. The impact of colonization, residential schools and the *Indian Act* has had a profound effect on Aboriginal communities through losing their children by removals from families and adoption. In 1920, the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Duncan Campbell Scott was quoted as saying:

Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question and no Indian department that is the object of this Bill. (Fournier, 1997, p.58)

In British Columbia, residential schools were in operation from 1863 to 1984 and attendance for Aboriginal children between the ages of seven and fifteen was mandatory (Fournier and Crey, 1998; Brasfield, 2001). There is a growing body of literature regarding the pain and tragedies Aboriginal children endured and the systematic effect on their immediate, extended families and the community at large (Haig-Brown, 1988; Kirmayer, Brass and Tait, 2000; Law Commission of Canada, 2000).

According to Kirmayer, Brass and Tait (2000), Aboriginal children who had attended residential school suffered physical, sexual, psychological and spiritual abuse because they were unable to practice their known cultural traditions and be proud of their cultural identity. Children were threatened by the staff not to speak to anyone about their residential school experience. One survivor recalled:

I remember Sister Superior coming into the classroom to lecture us about loyalty to the school and how it was our responsibility to keep its reputation good and to bring disgrace to it and Father MacKey. “You give the school and your teachers the same loyalty you give your parents...Don’t repeat what you have seen and heard about the fights or punishments in the school especially when you go on vacation because we have ways of finding out if you do.” (Knockwood and Thomas, 1992, p. 142)

The impact of the abuse on Aboriginal children when they left residential schools brought on disconcerting behaviours. To compound the problem, parents and extended families were often unaware of the abuse their children were enduring at the residential schools.

According to the 1996 *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, 11,000 status Aboriginal children as well as countless non-registered (namely Métis and non-status) Aboriginal children were adopted out of their families and communities. Many researchers and Indigenous people commonly refer to this time as the sixties scoop (Fournier, 1997). The popular practice of that time was for social workers to remove children from their family homes without considering extended family as an alternative option for placement.

Many researchers continue to hear tragic stories of Aboriginal children during the sixties scoop losing their identity and trying to find their ways back home (Locust, 2000; Carrière, 2005; Fournier, 1997; Spears, 2003). The countless numbers of Aboriginal children forced to attend residential school and the high number of children removed and adopted during the sixties scoop, left multiple generations of families lost without their Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Over the last couple of decades, some Aboriginal families and communities have discovered that their children were not only adopted out of the community, but in some cases, out of the country. It is believed that many Aboriginal children who were adopted during the sixties scoop are unaware they have Aboriginal membership to their Nation.

In 1982, Judge Kimelman was requested to complete an inquiry to the amount of children being adopted out of the province of Manitoba. Judge Kimelman concluded the concerns of Aboriginal people were substantiated in his findings and reported the child welfare system was guilty of “cultural genocide” and stating:

In 1982, no one, except the Indian and Métis people, really believed the reality – that Native children were routinely being shipped to adoption homes in the United States and to other provinces in Canada. Every social worker, every administrator, and every agency or region viewed the situation from a narrow perspective and saw each individual case as an exception, as a case involving extenuating circumstances. No one fully comprehended that 25% of all children placed for adoption were placed outside of Manitoba. No one fully comprehended that virtually all those children were of Native descent. No one comprehended that Manitoba stood alone amongst all provinces in this abysmal practice. (Kimelman, 1984, pp. 272-73)

Judge Kimelman made several recommendations including the adoption of Aboriginal children in non-Aboriginal homes should be the last resort for placement, more resources need to be implemented to support children being placed within their communities and cultural awareness training for staff. Crichlow (2003) supports Kimelman reporting since the passing of the *Indian Act*, there has been an intentional act of “cultural genocide and racism” (p. 92) naming it as a “Western Colonization Disease” (p.92)

Statistics and qualitative data for domestic and transracial adoptions in Canada is an area that requires a great deal of attention. There is however, a growing amount of qualitative literature regarding transracial adoption, thus exploring the “lived” experiences of adoptees and offering recommendations on changes to the child welfare system.

Provincial Statistics

Currently there continues to be an over representation of Aboriginal children in care of the province of British Columbia. Aboriginal children make up 9.8 percent of the general population and as of March 2008, social work caseloads of Aboriginal children with MCFD represented 52 percent as compared to 43 percent in the fiscal year of 2001/2002 (MCFD, *Quarterly Report*, 2008). The MCFD’s March 2008 report states during the fiscal year of 2007/2008, compared with non-Aboriginal children, Aboriginal children are:

- 3.5 times more likely to have a protection concern reported;
- 4.3 times more likely to be investigated;
- 6.1 times more likely to be found in need of protection;
- 5.6 times more likely to be admitted in care; and
- 10.2 times more likely to remain in care. (MCFD, 2008. *Quarterly Report*)

Over the last five years, the demographics of children in care have remained static; of all of the children under a CCO, 56 percent of these children are Aboriginal and most of them are under the age of ten (MCFD, 2007). Sixteen years was the longest reported duration of an Aboriginal child remaining in care of the Province (MCFD, 2007). The average length in care for an Aboriginal child is 31.8 months compared to 24.4 months for a non-Aboriginal child (MCFD, 2008). The Ministry reports one of the possible reasons for the longer length in care is more Aboriginal children being placed under a Continuing Care Order than non-Aboriginal children.

Placement of adopted Aboriginal children into Aboriginal homes has decreased slightly between 2006 and 2007. MCFD’s reason for this steady decline:

The placement of Aboriginal children in non-Aboriginal homes can sometimes result from the wishes of the community.... communities generally want a home that is local, whether it is Aboriginal or not, rather than place their children in a geographically distant location in an Aboriginal home. (MCFD, 2008, p. 22)

The Ministry also noted social workers had possibly not recorded adoptions on to the Ministry’s computer network, which may impact the accuracy of the number of Aboriginal

children in care who have been placed for adoption. The statistics of Aboriginal children in continuing care of the Ministry should indicate a decrease as children who are band members are being transferred to delegated Aboriginal child and family agencies. However, the statistics do not support this claim. In addition, there has been an increase of 10 Aboriginal adoptions in 2006 and 2007 compared to the increase of 54 more of non-Aboriginal children (MCFD, 2008)

Practice and Cultural Planning for Aboriginal Children in British Columbia

In BC, *The Adoption Act* was first implemented and passed in 1920 and adoption records were kept secret from the child. In 1957, an “as if born” clause was introduced in order to erase the label of the child being called illegitimate during this era. When an adoptive order was granted by the courts, a new birth certificate was issued to the adoptive parents of the child; all connections to the biological family were severed as well as any information of the child. Adoption professionals (such as social workers), acting in the “*best interest of the child*,” made the decision as to what information was provided to adoptive families without any consultation with the biological family. Financial assistance was first introduced to the *Adoption Act* in 1989 to assist adoptive parents of children with special needs. In 1991, an active Adoption Registry was introduced into legislation (MCFD, 2003).

As of 1992, British Columbia implemented a moratorium on Aboriginal adoption due to the outcries of Aboriginal communities with regards to concerns for their children being adopted into non-Aboriginal homes. Children were being adopted without consent from their families, the Aboriginal band or communities and without the knowledge as to where the children were being placed (Sinclair, 2007).

In 1996 *The Adoption Act* and the *Child, Family and Community Service Act* were proclaimed. The purpose of the Adoption Act “...is to provide for new and permanent family ties through adoption, giving paramount consideration in every respect to the child’s best interest” (Ministry of Children and Family Development, Adoption Worker Training, p. 5)

Subsequent to these two pieces of legislation, provincial government programs were developed using grass roots organizations such as: Adoptive Families Association of BC, Society of Special Needs Adoptive Parents and BC Fetal Alcohol Support Group. The legislation also started to recognize the importance of: extended family members; custom adoptions; openness in adoption; recognizing that the child should be connected to their cultural heritage and traditions; requiring of Aboriginal communities be involved in planning for children in care; and ensuring the Province is protecting the “best interests” of children. It was also during this time that the moratorium was lifted on the adoption of Aboriginal people.

During 1997, the Exceptions Committee was formally established by Ministry for Children and Family Development and their purpose is: to review all Ministry social workers submissions and recommendations to have Aboriginal children adopted into non-Aboriginal homes, to ensure planning is done in a timely manner and the plan is in *the best interests of the child* (MCFD, 2002). Ministry social workers must provide the Exceptions Committee with:

- A brief history of the child.

- The Aboriginal community involvement including the extended family and their views of planning.
- The attempts which the social worker has made to find an Aboriginal home as well as if the community is in agreement with the plan. And if not, why.
- How the non-Aboriginal home is going to be able to meet the needs of the child including preserving the child's cultural identity and maintaining kinship relationships.
- The child's agreement or disagreement with the adoption plan.
- Recommendations from the social worker, signed by their supervisor and/or team leader and manager.
- A signed cultural plan by the adoptive parents and Aboriginal community. (MCFD, 2002)

First Nation Agencies and Adoption Policies

Lalum'utul Smun'eem Child and Family Services (LS) has delegation to provide adoption services for children in care and is not required to submit the Aboriginal cultural adoptive plan to the Exceptions Committee but rather have their own internal process that supersedes a decision from MCFD. It is important to note that this policy sets a precedent in BC as this is the first program of its kind in British Columbia and second to the Yellowhead Tribal Services Agency in Canada as First Nation agencies taking over governance and administration of adoption services for their communities. Each of these two agencies have provisions to maintain cultural ties for children in their care and for this report, we shall focus on LS

Lalum'utul' Smun'eem and the Exceptions Committee

In early 2008, Lalum'utul' Smun'eem Child and Family Services (LS), an Aboriginal agency in British Columbia, was granted the authority for adoption delegation. Executive Director, Lise Haddock, has expressed she does not want to leave a legacy of children remaining in provincial care, but wants to see healthy permanency planning through adoption for children. "Adoption: A Journey of Honour," LS's adoption policy, was designed by the community, for the community and for the children of Cowichan Tribes and in accordance with British Columbia's *Adoption Act*. LS has established the Cowichan Tribes Adoption Committee to review adoption recommendations made by the social worker, to plan for adoption and to approve cultural agreements if adoption is in the "best interest" of the child (Lalum'utul' Smun'eem Child and Family Services, 2007, p. 3).

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE LITERATURE

Context

Although limited, the literature on cultural planning certainly points to a number of considerations for adoption practice in cultural planning for Aboriginal children adopted into non-Aboriginal families. The first consideration is context. Now commonly known as the sixties scoop references period of time between 1960-1990 where a staggering 11,000 status Aboriginal children as well as countless non-registered (namely Métis and non-status) Aboriginal children were adopted out of their families and communities (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). The passing of the *Indian Act* ensured the devolution of child welfare services to provincial governments, which, according to Kimmelman (1982) and Crichlow (2003), entrenched Canada's acts of cultural genocide against First Nation people placing Indigenous children as primary targets.

Identity Confusion

The continuing debate on identity confusion for Aboriginal children placed in non-Aboriginal homes reminds us that this issue is not easily resolved in cultural planning (Carrière, 2005; Bagley, 1993; Fanshel, 1972; Grow and Shaper 1974; Ladner, 1977; Locust, 2002; Richard, 2004; Spears, 2003). The discourse on identity confusion cannot be put to rest until the complex issues of transracial adoption for Aboriginal children have been clarified in cultural planning.

Attachment Vs. Connection

The literature indicates that attachment theory is not particularly relevant in some cultures and has certainly been debated by Aboriginal scholars (Carrière, 2007; De Aguayo, 1995; Greenwood and de Lew, 2006; McCormick, 1997a; Neckoway, Brownlee and Castellan, 2007; Richard, 2004; Trevethan, Auger, Moore, Macdonald and Sinclair, 2002; Yeo, 2003). In addition, Brendtro, Brokenleg and Bockern (1990) and Rod McCormick (1997a) suggest that a discussion on connectedness has stronger cultural meaning to Aboriginal peoples than the suggestion that children should attach to one or two principle figures in their lives.

Cultural Planning Practice

In British Columbia, there exists some examples of cultural planning through MCFD and a more recent effort by the Lalum'utul' Smun'eem Child and Family Services in Duncan that recommend: "Cultural plans should be embarked upon when the child comes into care and not waiting until the child becomes a continuing care ward of the province or waiting for adoption" (Lalum'utul'Smuneem Child and Family Services, 2007). The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Australia have accepted a cultural planning process to ensure cultural continuity for Aboriginal children in care of the state and implement these plans as children enter care. These experiences point to the need for expediency in cultural planning rather than waiting until the adoption process.

Summary: Literature Review

We trust that the literature review provided some context for cultural planning and Aboriginal adoptions in BC and other jurisdictions. The literature on Aboriginal adoption is extensive. We have attempted to capture some major themes in various relevant bodies of literature for this report that inform a number of recommendations for cultural planning and adoption of Aboriginal children. These are addressed later in the report as part of an overall analysis of findings and recommendations.

FINDINGS – GROUNDED THEORY APPLIED

Participant Descriptions

In this study, twenty participants represent two major groups: adoptive families and Aboriginal community representatives. While one youth was interviewed, due to confidentiality reasons, we have not used his information knowing that his interview and experiences may likely identify him. We begin by providing a general overview of each group.

Adoptive Families

There were thirteen families, for a total of sixteen individual participants, who were interviewed from various geographical locations within British Columbia. The four regions represented in the study are: Vancouver Island – Central (five families); Northern (two families); Vancouver Coastal (three families); and Interior (three families).

Adoptive Family Characteristics

Within these families, three were single parent families and ten were two parent families. The inclusion criteria required these families to be non-Aboriginal, however, the interviewer was informed at the time of the interview that one of the fathers has Métis ancestry. Given this information, the interviewer proceeded with the interview although she bracketed his comments in her notes to be further considered in the analysis. Three of these families were new parents while the remainder of families had extensive experience as foster parents or adoptive families. Since the interviews focused on participant experiences with adoption and cultural planning for Aboriginal children, no other individual demographic data was collected such as age, educational or financial background.

The Aboriginal children adopted in these families ranged from toddlers to early adolescents. Three of the families expressed that their child had been diagnosed with some complex medical needs. Another five participants discussed some emotional delays and special educational requirements. The remainder did not discuss any unique issues in child development other than socio-cultural needs which will be addressed in the findings.

The children's cultural backgrounds were mostly of First Nation ancestry though two families adopted Métis children and one family adopted an Inuit child. Out of the thirteen families, nine have some involvement with the birth family and the child's community in varying degrees. The remaining four are in various stages of wishing to connect or have no contact with either the child's birth family or community. All of the participants in the adoptive family group were eager and pleased to be involved in this study in hopes of contributing to some changes in the cultural planning process for adoption of Aboriginal children.

Aboriginal Community Representatives

There were four participants in this group who were from various geographic and cultural backgrounds. This includes two First Nation participants, one from Vancouver Island and one from the Vancouver Coastal region. Both First Nation participants are involved in adoption

through some frontline work and as advocates for culturally relevant adoption practices for Aboriginal children. Both have been directly involved in cultural planning for First Nation children being adopted. One of these participants is also an adoptive parent through a customary adoption.

There were two Métis participants in this group who were from Vancouver Island and from the Interior region respectively. One of them is directly involved in cultural planning for Métis children while the other participant has some past experiences with cultural planning and currently works with Métis families involved with the child and family services system.

Each of the Aboriginal representatives had several recommendations on cultural planning which will be addressed in the findings.

Interview Guide

Following Rubin and Rubin's (1995) recommendation for selecting a topic of conversation or categories of questions, an interview guide for participants was developed for this study (see Table 1.1, 2.2 and 3.3; Appendix B). This guide was designed to assist the interviewers in asking the right sequence and cluster of questions. Moreover, it allowed the study to honour the use of storytelling while also serving as a gentle reminder to participants to stay focused on the story. Yegidis and Weinbach (2006) suggest that it is important to develop questions that are "broad" and can lead to other subsets of questions (p. 69). Creswell (2007) states that "qualitative research questions are open-ended, evolving, and non-directional; restate the purpose of the study in more specific terms; start with a word such as "what" or "how" rather than "why" and are few in number (five to seven)" (p. 106).

TABLE 1.1: Interview Guide Adoptive Parents

1. Can you tell me about your child?
2. What was the adoption experience like for you?
3. How were you involved in the cultural planning for him/her?
4. What has been the most rewarding aspects of this cultural plan?
5. Please describe any challenges with the cultural plan?
6. Do you have any recommendations you would like to make to MCFD about cultural planning for Aboriginal children and adoption?
7. Do you have any other comments for this interview?

TABLE 2.2: Interview Guide for Aboriginal Community Representatives

1. Can you tell me about your experiences with adoption and children you are related to?
2. How were you involved in cultural planning for him/her/them?
3. What have been the most rewarding aspects of these cultural plans?
4. Please describe any challenges with the cultural plans.
5. Do you have any recommendations you would like to make to MCFD about cultural planning for Aboriginal children and adoption?

6. Do you have any other comments for this interview?

TABLE 3.3: Interview Guide for Aboriginal Youth

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself?
2. How old were you when you knew you were adopted?
3. How did you learn about your birth family and community?
4. Have you met members of your birth family and have regular contact with them?
5. How was your adoptive family involved with your birth family and community?
6. Was there a plan to help you learn about your family and community?
7. Do you have any suggestions about cultural plans for Aboriginal children and youth?
8. Do you have any other comments for this interview?

Discussion

This section reflects back on the research questions, which centre around recommendations for cultural planning for Aboriginal children adopted into non-Aboriginal families in British Columbia. Examining the key findings from participant interviews and reflecting upon key issues raised in the literature review accomplish this. The discussion concludes with a conceptual model that demonstrates the grounded theory in this study.

Interviews

The adoptive parents interviewed for this study demonstrated an overall concern for cultural planning and the Aboriginal children in their care. Most were open to suggestions, looking for resources and eager to be educated on practices that would support their children's cultural development. What was outstanding for the research team was the willingness by adoptive parents to pursue a cultural plan for Aboriginal children who are being adopted. The Aboriginal community representatives interviewed for this study each had a long cumulative history of working in the field of adoptions. Their personal and professional investments in culturally relevant and supportive practice frameworks for cultural planning were apparent. Some of them had experienced cultural planning in their work and in their families. The findings are outlined below under categories and sub-categories for each group of participants.

Adoptive Parent Interviews

Category: Education

This was a core category identified by adoptive parents. Within this category participants identified a number of sub themes or categories such as *information, training and communication*.

Sub-Category: Information

Participants discussed the need for more information on cultural planning prior to the process of adoption taking place. Participant 5 explains: "We didn't know about all the

paperwork, procedures, etc. It should have been explained better to us. There are no mentors available and getting information was most challenging.” Participant 8 said they received forms for the cultural plans in the mail and “had no idea what it was about and wished that someone would have told us what is an appropriate cultural plan.” Participant 12 said they “want to do the right thing, but are unclear how and who to talk to.” Participant 14 said that “there was not enough information and needed a heads up in what’s involved.”

Sub-Category: Training

A number of participants discussed the need for more training in working with cultural plans and with birth families and communities. Participant 8 said they would have appreciated some training on cultural planning and what it entails. Participant 13 suggested “cultural sensitivity training is important and might help in creating a cultural plan.” Participant 17 said that some training in cultural planning would have alleviated some anxiety in how to reach out to people as it is “important to know who the family is and how they can be reached out to.”

Sub-Category: Communication.

Participants 5 who adopted an Inuit child said no one is communicating with them now and they “have to figure things out as we go.” These participants are the only family who adopted an Inuit child in this study and their challenges around getting support were apparent throughout the interview. Participant 7 said that someone from the Exceptions Committee should have communicated directly with them on these matters rather than all the paperwork. Participant 11 said it would be helpful to “have someone to talk to in the Ministry about cultural planning – an advocate or something.” Participant 12 who adopted a Métis child does not know who to speak to. They “don’t know if our child is Métis and we are not sure where it would be OK to ask for help.” Participant 16 asked for a newsletter from the agency that handled the adoption to know about community events.

Category: Birth Family and Community Assumptions

There were a number of issues identified that referred to assumptions about the child’s birth family and community, which supports the need for more information, training and support. Participant 3 informed the interviewer that the child’s “band is not interested in him as he is handicapped.” This participant also had a number of other assumptions around cultural practices such as Sweetgrass ceremonies and that Aboriginal children should be placed “where they are loved – it’s good to expose them to their culture if it still exists,” and felt that Aboriginal people are “Canadians first” and that teaching them about their roots is “a mess these days.” Participant 16 said they had to “unlearn [their] racism” and that was difficult. Participant 10 said there were assumptions about them as parents because the father is First Nations and at the time of the adoption, they lived on the reserve so there was an assumption that the cultural plan “was a given and the children would be given exposure.” What happened, however, is that they had to work very hard to find the birth family and find resources to assist them.

Category: Cultural Plans

Sub-Category: MCFD Exceptions Committee

There were a number of assumptions about the MCFD Exceptions Committee with regards to their role and function. Participant 7 said the Exceptions Committee needs to be restructured to be more personal and supportive. They stated that

I think it would be better if whoever is making these decisions got right in there with the family and found out what the family’s needs are because a lot of families don’t know where to go to access the culture.

Later in the interview, Participant 7 stated that the Exceptions Committee should be involved with families “when we are wanting to adopt – not just making decisions about people and children they don’t know.” Participant 10 said that the Exceptions Committee needs to be

involved with face-to-face discussions with families. Participant 15 found the demands of the Exceptions Committee frustrating as they were already involved with the child's family and the bureaucracy was taking so much time to finalize the process.

Sub-Category: Discrepancy

There was a broad discrepancy in the application of the cultural planning policy as described by these participants. Participant 1 and 2 spoke of positive experience with everyone working together and no trouble with the cultural planning process. Participant 3 said it took two years of court involvement while they tried to reach the birth family. Participant 4 adopted an Inuit child through a private agency and developed their own cultural plan, but stated that it felt like quite an informal process. This participant stated that "the government of BC needs to be more informed about Inuit children – we had to figure things out as we went." Participant 8 also adopted privately and received the cultural plan in the mail. They didn't know what it was about and in their agency's experience, it was the first adoption of an Aboriginal child. They reported to have done everything laid out in the plan "and never heard about it again." According to Participant 8 in their attempt to get assistance from MCFD they were told "it's not our adoption so we don't care." Participant 10 was not obligated to abide to a cultural plan as her ex-partner was First Nations and it did not apply. Participant 12 was not sure if their child is Métis or not and has been struggling to pursue cultural planning although the child is in their home already. Four participants who adopted through a First Nation agency reported that their cultural plans were developed for them and were all the same plan.

Sub-Category: Resources

In this sub-category, adoptive parents spoke of the expectations required of them and the lack of resources to fulfill their obligations under their cultural plans. For the adoptive parents of the Inuit child, they are finding that "travel is expensive to maintain contact." Participant 11 had many children in her home and "that needs for travel are difficult." Other resources identified as necessary are cultural mentors to support adoptive parents in cultural planning. Many parents had purchase books, films, dictionaries, cook books but as Participant 8 stated, "we need to find someone to help with connections" since their daughter is from a First Nation quite distant from them. Participants 1, 2 and 11 spoke of informal cultural mentors who told them about community events and other relevant information to assist them but spoke of a need to have this for everyone.

Sub-Category: Staff

Many participants in this study identified support from workers as a strength and resource. Parents involved with the First Nation agency were relieved to have support of Elders and stated that having consistent workers are important. Participant 14 said "get more workers if that's what's needed. There are 1500 kids waiting!" Participant 16 however said they were "afraid of MCFD staff. You feel like they will come and take the kids."

Sub-Category: Follow-Up

It was interesting to note that a number of parents in this study spoke of the need for follow-up or monitoring of cultural plans. Some parents discussed how no one really checks on how cultural plans are working and this can influence parents to put anything down on paper. Participant 13 said, “people told her just put anything down so you can have your kids.” However, Participant 1 felt that there was follow-up from their worker. Participant 5 spoke of how long it takes to get paperwork concluded let alone any follow-up resulting from requests that are made. Participant 6 stated that “follow-up on cultural plans is important and the resources are there to do it.”

Sub-Category: Support Services

Many of the participants had expectations around services to assist them with cultural planning for their children. Participant 8 said “services should be available for families with Native children – at least a list of what’s available out there.” Participant 13 received assistance from their neighbors who agreed to help and be witnesses for their abilities by speaking to the child’s First Nation community. Participant 7 described that support would look like “hooking you up to First Nation people with a non-Aboriginal family so that they have that support” for cultural planning.

Category: Stress

Sub-Category: Safety

The biggest concern for adoptive families in this study was the fear in waiting for cultural plans to be approved. Participant 1 said

we are very committed to this child and the fear was that someone was going to come forward that would be deemed more suitable than us ... so we did not even feel comfortable to celebrate until we had the order.

Participant 7 was concerned about the stress that children feel without knowing the safety of adoption and that “the Exceptions Committee should be helping First Nation kids find forever homes and include those families in that forever planning with the biological families and with the community.” Participant 10 suggests that it is the fear of the unknown that prevent families from connecting with birth families. She stated, “there are people who are threatened by birth families. They are threatened by culture. It’s because they don’t know anything about it.”

Sub-Category: Costs

The main cost discussed by adoptive families was related to expectations with travel to the child’s birth family and community. Participant 3 is reluctant to take their child to another province into a remote northern community due to costs to take the whole family. Participant 1

said they take their child annually to visit her home community and the costs are quite extensive since they wish to bring gifts and need lodging and food, however, they do it gladly. As Participant 11 also has a number of children and cited that the cost of travel is only one piece and that other associated expenses were “the care for my other kids because they are home schooled.”

Category: Commitment

Sub-Category: Willingness

In spite of challenges, most families are willing to do what they can to ensure their child’s culture is maintained. Some are just exploring a range of options on their own and some are very connected to a cultural mentor or the child’s family and community. Participant 1 stated that

we actually have engaged with the community. We are not Aboriginal so we just have always felt it would be very arrogant of us to assume we knew what was appropriate to teach her, so we would let her community guide what we teach her.

Participant 3 however felt that, “the primary objective is to place them where they are loved. It’s good to expose them to their culture if it still exists. I think teaching them about their roots is a mess these days.”

Sub-Category: Openness To Birth Families

For the most part, participants in this study were open to being involved with birth families. This involvement occurred in various ways with families and some are connected more often and consistently than others. Participant 2 said one of the birth family members will be assisting their children to learn their language. Participant 5 said they were invited to the birth of their Inuit child and all the relatives were there to meet them and they have stayed in touch with email and photos. Participant 7 said that she has a very good relationship with her children’s birth mom and that she believes that “children need their families and birth parents.” Participant 8 created a website so everyone in their child’s birth family and community can see her progress, especially her birth mother;

so that at her own leisure, she can ... whatever ... in the middle of the night if she’s thinking about her and needs to see how she is doing and doesn’t have to worry about writing us or whatever.

Participant 10 found the birth family on her own because the Ministry was not helping her and she said “it’s just a matter of finding out names and keep pushing to find people and contacting them ... I was really fortunate that the people I did find were open and really respectful.”

Aboriginal Representative Interviews

Category: Ceremony

Participant 4 said that in her experience with cultural planning, “it began with ceremony and creating a climate of safety.” Participant 6⁴ said that it is important for the whole family to participate in ceremony “because everyone needs to learn about culture.” Participant 9 described how she helps to organize a community ceremony that involves Elders and provides a cultural package to each family that contains information about culture, history and traditions.

Sub-Category: Cultural Rights

Participant 4 emphasized that it is an issue of rights for Aboriginal children to remain connected to their culture. She stated that, “connection to culture and birth family should be mandatory as sending an Indigenous child to live outside of their culture is in itself a violation of the convention on the rights of Indigenous children.” Participant 6 said that for Métis children, “it is important to have appropriate people like Métis resource people for Métis teachings.” Participant 9 suggests that cultural planning should be in legislation or the policy needs to be strengthened as “there is too much discrepancy in how it works.” Participant 17 reminds us that culture is a way of life and “when you have that cultural piece, you are at peace with yourself and thrive spiritually.”

Sub-Category: Community Connections

Participant 17 states that community connection assists adoptive families to “develop an appreciation of First Nation gifts and what can be offered to children such as potlatch, naming, understanding and celebrating family.” All four participants expressed the importance of a reciprocal arrangement with adoptive families and the child’s Aboriginal community. Participant 4 described “circles of responsibility in our communities which will help draw kids back into our community.” Participant 6 said that Aboriginal communities could help by letting adoptive families feel safe in their community and that communities should “be willing to teach people and they will understand more about Aboriginal cultures.” Participant 9 has noticed a growing interest from communities with “people wanting to be involved rather than cut off from the child.”

⁴ Interviews are numbered according to interview sequence and not as participants one to four.

Category: Resources

Sub-Category: Information

Participant 4 highlighted the importance of birth family and adoptive families sharing information and communicating so that “talking with each other you can share some dreams and talk about things for the child that no one else would get.” Participant 9 suggests that the more involvement there is with an adoptive family the less likely that there could be an adoption breakdown. She also stated that Aboriginal community members are on a healing journey and also “need somewhere to go for information” so a cultural planning resource worker can assist both adoptive and birth families. Participant 17 describes that one of the major obstacles for adoptive families is lack of information and that it is “important to know who the child’s birth family is and who can be reached out to.”

Sub-Category: Follow-Up Resources

Participant 4 discussed the importance of monitoring a cultural plan and that someone in the birth family should be able to say, “I’m attached to the child and whoever adopts the child adopts me too.” Participant 9 expressed the constant need for resource people to support the cultural planning process and that “follow-up on cultural plans is important.” She continued by describing a situation with an inter-provincial adoption where she assisted to identify cultural and community resources in another province to ensure cultural continuity. She states that she makes follow-up calls with adoptive families, “but that’s rare anywhere else.”

Category: Cultural Planning Practice

In this category, participants emphasized the need for a collaborative approach between adoptive families and the child’s Aboriginal community. The need for consistency was expressed as a priority and that there should not be so many variations in the approach to cultural planning. As Participant 4 commented, there is a need for “a consistent resource person” and that in community, we need to remember that “we are all related and we need to revive that sense of connection and responsibility to each other.” Participant 6 emphasized the need to support cultural planning practices because “when parents learn about Aboriginal culture then they will create a positive atmosphere for the Aboriginal child.” Participant 9 believes that appropriate cultural planning prevents adoption dissolution and programs such as the Roots program “makes sure that they are participating in cultural events and learn what they can do to help the child.” She continues by stating that cultural planning “should be in legislation or the policy needs to be changed as there is too much discrepancy in how it works.” She adds that, “workers and management need to be educated as well – a connection is needed at all levels.” Participant 17 believes that “cultural planning should be done immediately, as soon as children come into care.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations were formulated from the analysis of interview findings and from reviewing the literature. The following are inspired by the persistence of both adoptive parents and Aboriginal community representatives to address the importance of cultural planning in British Columbia for Aboriginal children being adopted. A set of *Final Recommendations* were developed that capture both the interviews and the literature review.

Summary of Adoptive Parent Recommendations

- Be mindful that the primary objective is to place children in a home where they are loved.
- Support the cultural plans that people commit to and provide families and communities with the needed resources to follow those cultural plans.
- Coordinate face-to-face meetings with the child's family and community in order to develop the plan together and make all the necessary connections.
- Develop resources to assist families address the cultural needs of Inuit children in British Columbia.
- Build more bridges to open opportunities for non-Aboriginal adoptive families and create extended families for adopted kids.
- Provide resources such as support and information to every family with an Aboriginal child.
- Make cultural planning universal.
- Set up of micro-boards or small advocacy groups and/or an individual advocate to monitor the cultural planning for each child.
- Support people in the Aboriginal community who can facilitate connections for the adoptive family and child.
- Develop, train and administer education on cultural planning to children, social workers, families and communities.
- Follow through on cultural planning with appropriate supports for families and communities.

Summary of Aboriginal Community Representative Recommendations

- Place more emphasis on family and community knowledge for adoption workers.
- Change the policy to legislation or strengthen the policy to make it consistent and binding for every child.
- Facilitate cultural planning for Aboriginal adoptive families.
- Provide the needed resources to cover the costs associated with cultural planning to families, communities and agencies.
- Initiate and sustain community building activities to get people involved in conversations about Aboriginal children and adoption.

- Establish processes that will involve the child’s family and community in preparing a child’s cultural plan. Have a mediator involved who understands family dynamics and is aware of cultural knowledge and traditions.
- Be conscious of the fact that workers involved in cultural planning have more power than the people they are trying to assist. Establish protocol and guidelines for how to address these power imbalances.

Summary of Recommendations from developed from the Literature Review

- Cultural plans should be embarked upon when the child comes into care; it is essential to not wait until the child becomes a Continuing Care ward of the Province or is being placed for adoption.
- MCFD and Aboriginal agencies need to coordinate to provide cultural outreach to non-Aboriginal adoptive families. As adoptive parents do not always feel “welcome” in Aboriginal communities and may fear rejection or possible backlash by the birth family, it is important for MCFD and Aboriginal agencies to help adoptive families to make a connection in the community and to gain access to services.
- A genogram of the child’s birth family be attached to the cultural plan. This is important for the Exception Committee specifically as they can then be made aware of family members who have been approached while the child has been in care and during the adoption process.
- The implementation of a standard for social workers to have family group conferences as a pre-cursor to adoption planning is perceived to be a potentially important step prior to children coming into care. This could clearly demonstrate efforts to engage families in permanency planning and to secure possible family resources for children. Family group conferences could identify members who are willing to provide cultural connections/mentoring for children and potential adoptive families.
- Aboriginal agencies and the Province of British Columbia require further financial support to recruit, maintain and support Aboriginal family care homes and adoptive families.
- Developing a culturally appropriate home study for Aboriginal caregivers and adoptive families.
- Exploring the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander’s model of a “Cultural Support Plan” to enhance the comprehensive plan of care that ensures children are being connected to their identity, culture and extended family. These plans help to end the mass emotional and psychological trauma children are experiencing when they are not connected to their culture.

Final Recommendations for Practice in Cultural Planning for Aboriginal Children and Adoption

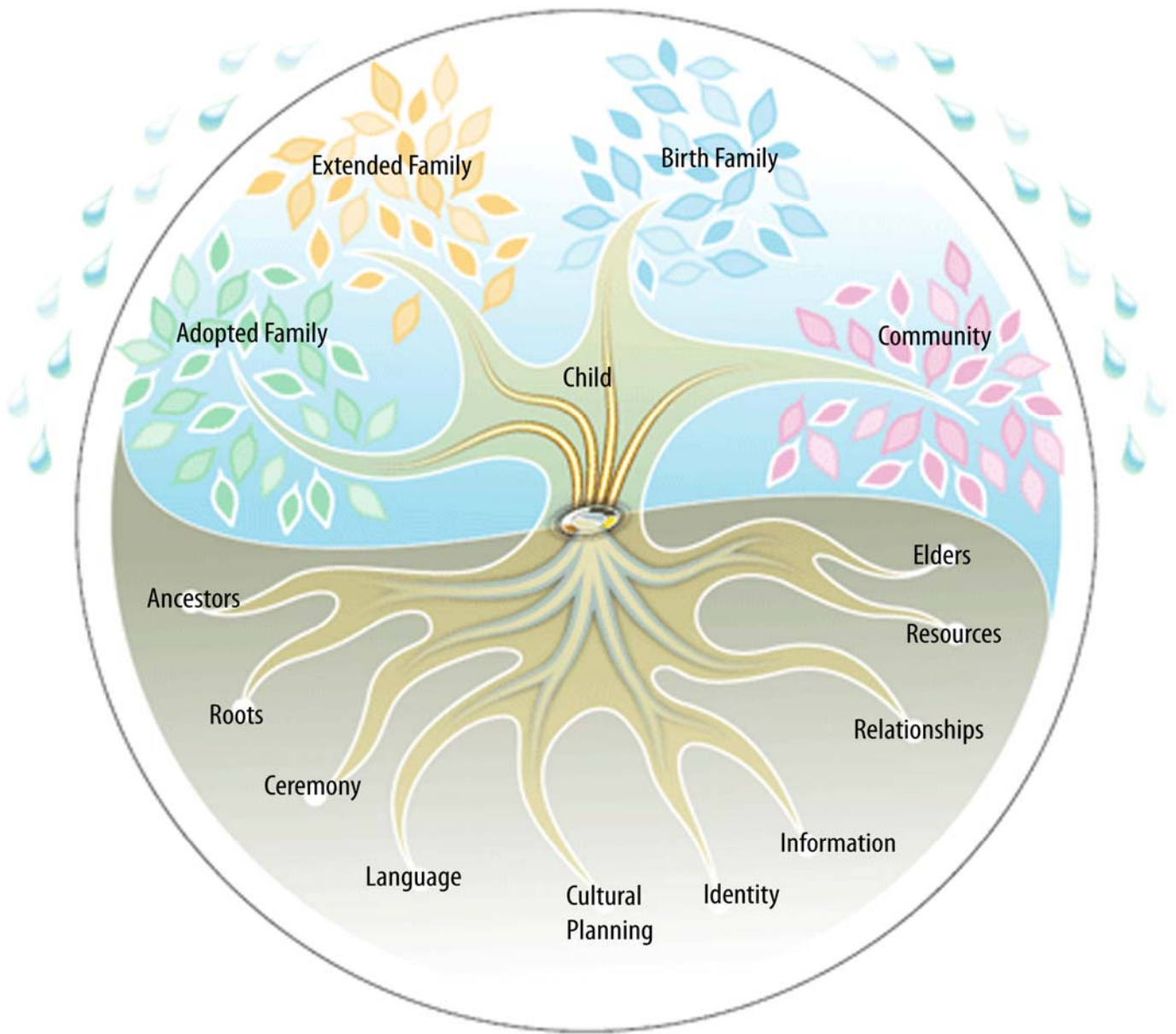
This section is a correlation of recommendations that were consistent within the interviews and the literature review as the final recommendations for practice within this report:

- Legislation and policy changes are required to ensure that cultural plans are developed as part of a comprehensive plan of care when Aboriginal children come into care and prior to the adoption process.
- Cultural brokers should be identified for First Nation, Metis and Inuit children being adopted into non Aboriginal homes. A list of resource persons and agencies should be provided to adoptive families.
- MCFD and Aboriginal agencies need to coordinate to provide cultural outreach to non-Aboriginal adoptive families on a more personal basis than what currently exists. This should be delivered through face to face services and use models such as Family Group Conferencing to facilitate a process of relationship building, negotiation and establish mutual commitments with the child's birth family and/or community members and the adoptive family.
- Resources for cultural planning need to be identified within MCFD for: financial assistance to families to fully engage in maintaining a cultural plan, education and training for adoptive families, dedicated resource staff to assist in cultural planning and financial assistance to Aboriginal agencies that can be instrumental in assisting adoptive families to develop and maintain an appropriate cultural plan.
- Education and training in effective cultural planning is necessary for MCFD adoption workers

CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The following model is the vision that contains the important elements of cultural planning for Aboriginal children and adoption. The graphic of the tree used to demonstrate this child centred ecological framework was adapted with permission from the Canadian Council on Learning (2007). The Principal Investigator has named the model as the *Extended Family Tree of Adoption*. It demonstrates the critical environmental factors for an Aboriginal child's development within adoption which considers a broad spectrum of family and cultural ties. It is hoped that this tree can be planted for every Aboriginal child being considered for adoption.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL: *The Extended Family Tree of Adoption*



TREE OF LIFE: GROUNDED THEORY

As portrayed above, the conceptual framework constructs the analogy that the tree of life, for an Aboriginal adoptee, includes a number of branches to support his/her development. The words appearing on the tree's branches were themes and sub-themes in this study. The theme that was common amongst participants is that cultural planning is critical for Aboriginal adoption. From this overarching theme, what was apparent as the emerging theory that *cultural planning is an essential practice for Aboriginal adoptions and must be applied consistently, with supporting resources to build an extended family for the child where he/she will be exposed to their cultural, linguistic, historical and ancestral knowledge.*

It is important to note that both groups of participants discussed the value of cultural planning, although opinions differed on the process to connect with their child's Aboriginal heritage. The research results indicate that we are at a place in the history of Aboriginal adoptions in British Columbia where the awareness of cultural needs is within the spectrum of basic needs for Aboriginal children.

Future Research

What remain important areas of research are a means to engage and a space for more adopted youths' voices and perspectives to be heard regarding their experiences of cultural planning processes. Hearing from adoption workers would also be an important area for future research on cultural planning.

SUMMARY REMARKS

This journey has been inspiring to the research team members who witnessed the stories of conviction and love for Aboriginal children in British Columbia who belong to many families. We have been touched by the commitment of adoptive families and the cultural wisdom and willingness to share by Aboriginal participants in the study. It is apparent that cultural planning for Aboriginal children in adoption is an important practice consideration for a number of people in their lives. Their adoptive families have concerns that this needs to happen in a good way and their birth families want to maintain some connection to these children, if only to know where they are and that they are loved. We have developed a number of recommendations to be considered by MCFD in addressing the cultural planning policy and we hope they are useful in the deliberations around this policy. We encourage more conversations with other stakeholders such as adoption workers to examine this policy within the context of today's adoption practice climate. We hope that Eagle's poem remains in the memory banks of all those who have the ability to make a difference for Aboriginal children in the adoption circle.

Eagle's Poem

Poem by Eagle

When I was a baby, they took me
away, and the change in my life was as night unto day.
They took me away from the reservation, and all was lost of my Indian nation.
They taught me to speak English and undid my braids, and said to me,
“Little girl, you’ve got it made.”
My mother’s love was conditional to me, and as I grew older, I began to see.
When I was bad, she’d put me to bed and say,
“No hugs or kisses; you were naughty today.”
When I reached adolescence, things really got bad,
and everything I did made my mother mad.
I ran away often, hoping I would find someone or
something to give me peace of mind.
More than 25 years have now passed away;
is the little girl lost inside of me this day?
I’ve built up a wall which is stronger than steel,
but it’s there to keep out the pain that I feel.
I’m searching for you, and I’ll look everywhere.
I hope you’re the person who really does care.
It’s hard to believe that what they say is true,
but I’ll never know ‘till I hear it from you.
I believe that your love can set my heart free.
I want to be loved unconditionally.

From Carrière (2005), *Connectedness and Health for First Nation Adoptees*.

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APPENDIX A: Consent Form

Title: Strengthening Cultural Plans for Aboriginal Children and Adoption

Researcher: Jeannine Carriere

Assistant Professor, School of Social Work
University of Victoria
Victoria, B.C.
Phone: 250-721-6452
Email: carriere@uvic.ca

This study has received ethical approval from the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria. If you have any concerns you can reach them at 250-472-4545 or email them at ethics@uvic.ca

Participant Consent

Please circle your answers:

- | | | |
|--|-----|----|
| Do you understand that you have been asked to participate in a research study about cultural planning and Aboriginal adoption? | Yes | No |
| Have you received and read an Information letter about the research? | Yes | No |
| Do you understand the risks and benefits in taking part in the research? | Yes | No |
| Have you had a chance to ask questions and talk about the research? | Yes | No |
| Do you understand that you can leave the research at any time? | Yes | No |
| Has the researcher explained how personal information will be handled? | Yes | No |
| Do you know what the information you give will be used for? | Yes | No |
| Have you been advised that you will receive a summary of final results? | Yes | No |

The research was explained to me by: _____

I agree to take part in the research and I understand what the research is about

Signature of Research Participant

Printed Name

Witness:_____

Date

I believe that the person signing this form understands what is involved in the research and voluntarily agrees to participate.

Signature of Researcher

APPENDIX B: Interview Guides

Interview Guide for Adoptive Parents

1. Can you tell me about your child?
2. What was the adoption experience like for you?
3. How were you involved in the cultural planning for him/her?
4. What has been the most rewarding aspects of this cultural plan?
5. Please describe any challenges with the cultural plan?
6. Do you have any recommendations you would like to make to MCFD about cultural planning for Aboriginal children and adoption?
7. Do you have any other comments for this interview?

Interview Guide for Aboriginal Community Representatives

1. Can you tell me about your experience with adoption and children you are related to?
2. How were you involved in the cultural planning for him/her/them?
3. What have been the most rewarding aspects of this cultural plan?
4. Please describe any challenges with the cultural plan?
5. Do you have any recommendations you would like to make to MCFD about cultural planning for Aboriginal children and adoption?
6. Do you have any other comments for this interview?

APPENDIX C: Recruitment Letters

Recruitment Letter for Adoptive Families

Title: Inviting Adoptive Parents to Inform the Cultural Planning Process for Aboriginal Children

We are inviting adoptive parents to participate in an exciting project which examines the outcome of the cultural planning process for Aboriginal children adopted into non-Aboriginal homes. The research is being coordinated by Dr. Jeannine Carriere at the University of Victoria School of Social Work and a Master of Social Work student Kim Grzybowski and being funded by the Ministry of Children and Family Development In order to participate in this research you must meet the following criteria:

- Be a non Aboriginal adoptive parent of an Aboriginal child
- Live in the province of British Columbia
- Involved in a cultural planning process for your child

If you meet these criteria and are interested in being interviewed, please contact Dr. Carriere by phone or email for further information and to discuss the possibility of an in interview. Her contact information is as follows:

Jeannine Carriere

University of Victoria, School of Social Work

P.O.Box 1700 STN CSC

Victoria, BC

V8W-2W2

Phone during office hours: 250-721-6452

Email: carriere@uvic.ca

Recruitment Letter for Adopted Youth

Heading: Looking for Aboriginal Adopted Youth to Share their Story

We are inviting Aboriginal adopted youth to participate in an exciting project which looks at the cultural planning process for Aboriginal children adopted into non-Aboriginal homes. The research is being coordinated by Dr. Jeannine Carriere at the University of Victoria School of Social Work and a Master of Social Work student Kim Grzybowski and being funded by the Ministry of Children and Family Development. If you are interested in sharing your story and views on your culture we would really like to hear from you. To participate you must be:

- An Aboriginal youth age 13 to 19 adopted into a non Aboriginal home
- Live in British Columbia

Kim is hoping to interview youth in January and February 2008. If you are interested, please phone or send an email to her at the following:

Phone: 250-701-4222

Email: ggrzybow@telus.net

Recruitment Letter for Aboriginal Community Representatives

Title: Inviting Aboriginal Community Members to Inform the Cultural Planning Process for Aboriginal Children and Adoption

We are inviting Aboriginal community members to participate in a project that examines the cultural planning process for Aboriginal children adopted into non-Aboriginal homes. The research is being coordinated by an Aboriginal research team at the University of Victoria School of Social Work and being funded by the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

Dr. Jeannine Carriere who is Metis teaches in the Social Work Indigenous Specialization and Kim Grzybowski is a First Nation Masters student who will assist with the research. If the following applies to your situation we would really like to hear from you:

- You are an Aboriginal family or community member of an adopted child
- You live in British Columbia
- You have been involved in a cultural plan for this child

If this fits for you and you are interested in being interviewed, please contact Jeannine by phone or email for further information and to discuss the possibility of an in interview. Her contact information is as follows:

Jeannine Carriere

University of Victoria, School of Social Work

P.O.Box 1700 STN CSC

Victoria, BC

V8W-2W2

Phone during office hours: 250-721-6452

Email: carriere@uvic.ca

APPENDIX D: Cultural Planning Study Information Letter



Jeannine Carriere, PhD
Faculty Member, School of Social Work
University of Victoria
POBox 1700 STN CSC
Victoria, BC
V8W-2Y2

CULTURAL PLANNING STUDY INFORMATION LETTER

Hello and thanks again for being interested in this project and as promised, we are sending you more information about this research. This project was designed to examine the cultural planning project for Aboriginal children who are adopted by non-Aboriginal families in British Columbia. The study is being funded by the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). The Ministry of Children and Family Development Cultural Planning Policy was developed in 1996 to ensure that the culture of Aboriginal children being adopted was maintained.

Now that the policy has existed for over ten years, the Ministry thought it was necessary to see how this process has been working for everyone involved: Aboriginal youth, Aboriginal community members, non Aboriginal adoptive families.

As you know the research team invited to conduct this study includes Jeannine Carriere from the University of Victoria School of Social Work and Kim Grzybowski a Masters student at UVic. Jeannine and Kim want to interview participants from each of these important groups. The research team recognizes that it is important for participants to know how their ideas will be used. First the interviews will set up at a place that is convenient for you. Some interviews may have to be conducted by phone. Your name will not be used for the purposes of this research however you may be asked to supply a nickname that will be attached to your interview. A tape recorder will be used during the interview to help the researchers remember all the important points and the researcher may take some notes during the interview.

Once the researcher has the tapes transcribed, they will send your interview results back to you to make sure you are satisfied with the results. If you do not reply then it will mean that you agree with the content of the interview which will be examined for themes that will go into a final report to MCFD. No-one's names will be shared with MCFD and the interview tapes and transcripts will be stored in a locked cabinet at the university. Once the research is complete, the tapes and transcripts will be destroyed after a period of six months.

Before the interview begins, you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you are being interviewed by phone the interview will not take place until you mail or fax the consent form to the research team. The Ministry of Children and Family Development will receive a copy of the results through a final report prepared by the researchers and will use the report to revise their cultural planning policy for Aboriginal children being adopted.

We hope that this clarifies the intention of this research and how the interviews will take place. We will be contacting you in the near future to see if you have further questions and to set up an interview with you. This study has received ethical approval from the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria. If you have any concerns you can reach them at 250-472-4545 or email them at ethics@uvic.ca. Thanks very much for your time and assistance with this research.

Jeannine Carriere

University of Victoria, School of Social Work

P.O. Box 1700 STN CSC

Victoria, BC V8W-2Y2

Phone during office hours: 250-721-6452

Email: carriere@uvic.ca

Kim Grzybowski

5932 Jaynes Street

Duncan, BC V9L-4W8

250-701-4222

ggrzybow@telus.net

APPENDIX E: Certificate of Approval



University of Victoria

Human Research Ethics Board
 Office of Research Services
 University of Victoria
 Technology Enterprise Facility, Room 218
 Tel (250) 472-4545 Fax (250) 721-7836
 Email ethics@uvic.ca Web www.research.uvic.ca


**Human Research Ethics Board
 Certificate of Approval**

<u>Principal Investigator</u> Jeannine Carriere Faculty	<u>Department/School</u> SOCW	<u>Supervisor</u> N/A	
<u>Co-Investigator(s):</u>			
<u>Project Title:</u> Strengthening Cultural Plans for Aboriginal Children and Adoption			
<u>Protocol No.</u> 07-431	<u>Approval Date</u> 31-Jan-08	<u>Start Date</u> 31-Jan-08	<u>Expiry Date</u> 30-Jan-09

Certification

This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria Research Regulations Involving Human Participants.

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol. Extensions and/or amendments may be approved with the submission of a "Request for Annual Renewal or Modification" form.



 Dr. Richard Keeler
 Associate Vice-President, Research

07-431 Carriere, Jeannine