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Voices from Aboriginal Child and Family Agencies in British Columbia:

Supporting Aboriginal Adopted Children with Cultural Planning

by

**Kim Grzybowski,
BSW, University of Regina, 1997**

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

In the School of Social Work

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Supervisory Committee

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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This study explores the stories of Executive Directors of Delegated Aboriginal Child Welfare Agencies in regards to cultural planning for Aboriginal children being adopted into non-Aboriginal homes in British Columbia. This qualitative study used an Indigenous methodology to describe and interpret the elements of cultural planning for adopted Aboriginal children by interviewing Executive Directors of Aboriginal child welfare agencies in the province of British Columbia. The purpose is to provide knowledge about cultural planning and safety agreements in conjunction with Aboriginal agencies and to also gain an understanding of how Aboriginal agencies are able to meet their commitment to retain their adopted children's' Aboriginal identity and maintain their connections to culture, community and or family. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six Executive Directors who volunteered for this study. Their stories were audio taped and analysed utilizing a thematic analysis. Two main themes emerged from the analysis were 1). Funding and 2), Legalizing Cultural Agreements. Ceremony was stressed throughout the interviews and is an integral part of Indigenous people and adequate funding needs to be re-addressed to support Aboriginal children in their best interests. Training continues to be a factor for adoptive parents to learn about the history of Aboriginal people and learning ways to best support the children they are adopting by learning about the rich cultures they belong to and how they will be able to make those connections. Funding of operational

dollars for Aboriginal agencies appears to be at the fore front in every aspect of the cultural planning process.

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Dedication

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Introduction

i Purpose

This qualitative study will use a narrative approach to describe and interpret the elements of cultural planning for adopted Aboriginal children by interviewing Executive Directors of Aboriginal child welfare agencies in the province of British Columbia. The purpose is to provide knowledge about cultural planning and safety agreements in conjunction with Aboriginal agencies and to also gain an understanding of how Aboriginal agencies are able to meet their commitment to retain their adopted children's' Aboriginal identity and maintain their connections to culture, community and or family. This research study also draws upon previous research and has also been enhanced through my own personal work experiences as a child welfare practitioner for thirteen years.

It is essential to determine how cultural planning is working for these agencies and what factors are required for its success. This research will examine how policies and service delivery models impact how an agency develops cultural planning for children in their care. The premise is that information provided from this data enables the Executive Directors to make decisions that will benefit each of the Nations they serve. In the analysis section this research also draws parallels from the literature on adoption and cultural planning with the findings of interviews with the Executive Directors.

Researchers, Indigenous and non Indigenous, continue to describe tragic stories and personal experiences of Indigenous adults who were forcefully taken from their families as young children during the residential school era and Sixties Scoop (Carriere, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2010; Fournier, 1997; Locust, 2000; Sinclair, 2007, 2010; Spears, 2003). The Sixties Scoop was a term coined by Patrick Johnson in 1983 to describe children removed from their parents care

during the 1960s (cited in Bonita Lawrence, *Real Indians and Others*, in his chapter). In Bourassa's (2010) review of the Manitoba child welfare system she states Canada had changed the Indian Act for social workers to work on reserves. Two reasons for the child removals were the low levels of income and the fact that "children would be removed if the family was not practicing Christianity" (p.15). Clearly there is a need for Indigenous child welfare reform and decolonization, and research can help in this process.

Creswell (2007) explains "research should contain an action agenda for reform that may change the lives of participants, the institutions in which they live and work" (p. 21). Preserving cultural identity is important task for Executive Directors of Aboriginal agencies to ensure Aboriginal adoptive children are safeguarded and grow up knowing their culture, connections, and history.

One of the purposes of this research, for me, is to be able listen, learn and to give back and contribute to the Aboriginal communities of British Columbia. I have had the opportunity and great honour to be able to work, learn, and share knowledge reciprocally with many of the Aboriginal agencies in my journeys in child welfare. As a Cree woman and a visitor to Coast Salish Territory I have great respect for the Aboriginal peoples in British Columbia and thank them for allowing me to work, live and raise my family in their territory. The following describes my personal location and relationship to this research further.

Who Am I? – Personal Location

Location of self is important to describe the foundation from where I, the researcher, come from including race, and gender to understand the connectedness to the research (Absolon & Willett, 2005; Steinhauer, 2001).

Many people, who reside in Canada, when they talk about culture, can say where their family originates from, what their traditions are and some may be able to say what their ancestors have accomplished. As for myself, I can say the paternal side of my family originated in Poland and came to Canada. I learned to celebrate many Polish traditions and even learned some of the language throughout my childhood and adulthood. I thank my father, grandmothers, grandfather, aunties, uncles and cousins for everything they have taught me.

On my maternal side of the family, I had some experiences with my Cree teachings and cultural knowledge. As a child growing up, our family made many trips to the Peguis First Nations Reserve to visit with my grandmother, grandfather and the many aunties, uncles and cousins. At that time, I thought it was great to be able to visit such a remote town, where my grandparents had no running water or electricity during the 1960s and 70s. They were able to teach us how they depended on the land for food, hunting, fishing, and hauling water so we could drink and cook. We learned how the ground can be used as a refrigerator to keep food cold. My grandparents, aunties, uncles and cousins were proud people in regards to their homes, land and family. As a child or an early adult I didn't understand there were government laws and social policies in place restricting my grandparents and extended family from participating with the rest of society because my family was Aboriginal in a white, racist country. What I had learned as a young girl through television, media, and my education was that it was not a good

thing to identify as an Aboriginal person because we were negatively stereotyped. We were the dirty drunken Indians, we were poor, and were portrayed on television or in the movies as scalping people. The cowboys on television were always killing us Indians. There never seemed to be any positive images of Aboriginal people portrayed while I was growing up, through my childhood and into my adult life, with the exception of the romanticism of being an Indian which I will further discuss in the literature review. As Basso (1996) states it is important to, “Allow the past to inform your understanding of the future” (p. 91). This research is important to me, not only in terms of my practice as a professional social worker, but it resonates within me as a voice from my childhood in which I knew that my identity was connected to that large extended family at Peguis First Nation and my ancestors from Poland. That was important to me as a child and remains that way to date.

Terms of Reference

In this study I will use the terms Indigenous and Aboriginal interchangeably to describe the First Peoples of Canada: First Nations, Métis, Inuit and all people who lost their status as Indians in accordance to the *Indian Act of Canada*. I will also be using the following words throughout: Aboriginal child, Aboriginal community, child, child in care, parent and youth that is in accordance to the British Columbia Child, Family and Community Service Act. (see Appendix G).

Review of the Literature

The literature was reviewed from diverse disciplines including social work, psychology, law, Native studies, and political studies spanning from the years of 1969 to 2012. In the last few years there has been a growing interest in transracial adoptions and identity issues; however the literature on cultural planning is limited in Canada. I have developed this literature review as an enhancement to my previous work in *You Should Know That I Trust You* (Carriere, 2008).

The review of the literature will examine the historical context of adoption in North America, the limited statistical data available in Canada, and transracial adoption in North American with an emphasis on Aboriginal adoptees. Attachment and identity are explored as the impact of not being connected to one's own Aboriginal culture. Conclusions for further research to support and enhance the wellbeing and maintain the culture planning for adopted Aboriginal children/youth and adoptive families will be discussed. It is hoped that this research, as Basso (1996) becomes, "The local landscape that is avowed to produce a beneficial form of heightened self awareness" (p. 81) for cultural planning; for the benefit for Aboriginal adopted children, Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal agencies and adoptive parents. This research study has the possibility to contribute to the literature, assist Aboriginal Agencies and the Ministry for Children and Family Development on possible changes to policy and training in the field of social work.

The purpose of this review is to explore the literature addressing cultural planning for Aboriginal children and adoption. The key areas explored in this review will include the historical overview of adoption, transracial adoption, race theory, cultural identity, cultural safety, agreements, cultural planning and attachment theory. The search threads include,

“Adoption,” “Aboriginal,” “Native,” “Indian,” “Transracial Adoption,” “Identity,” “Child Welfare,” “Cultural Planning,” “Agreements” and numerous combinations of these terms.

There is a growing amount of literature on ‘cultural safety’ and in British Columbia, cultural ‘planning’ in child welfare is accomplished through a cultural plan that social workers must develop in for the preservation of cultural identity for the Aboriginal child. *The Cultural Planning Practice Standard 4* for the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) states the social worker, “must give special attention to preserving the child’s unique cultural identity and heritage” and consider “the importance of preserving an Aboriginal child’s cultural identity when determining the best interests of the child, is a requirement of Section 3 of the *Adoption Act* and Practice Standard 1” (MCFD 2001, p. 20). The child’s First Nation or Métis community is to be actively involved in a meaningful way in all areas of the child’s life while in the care of MCFD. Some of the areas of information gathered for the cultural plan in accordance to MCFD policy are: the child’s heritage, genealogy, language, traditional foods, spiritual practices, extended family, access and traditional teachings to ensure there is a continuity of the child’s culture (MCFD 2001, p 366). The intent for these areas of information for the cultural plan is to, “clearly describe how the adoptive parents and the Aboriginal community will share in the responsibility of preserving the child’s cultural identity and connection with his or her siblings, extended family and community” (MCFD, 2009, p 3).

i Historical Context of Adoption

Adoption has been recognized in law since early Greek, Roman, and Near Eastern civilizations. There are indications that adoption was practiced to support heredity, family name,

wealth and culture. Traditionally in some Aboriginal cultures, grandparents would be given the first born grandchild to raise as their own child¹ (Arrillage 2001). Adoption practices continued to evolve, through medieval times in Britain to the settlement of North America where the development of agrarian and capitalist society left children vulnerable to apprenticeships and indenturing practices (Thompson, 1997). During this time children continued to be especially vulnerable to poverty, infanticide, child abandonment and harsh labour practices. The concern for child welfare in America during the 1800s led to government wardship and adoption legislation to prevent the use of children as cheap labour (Crosson-Tower, 2005). Child poverty and homelessness were municipal issues until the 1940s and 1950s.

In Thompson and Carter's (1997) book they introduce Helm's 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, 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).

Historically, adoption practice across Canada removed Aboriginal children from their families, communities and their culture causing immediate damage with cultural disruption and the facilitation of cultural genocide (Kimelman, 1985). Colonization, residential schools and the *Indian Act* has had a profound effect on Aboriginal communities with their children being lost through removals from families and adoption. In 1920, the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Duncan Campbell Scott was quoted as saying: "Our object is to continue until there is

¹ While working in the field of child protection services, a Coast Salish woman had shared as part of her traditional culture she was to give her first born child to her parents to raise as their own child.

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.”(in Fournier, 1997)

In British Columbia residential schools were in operation from 1863 to 1984, and attendance for Aboriginal children was mandatory between seven (7) and fifteen (15) years of age. The last residential school closed in 1996 in Duck Lake, Saskatchewan (Brasfield, 2001; Fournier and Crey, 1997). There is a growing body of literature regarding the pain and tragedies Aboriginal children endured and the systematic effect on their immediate family, extended families and the community at large (Haig-Brown, 1988; Kirmayer, Brass and Tait, 2000; Llewellyn, 2000, Thomas, 2005).

According to Kirmayer, Brass and Tait (2000) the Aboriginal children who had attended residential school suffered physical, sexual, psychological and spiritual abuse. They were unable to practice their known cultural traditions and be proud of their cultural identity. The 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 not 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).

Alcorn (2011) discusses how she had been the third generation in her family forced to attend residential school, the impact this has had on her life and how she was “brainwashed” to believe she was the following:

worthless, incapable, stupid, dirty, ugly, ignorant, lazy, fat, unsuccessful, bad parent, slut, abuser, abused, misused, misunderstood, low self-esteem, no confidence, silenced, violent-woman, angry, unemployable, alcoholic, drug addict, homeless, displaced, lost,

pitiful and just another “Indian” woman. What worries me is have we passed this on to our children. (p. 1)

These messages are clearly difficult to live with and difficult to shed while still living in a colonial society.

The impact of the abuse on Aboriginal children when they left residential schools sometimes brought on disconcerting behaviours (Barlow, K. 2009; Chansonneuve, D. 2007; Kirmayer, et al 2007). Parents and extended families were often unaware of the abuse their children were enduring at the residential schools and struggled to parent once the children were home. Once the provinces and territories took over child welfare, families continued to lose their children. Today more children are being removed than during the height of the Sixties Scoop (Blackstock, 2003, 2010).

Changes to the *Indian Act* in 1951 resulted in Aboriginal child welfare being transferred from the federal government to the provinces (Milloy, 2008, Blackstock, 2010). In 1996 the Child Welfare Act and the Canada Assistance Plan institutionalized child welfare and jurisdiction was transferred to the provinces (Levitt & Warf, 1985).

During this time adoption practices became more secretive with adoption records being sealed and never made available to the adopted child. This closed adoption practice (now declining in popularity) promoted secrecy and non-transparency 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 (Locust, C. 2000; Richard, K. 2004; Sinclair, 2007; Spears, S. 2003; Thompson, 1997).

Blackstock (2005) cites, 11,000 status Aboriginal children were adopted between the years of 1960-1990 according to The 1996 *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* and she further reported these numbers did not include children who were registered band members. It is

during this time, that many researchers have referred these years as the sixties scoop (Fournier, 1997). Children were removed from their family homes and social workers did not consider extended family as an alternative option for placement. Blackstock (2010, p. 2) explains the number of First Nations children in the care of child welfare agencies across Canada has “reached record levels eclipsing both the “60s scoop” and residential schools (Blackstock, 2003).

Many researchers continue to hear tragic stories of Aboriginal children during the “sixties scoop” losing their identity and trying to find their way back home (Carriere, 2005, 2010 Fournier, 1997, Locust, 2000, Spears, 2003, Sinclair, 2007, 2009, 2010). There were generations of families who lost their Indigenous ways of knowing and being through Aboriginal children attending residential school and then the high number of children removed and adopted during the Sixties Scoop. Over the last couple of decades some Aboriginal families have found out their children were adopted out of the community or the country. It is believed that many Aboriginal children who were adopted during this time are unaware they have membership with their nation and many may not know they are Aboriginal. In 1982 Judge Kimelman was requested to complete an inquiry to the number 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” 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, 1985, p. 272-73).

A few of the key recommendations Judge Kimelman included were: 1) the adoption of Aboriginal children in non-Aboriginal homes should be the last resort for placement, 2) more resources to be implemented to support children being placed within their communities and 3) 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”.

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 giving the “lived” experiences of adoptees and recommendations on changes to the child welfare system.

ii Transracial Adoption

Transracial adoption is increasingly coming to the attention of the media; especially in light of famous adoptive parents such as: Angelina Jolie, Rosie O’Donnell and Sharon Stone adopting children from ethnic races other than the adoptive parents’ race. There are strong opposing opinions on the adoption of Aboriginal children and some say 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” (Richard, 2004). 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. They stated that black children will not develop a sense of their identity, psychologically, or develop a positive sense of their own culture and having black

children adopted into white homes was an act of genocide (The Adoption History Project, 1972). 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 some studies conducted on transracial adoption, focusing on concerns about identity and adjustment (Bagley, 1993, Ladner, 1977).

Atkinson (2010) reports, that there are common themes for transracial adoptees of identity loss, cultural loss, community loss, passing, reconnecting and racism. She states, “Observing culture from a distance without participating and immersing oneself will not help the children to develop a good sense of who they are as Aboriginal people” (p. 41). Sinclair (2007) also states, “the transracial adoption of these Aboriginal children has had negative outcomes in terms of high adoption breakdown rates and identity problems for adoptees” (p. 89). Sinclair also discusses in her study of thirteen Aboriginal transracial participants, that while adoptees did not have a struggle about their identity they experienced trauma of the stereotypical ideations of the “good Indian/bad Indian” (p. 272). She further explains that researchers have “interpreted racism/ostracism and the emotional consequences of those experiences as identity or adjustment issues (p. 273). Atkinson (2010) states, “the majority of white people do not experience racism, they are not equipped to assist Aboriginal children with the coping mechanisms needed to address it” (p. 41).

There are definitely some differences in opinions of the positive and negative outcomes for transracial adoptions. 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.

iii Attachment and Identity

John Bowlby (1969), a psychoanalyst has been recognized for the formulation of attachment theory. The worldview on attachment theory is, essentially, that 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 a primary caregiver will cause emotional damage to the child. Bowlby (1979) also discussed the significance of affectional bonds and of the dangers of 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).

Neckoway, Brownlee and Castellán (2007) challenge Bowlby's theory, explaining that secure attachment in Aboriginal structures, environments and shared parenting styles can enable Aboriginal children to attach to shared parenting styles with extended family members. The authors explained that they "could find no research" analyzing secure attachment using Bowlby's strange situation procedure with Aboriginal parents and children. They had researched four cultural groups Japanese, African, German and Jewish and from their findings there are no reliable models to measure secure attachment for Aboriginal children. Aboriginal parenting is not linear with the biological mother as the sole provider to their child's physical and emotional well being and Bowlby's theory does not include a theory inclusive of extended families, clans, kin, Elders and the community. It is not uncommon for Aboriginal families to have a couple of families residing in one home, especially on reserves in Canada due to housing shortages. Others choose to live with extended family. 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 that 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.

Carriere and Richardson (2009) engage with Bowlby's theory of secure attachment stating, "the inappropriate application of this theory to child welfare decision-making with Indigenous families in Canada is problematic" (p. 51). They discuss the tragic story of Richard Cardinal who had taken his life at the young age of seventeen, who had been moved twenty eight times during his time in the child welfare system in Alberta over twenty years ago. I viewed this story many times during my employment as an instructor. One of the tragedies is Richard wanted to be with his family; he was granted his wish at his funeral.

In relation to Indigenous adoptees, Carriere and Richardson further explain, "the act of searching for family brings to life the adoptee's sense of connectedness and an expanded sense of possibility" (p.54). Finding and connecting is what brings balance, while the search itself can be hard and lonely if it is not successful to some degree. They further recommend from the literature, "that the role of kinship connections for Indigenous children in state care is to provide balance in their lives by providing them with cultural and ancestral knowledge" (p. 57). In recognition of Richard Cardinal they suggested, "by supporting connectedness and cultural identity for indigenous children and families, service providers may help turn longing into belonging. This spiritual transformation will inevitably help indigenous children to deal with racism, ethnocentrism, and the many social challenges they will meet growing up on the foreign ground of Canadian soil" (p. 63).

Locust (2000) revealed through her study that placing Aboriginal children 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” and this could be recognized as what she had termed “Split Feather Syndrome” (p. 11). The identified people with this syndrome demonstrated five factors that contributed to the development of this condition which are: 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) uses an autobiography research method of three biological Aboriginal women who have been affected by colonization in Canada. The researcher discusses the history of Aboriginal people, how adoption had impacted her family through the 60’s scoop and how child welfare had created identity confusion for many Aboriginal people because the adoptive children were placed outside of their community (p.49). Marie Fox Belly founder of the Lost Bird Society in the United States reports adoptees when they return to their communities feel like outsiders; they don’t know their language and their heritage (Arrillage, 2001).

In Nuttgens (2004) research, he concluded in his findings that if children are connected to their family, community and culture they would have positive racial identity when an adoption placement was into a non-Aboriginal home. It was found that the lack of connectedness to their culture, with the participants in the study, was found to have had a negative impact on their individual identities. Berge’s (2006) research 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 had stated they had wanted more contact with

their birthmothers and extended family members, which “contributed to their understanding of who they are” (p. 1034). Carriere (2005) reports that 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.

Sinclair (2007) reports that adoption break down with Aboriginal children happens when children are developing into their adolescence, and there is confusion pertaining to their sense of identity which damages their self-esteem “and self-regard in the face of racism” (p. 274). The Children’s Representative for British Columbia in the 2008, report *Growing Up In BC*, reports: Aboriginal children who are “culturally dislocated” are a greater risk of suicide, are disproportionately at a higher rate of being in youth justice custody, whereas if they are “highly connected” to their culture less they likely to have reports of poor health.

iv Practice and Cultural Planning for Aboriginal Children in British Columbia

The British Columbia Adoption Act was first implemented and passed in 1920. Amendments to the Act were made to keep adoption records secret, conduct assessments of prospective adoptive parents and introduced a probationary period of one year. 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, and any information of the child and professionals (social workers) made decisions as to what was in the “*best interest of the child*” 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.

As of 1992, a moratorium on adoption in the province of British Columbia was implemented due to an outcry from Aboriginal communities out of concerns for their children being adopted into non-Aboriginal homes. Children were being adopted without consent from their families, the Aboriginal band, and without the knowledge as to where the children were (Sinclair, 2007).

In 1996 *The Adoption Act* was proclaimed as was the *Child, Family and Community Service Act*. 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. “ (p. 5)

From these two pieces of legislation the provincial government programs were developed 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, recognition the Aboriginal child should be connected to their cultural heritage and traditions, the requirement of Aboriginal communities be involved in planning for children in care, and to ensure the province is ensuring the “best interests” of children. It was also during this time that the moratorium on the adoption of Aboriginal children was lifted.

MCFD introduced cultural planning, (Government of British Columbia, MCFD, 2001, Practice Standard 18) in order for non-Aboriginal adoptive parents to understand the importance of Aboriginal children to be connected to their culture, families and their communities. Cultural planning in British Columbia is accomplished through a *Cultural Safety Agreement*, formally

known as a “Cultural Plan” that MCFD adoption social workers must develop for the preservation of cultural identity for the Aboriginal child who is being adopted into a non-Aboriginal home. MCFD (2009) developed guidelines for adoption social workers of suggested key components which “must” be included in the *Cultural Safety Agreement*, which are:

- Responsibilities of the Adoptive Parent
- Responsibilities of the Aboriginal Community
- Maintaining Relationships with the Child’s Siblings
- Contact with the Birth Parents and Extended Family
- Community Events (p.6-8)

The intention of the *Cultural Safety Agreement* is to outline the “agreed” shared responsibilities of the adoptive parent/s and the Aboriginal community to protect the adoptive Aboriginal’s child’s inherent right to maintain a relationship with his or her First Nation community and family.

The cultural plan is then presented to the MCFD *Exceptions Committee*.

The MCFD *Exceptions Committee* was formally established in 1997 by the Ministry for Children and Family Development with the purpose/mandate 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*. Ministry social workers must provide to the *Exceptions Committee*:

- 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, if the community is in agreement with the plan, 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
- how the adoptive parents will be able to meet the needs of the children
- if the child agrees with the adoption plan

- recommendations from the social worker which signed by their supervisor and or team leader and manager (Submissions for Exception to Policy)
- a signed cultural safety plan by the adoptive parents and Aboriginal community. (Government of British Columbia 2009)

The *Exceptions Committee* reviews all of the documentation, whether or not the Aboriginal community does not agree to the adoption plans, and makes a decision according to the Guiding Principles of the *Child, Family and Community Service Act* inclusive of:

Section 2: Guiding Principles

Section 3: Service Delivery Principles

Section 4: Best Interests

Section 70: Rights of Children in Care

Section 71: Out-of-home living arrangements.

v Statistics

Currently there continues to be an over representation of Aboriginal children in care of the Province of British Columbia. Aboriginal children make up only 8 % of the general population (Ministry of Child and Family Development, 2011) but as of May 2012, Aboriginal children represented 56.0% of social work case loads. This is an increase from the fiscal year of 2001/02 where Aboriginal children comprised 43% of social work case loads. The Ministry's report May 2012, states during the fiscal year between 2011 and 2012:

“that an Aboriginal child is 4.8 times more likely to have a protection concern reported

8.5 times more likely to be investigated:

9.8 times more likely to be found in need of protection

7.6 times more likely to be admitted in care

13.8 times more likely to remain in care”

There has been a steady increase of Aboriginal children assigned a Continuing Care Order vis-a-vis non-Aboriginal children. MCFD reports as of January 2012, there were 4,586 Aboriginal children in care and 62.5% of these children were under a continuing care order. The Ministry’s report of 2008 most of them are under the age of ten (10), with child protection reports being fairly static since May 2003. MCFD reports the reason for the higher numbers are that more Aboriginal protection reports are investigated compared to non-Aboriginal reports and this has been consistent since the fiscal year of 2006/07. The longest duration of an Aboriginal child remaining in care of the province was approximately 16 years (Ministry of Child and Family Development, May 2012); whereas the average is 34.74 months compared to 30.27 months for a non-Aboriginal child (Ministry of Child and Family Development, 2011). The Ministry reports two possible reasons for the longer length in care is more Aboriginal children are being placed under a continuing care order than are non-Aboriginal children since May 2003 and Aboriginal children require more protection services.

Placement of adopted Aboriginal children into Métis or mixed Aboriginal homes has decreased slightly during the year 2006 to 2007. The Ministry of Child and Family Development reasoning for this steady decline is:

“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. The statistics for children in continuing care with the Ministry should indicate a decrease as Aboriginal children who are band members are being transferred to delegated Aboriginal child and family agencies in the province. There has been an increase of 25 Aboriginal adoptions from 2009 – 2010 and there are more non-Aboriginal children being adopted each year (MCFD 2011). The number of Aboriginal children being placed into adoptive First Nation, Métis and mixed Aboriginal homes has been steadily increasing since the fiscal year of 2009 to present. There has been a decrease of adoptive placements into non-Aboriginal homes from 53 % during 2008/09 to 32% in 2010/11.

In the 2006 Census in Canada, the statistics for domestic adoption is unattainable and the provinces are held responsible to sustain their own adoption statistics. There are numerous reports of international adoptions in Canada; adopting children from China is the most common, the next being Russian, the United States and Vietnam (Adoption Council of Canada 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2009). According to the 2009 statistics the province of Ontario continues to be the leading province for international adoption and Quebec being second. During 2009, adoptive families in British Columbia assumed 347 international adoptions out of the 2,122 adopted children from abroad. Out of the 347 international adoptions during 2009, 81 children were adopted from the United States, 45 children were adopted from China, and 39 children were adopted from Ethiopia.

Statistics Canada (2011) has been slowly releasing the results of the 2011 Census. For the first time, Canada has counted foster children as part of the census. The definition of a foster child for the 2011 Census, "are considered as 'other relatives' in an economic family, that is, a group of two or more persons who live in the same dwelling and are related to each other by

blood, marriage, common-law, adoption or foster relationship.” The Census reported, there are 29,590 children 14 years of age and younger who are foster children with the highest numbers being in Manitoba, then Northwest Territories, Nunavut and the Yukon. Additionally 11,455 foster children were aged 15 to 19, 1,730 were aged 20 to 24 and 5,115 were aged 25 and over.

At this time it is unknown how many of these foster children are Aboriginal or if the Census captured the difference between foster children and adopted children.

vi The Delegation Process for Aboriginal Agencies

Aboriginal Child and Family Service Agencies in the province of British Columbia serve First Nations and Métis people who are residing on and off reserve land. All of the Aboriginal Child and Family Agencies have had to agree to a delegation process as set out by the provincial government, MCFD to be able to deliver child welfare services to their citizens as designated in accordance to the Child, Family and Community Service Act and the Aboriginal Operational Practice Standards and Indicators (AOPSI) (2005). All of the Aboriginal agencies have had to undertake a three (3) phase process: pre-planning, planning and start-up in order to be qualified to enter into a Delegation Enabling Agreement with the Director of Child Protection.

The next step in the process is the Aboriginal agencies must be able obtain funding from “Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada” for on-reserve services or MCFD for Métis and urban based agencies. When the “operational readiness” is completed as outlined by AOPSI (2009) the Deputy Director of MCFD will review and make a decision if the Aboriginal agency is eligible to enter into the first phase of the delegation process.

The delegation process is also a three step process consisting of Voluntary Services, Guardianship and Child Protection which require educational and training experience for Executive Directors, program managers, supervisors and social workers at each level of delegation. The agencies under the umbrella of Voluntary Services are able to provide family support services the following services in accordance to the CFCSA: Support Services Agreements; Voluntary Care Agreements and Agreements with the child kin and others. Agencies with Guardianship delegation provide services for children who are wards of the state, known as children in continuing custody and are also able to provide Voluntary Services. The third step of delegation the agency is able to provide Child Protection Services, Guardianship and Voluntary Services.

The Executive Directors of the Aboriginal Agencies are responsible for ensuring the Operational and Practice standards are met as laid out in the Aboriginal Operation and Practice Standards and Indicators (2009, 2005) as per their level of delegation. The Executive Directors may be responsible for policy and program development and implementation, case practice standards, audits, reports, fiscal accountability, communications, coordination, networking, evaluations, contract negotiations, conflict resolution, and community relations. The APOSI Standards (2005) discuss throughout the Practice Standards that social work practice should be practiced in culturally appropriate ways when working with Aboriginal children and families. Kozlowski et al. (2012) explained the, “Expectations include: prioritizing child placement within Aboriginal communities, involving families and communities in intervention plans, promoting children’s access to information on their heritage, and ensuring a child has access to cultural ceremonies” (p.4).

The Executive Directors not only have accountability to the provincial government; they are also accountable to Chief and Council to ensure they are meeting the goals and objectives of the community/s they are serving.

vii Lalum’utul’ Smun’eem and the Exceptions Committee

Lalum’utul’ Smun’eem Child and Family Services (LS), a fully delegated Aboriginal agency, who serves the Cowichan First Nation community in the province in British Columbia, was granted the authority for Adoption delegation on January 17, 2008. This was historical signing as there is only one other First Nations child welfare agency in Canada with adoption authority that being, Yellowhead Tribal Services Agency in Alberta (YTSA).

During the process of negotiating the transfer of 23 Cowichan children from MCFD in 2004, and prior to signing this agreement in 2008, it came to the attention of Lalum’utul’ Smun’eem that adoption planning for the children had already been initiated.

I recall, when I was working at the agency at that time, decisions were made to cease all adoption planning until Lalum’utul’ Smun’eem could explore if there were Cowichan families who could adopt the children or were there Cowichan members who were able to care for any of these children and I am unaware of the outcome of this search for family. The power point presentation a *Journey of Honour* (granted personal permission for use, Nov. 2012) discusses the process of how Lalum’utul’ Smun’eem was unable to take “community control” of the adoption delegation until they had followed all the operational and policy standards of MCFD as there are no Aboriginal Operational Adoption Standards developed to date.

Executive Director Lise Haddock has expressed that she does not want to leave a legacy of children remaining in provincial care, but to find healthy permanency planning through adoption for children (In personal communication-2006). Lalum'utul' Smun'eem developed the adoption policy called, *Adoption: A Journey of Honour* which was designed in consultation with the community, for the community and for the children of Cowichan Tribes in conjunction to according to the *British Columbia Adoption Act*. The agency resisted to be a part of the MCFD *Exceptions Committee* and had established *The Cowichan Tribes Adoption Committee (CTAC)* whose membership consists of the following people: Chief of Cowichan Tribes, the General Manager, one (1) Council member, two (2) Advisory Committee Members, one (1) Elder, the committee chair Executive Director of Lalum'utul' Smun'eem, the Adoption Manager, the Child Safety Manager, the Support Services Manager as well as additional staff members may be called to review adoption plans or technical support for the meetings.

CTAC management and organizational roles are the following:

- promote community support for honouring the tradition of adoption and understanding its implications,
- recommend and oversee the implementation of adoption policy and protocols,
- present reports to Chief and Council, as requested,
- sign a protocol with the Ministry of Children and Family Development regarding the roles of the parties. p. 9

The CTAC provides case decisions regarding specific children who consider: recommendations made by the Child Safety Social Workers of Lalum'utul' Smun'eem; they either approve the recommendations for adoption or have to provide a written alternative with recommendations for follow-up and review and approve cultural agreements (p. 8).

Lalum'utul' Smun'eem is unique in its approach in regards to cultural agreements as they wanted a commitment from the adoptive parents ensuring they keep Cowichan children connected to the extended family, membership, culture and community and have them sign a cultural contract. The cultural contract outlines numerous obligations the adoptive parent/s must follow to ensure they are actively involved in cultural planning for Cowichan children and are also involved in the custom adoption ceremony.

I believe it is very important to understand the community celebrates the adoption of the child through ceremony calling it a custom adoption and this term does not have the same meaning as defined in the *Adoptions Act*. H. Charlie, Adoptions Manager with Lalum'utul' Smun'eem explained (personal communication, Nov. 2012) the cultural ceremony the community is witnessing is a custom adoption because the community is witnessing the ceremony and when this is done there is not the Supreme court present to sign off on a custom adoption.

The cultural contract, respects community tradition and also outlines the roles and responsibilities of Cowichan Tribes who will ensure the adoptive family is aware of cultural events, the adoptive parent/s will receive a copy of the Cowichan Tribe's newsletter, are obligated to share cultural resource information with the family and the family will be visited at least once every six (6) months.

Protocols have been developed with MCFD regarding roles and responsibilities when MCFD and Lalum'utul' Smun'eem are working together in the planning of the adoption of a Cowichan child.

There is a training component for adoptive parents, Chief and Council, CTAC and an orientation for the Cowichan Elders.

Lalum'utul' Smun'eem has already embarked on evaluating their program last year (2011) to find out what is working and what challenges do they need to address. Lalum'utul' Smun'eem (August, 2011) interviewed all of the adoptive families and the findings were the following:

- Adoptive parents wanted to be informed of staff changes,
- Increase in staff to complete home studies in a timely manner,
- Support for acting out behaviours for the adoptive child & parent during the waiting period,
- Lalum'utul' Smun'eem deliver their own adoption training focusing on the experiences of previous adoptive parents,
- Provide continued support and learning of Cowichan culture and knowledge,
- Adoptive families requested annual events for those who had adopted at the same cultural ceremony,
- LS to review protocols with community members,
- Adoptive parents to understand the nature of the cultural ceremony and is presented in a culturally appropriate way,
- Incorporate MCFD's legal term of custom adoption, to celebrate during the cultural ceremony,
- Pre-adoption support,
- Continued support of the LS adoption social workers after the adoption order has been granted,
- LS provide Post Adoption Assistance rather than MCFD,
- Supports for families when children lose their Aboriginal status and are placed on the A-List, educational tools for adoptive parents to engage with their Cowichan children (p. 5-13).

The next heading I will discuss the current cultural planning research in British Columbia supported by MCFD.

viii Current Cultural Planning Research in British Columbia

Since 2008, Carriere has conducted three phases of research on cultural planning for Aboriginal children and adoption for the Ministry for Children and Family Development in British Columbia, the most recent being at the beginning of 2011. The first phase, called *You*

Should Know that I Trust You: Cultural Planning, Aboriginal Children and Adoption, was comprised of 20 participants; adoptive parents and community representatives and their experiences with cultural plans.

All of the participants in Carriere's (2008) research study provided valuable information in ways to change child welfare practice and the importance of keeping children connected to their culture.

One of the participants stated, "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" (p. 37). Another participant shared, "when you have that cultural piece, you are at peace with yourself and thrive spiritually" (p.37).

In this research study, there was a concern from many of the adoptive parents of how cultural plans were constructed. One of the participants received a blank cultural plan in the mail and was requested to fill in the form. The adoptive parent stated, they "had no idea what it was about and wished that someone would have told us what is an appropriate cultural plan" (p. 32). Another adoptive parent, who adopted an Inuit child through a private adoption agency, also received their blank cultural plan in the mail, completed the cultural plan on their own, returning the plan to the private adoption agency "and never heard about it again" (p34).

Most of the participants in this research study clearly wanted support with formal training as to how to complete a cultural plan and connections to the community. One of the adoptive parents (p.33) who had adopted a Métis child was unsure who they could communicate with and unsure if asking for help was the correct thing to do. One of the participants made a recommendation for future adoptive parents to engage in "cultural sensitivity training" (p. 32) and this would support the adoptive parent in creating a cultural plan.

I fully agree adoptive parents and child welfare professionals who are not culturally aware of the impact of colonization; residential schools and the importance of keeping Aboriginal children connected to their identities could have serious negative impacts. Carriere describes one participant who believes:

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. p. 33

Harding’s (2010) research project discussed the importance for child welfare professions to take training in the areas of self awareness and cultural competency prior to working with Aboriginal children, families and communities and I would also recommend non-Aboriginal adoptive parents who are planning to adopt Aboriginal children should also be taking this training. One of the participants in her research study stated:

Knowledge of the history of First Nation oppression is a key to good practice. Attempting to work within First Nation communities in a state of ignorance of past and current racist subjugating efforts by the federal government and the dominant society is futile. It is critically important that social workers working within aboriginal communities have a level of self awareness (and self care plan) that allows them to see themselves professionally and personally within this historical context. Social work practice in aboriginal communities devoid of this information significantly increases the risk of a continued dis-connect between First Nation communities and the wider national community, with continued disastrous consequences for First Nation people(s). p48

Currently, *Caring for First Nations Children Society* (CFNCS), a non-profit organization, in Victoria, B.C., works in partnership with the Aboriginal agencies and MCFD. They have the responsibility to provide mandatory delegation training for social workers in Aboriginal child welfare agencies (Harding, 2010; Kozlowski, Shinhu, Vandna, Hoey and Lucas, 2012). CFCNS also offers training called, *Aboriginal Pre-Adoption On Line (AOL) Course* for pre and post

adoptive parents who are considering adopting an Aboriginal child. Adoption social workers in the province make referrals for adoptive parents to take this course; however, this course is not mandatory for adoptive parents (A. Clayton, May, 2012, personal communication).

The summary of recommendations for practice in Carriere's (2008) research study was the following:

- To implement a standard for family group conferencing when a child first comes into care in order to support the child with family connections, mentors and family as a potential adoptive family
- MCFD and Aboriginal Agencies a contact person who could support non-Aboriginal adoptive parents in making connections with the Aboriginal community.
- To have a genogram attached to the cultural plan in order the MCFD's Exception's Committee to understand who in the child's family has been involved and approached during the child's time in care. MCFD and Aboriginal agencies require increased funding to recruit Aboriginal family care homes and adoptive families.
- Developing a culturally appropriate home study for Aboriginal caregivers and adoptive parent(s).
- Explore the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander's model of a "Cultural Support Plan" to enhance the comprehensive plan of care (p. 62-63).

You Should Know that I Trust You: Phase Two (Carriere, 2010) was a qualitative on-line research study involving nineteen adoptive, guardianship social workers and Root workers and their experiences with cultural planning for Aboriginal children being adopted in to non-Aboriginal homes. Over the past 10 years this sample group approximated completing 120 cultural plans.

Once again, the participants in this research study provided valuable information for changes in practice as they are the child welfare professionals who are making recommendations and have a vast amount of experience of working with Aboriginal communities, families to support cultural planning for Aboriginal children.

Some of the participants in this study discussed the challenges they face when planning for Aboriginal children. One of the participants noted, "many caregivers (foster parents more

than adoptive parents) continue to see culture as something you add into a child's life once they are old enough to have an intellectual understanding of it and if they want it rather than something that surrounds the child from the moment of conception" (p. 37).

Another participant explained their frustration after completing a cultural plan with the adoptive family, they found, "incredibly challenging is learning that the family actually isn't as proactive as they said they would be when they were engaged in the cultural plan" (p. 27).

The above statement is concerning, especially when an adoptive parent explained in the previous research study, "people told her just put anything down so you can have your kids" (Carriere, 2008, p. 35).

There appeared to be consensus by all of the participants in this research study that cultural planning is time consuming and can take up to 6 months to complete. One of the participants explained their worries that, "sometimes I am concerned that the Aboriginal children are being passed over as it is simply too difficult to get the work done and it is easier to place non Aboriginal children" (p. 30). With the high amount of Aboriginal children aging out of care, this practice could be very true and would I would recommend a support person from Aboriginal communities to support adoption social workers and or adoptive social workers to build the relationships in the Aboriginal communities they are working, in to support them with cultural planning for children who are waiting to be adopted. I recognize from my own personal experience that social workers are overworked with all of the responsibilities they are mandated to complete and the best intentions to support children and families.

The CFCSA, Section 4 and Adoption Act, Section 3 clearly states, "Best interest of the child" and to give "paramount considerations in every respect to the child's best interests" however, the governments that provide the funding to Aboriginal Agencies for the best interest

of children are underfunded and do not have the ability to provide adequate supports to social workers and or children and families they are working with (Blackstock, 2003, 2010, Auditor General of Canada, 2008). I dare to say, we continue to live in a racist system that continues to oppress Aboriginal children and families. As previously noted, Prime Minister Harper apologized for the atrocities of the residential school system; however, I question, why is the Canadian government not supporting Aboriginal children and families for stronger healthy families? Or was the apology empty words to continue to oppress Aboriginal people with less funding?

On a positive note, working in the field of child welfare can be very gratifying, as one participant experienced, “it is hearing a youth say after a visit to their community that the hole in their heart has been filled, that they now know where they come from and where they belong” (p.26).

Participants in this research study, also agreed with the earlier study the Province needs to explore legally binding cultural plans or we will continue to have children assimilated and lost as they will not know where they come from or belong.

As a result of the study this is a summary of the recommendations that were made for:

Policy:

Cultural planning should be legally binding, should start when a child first comes into care, less time consuming, the Exceptions Committee to communicate clearly of expectations and to implement a regional committees rather than provincial, increased financial supports to support the cultural plan and increase staffing such as ROOTS workers (p. 32).

Considerations for Practice:

Further training for all parties involved with the child, including professionals, Aboriginal children to remain in their home community or be able to maintain the connections to their community, family relationships, openness to community input, ceremonies and to have contact persons in the Aboriginal communities to support adoptive families and Indigenous adoptive families (p.32-33)

You Should Know that I Trust You: Indigenous Youth Speak on Adoption and Cultural Planning (Carriere, 2011) are the voices of eight youth who shared their ideas about adoption, foster care and cultural planning also using a qualitative methodology. The majority of the youth echoed that:

“they are content in their adoptive homes but want the link to their birth family, community and cultural teachings” (p. 33) with the exception of one who would not share the reasons for not wanting to have the connection. Of the two youth in foster care, they “had made it clear that they would have liked to be adopted and that cultural planning should be encouraged in the foster care system as well as adoption” (p.33).

One of the youth explained,

“Cause your... and all throughout your whole life you never meet them, you’re always kinda in the back of your head you’re wondering...Like where you really came from I guess...And once you actually go see where they live and everything, and I guess it kinda fills that gap” (p.19).

The following recommendations were made hearing the youths’ recommendations and the literature review:

The child’s birth information and the community they belong to should be maintained to support them during reunions and maintaining connections; Cultural activities and involvement are a necessary part of the adoption process for everyone involved including Elders; adoptive children who live a great distance from their community need to have regular visits either through email or Skype; if the birth family or community is unable to support the adoptive child or parent, the cultural plan needs to source what supports are available in the child’s community they are residing in and youth should be a part of their cultural planning. p. 23

ix Conclusion to Literature Review

There has been minimal research in relation to the impact of cultural planning for Aboriginal children in North America, until the recent publications of Carriere in the last four years. Spence (2007) developed a report for the Ministry for Children and Family Development and Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society to develop “new approaches to benefit service deliver to Aboriginal children” (p. 4) by enhancing the Comprehensive Plan of Care with a cultural plan for when a child enters the care of the director of the province. The cultural plan was also to enhance the Aboriginal child’s positive sense of identity by entrusting adoptive parents would ensure their adoptive child was connected to their nation, community and possibly their biological or extended family. Additionally, in Australia in 2005, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander has implemented a “Cultural Support Plan” for Aboriginal children. The cultural plan that was developed is to ensure child protection workers are keeping Aboriginal children connected to their culture, family and community when they come into care of the state.

This research study will be a first in the research data as to how cultural plans are working for adopted Aboriginal children in non-Aboriginal homes from the voices of Executive Directors of Aboriginal Delegated Agencies in British Columbia. The question arises if the present day cultural planning for the province of British Columbia is working “for” Aboriginal children and Aboriginal communities and what recommendations need to be implemented to support adopted Aboriginal children, the adoptive families, the First Nations communities, Aboriginal child welfare agencies and MCFD? I believe this research study will complement the existing research by honouring the voices of Aboriginal Agency Directors in British Columbia

who are hold dual responsibility to the Aboriginal children, families and communities they serve in accordance to MCFD Delegation Enabling Agreements and accountability to Chief and Council.

Research Question

Creswell (2007) suggests the researcher should reduce their study to a single question and can or should be able to create sub questions that follow the central question (p.109) and I will explain how I approached this process later in the thesis. This research study is asking the following question: *What is required for Aboriginal agencies in BC to provide cultural planning for Aboriginal children in care?*

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that informs this study has its roots in decolonization and critical race theory. The intent of cultural planning is about preserving connections to family and community for Aboriginal children in care which is an approach to decolonization. The cultural plan is to preserve the rights of Aboriginal families and communities to maintain a role in planning for their children which was a role that colonial child welfare and education policies attempted to erode. Critical race theory addresses the constructs of ideology and hegemony, power and powerlessness, domination and resistance, representation and misrepresentation and normality and abnormality (Henry, 2000). By uncovering the nature of Indigenous knowledge of Aboriginal people in Canada throughout the literature review and my own personal experiences as an Indigenous woman, I have developed further critical insights of how racism has functioned within child welfare in our political systems and has created racial beliefs, values and norms of Western thought and the dominant white society.

Moosa-Mitha (2005) discusses structural theorists and Marxist theorists who “have defined the dominant classes to include those who have access and control of technology, media, political power, and other social structures... that define the culture of societies served the interests of the dominant in society over others” (p.47).

One of the forces of colonization against Aboriginal peoples in Canada was the development of the Indian Act. Henry (2000) states, “The Canadian Government, through the Indian Act of 1876 and subsequent legislation and treaties, introduced institutionalized racism in the relationship between Canada and its Aboriginal Peoples that continues to flourish today” (p. 130).

The introduction of the Indian Act in 1876 created racist policies with regard to Aboriginal peoples such as the denial to purchase land, prohibiting spiritual ceremonies, forced relocation and segregation on reserves, and restrictions on civil and political rights.

As a result of this history of racism and abuse, Aboriginal peoples have been oppressed socially, economically, politically and culturally through the policies of promoting assimilation in mainstream Canadian society to effectively destroy Aboriginal identity. As a direct result of the Indian Act and political will to assimilate “Indians”, Aboriginal children were forcibly removed from their families and communities and placed into residential schools (Sinclair, 2007, Green and Thomas 2009).

It is through these oppressive policies Canada’s democratic liberal society throughout history has created negative ideologies regarding Aboriginal people and much of society accepts these ideologies as truth, therefore having an impact on child welfare. Dua, Razack and Warner (2005) describe Canada as “characterized in a national mythology as a nation innocent of racism” (p. 1-2). This is further supported by Moosa-Mitha (2004) who discusses Rawlsian liberal theories, “that upholds the status quo within society...the state is viewed as neutral...in its treatment of certain citizens are acknowledged” (p. 43).

The colonization of Aboriginal people in Canada is part of our social context and social work practice in child welfare that has been impacted due to these ideologies of colonization. Carriere and Sinclair recommend taking an anti-oppressive approach by “uncovering oppressive perspectives, structures and practices, and working towards culturally relevant programming and services, with an anti-racist approach as a foundation” (2009, p. 269).

Furthermore, critical race theory positions this research as a tool for resistance for the Executive Directors of Aboriginal agencies who need to express their concerns, how they are

continuing to be oppressed and develop their own processes and policies as they pertain to cultural planning. Creswell (2007) states, “the use of CRT methodology means that the researcher foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process: challenges the traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of people of colour; and offers transformative solutions to racial, gender and class subordination in our societal and institutional structures” (p. 28).

Methodology

This research was a qualitative and Indigenous study using a storytelling approach through in depth interviewing with open ended questions. This method was selected as it is an appropriate means to record the important points that Aboriginal agency Executive Directors can share with the child welfare community on the importance and process of community based cultural planning for Aboriginal children being adopted. In the following sections I will describe the methodologies in greater depth as well as the ethical considerations and limitations for this research study.

Creswell (2007) cites Pinnegar & Daynes (2006) definition of narrative research as “an approach to qualitative research that is both a product and a method. It is a study of stories or narrative or description of a series of events that accounts for human experiences” (p. 234). Being able to share our knowledge through storytelling of what we have experienced provides insight to other people.

As the researcher, the question arises as to why cultural planning is important for Aboriginal children being adopted into non-Aboriginal homes. When I took Dr. Jeannine Carriere’s class on adoption (2007), I was touched by her sharing of her personal story of adoption. It made me reflect back to when my grandfather explained he had lost one of his son’s during the residential school era and was trying desperately to find him before his passing out of this world. It made me wonder was he adopted. Where was this uncle I had never met? One of the various subjects also explored during this class, was “best interests of the child” in accordance to *Child, Family Community Services Act* of British Columbia and the importance of connectedness to family, community and culture during the adoption process. As I reflect on the

knowledge that I have gained as an Indigenous woman I believe “we must maintain our connectedness, we must maintain our relations, and never abandon them in search of understanding, but rather find understanding through them” (Burkhart, 2004, p. 25). This has become part of my “respect of attaining a framework of [my] interpretive analysis” (Waters, 2004).

Thomas supports using a storytelling approach explaining, “the beauty of storytelling is that it allows for storytellers to use their own voices and tell their own stories on their own terms” as a guide for Indigenous research (Brown & Strega 2005, p. 242).

Several researchers have written about “what is Indigenous research” (Absolon & Willett, 2004; Hart, 2007; Kovach, 2005; Weber-Pillwax, 2001; Wilson, 2001) and I have to agree with Kovach (2005) that I found this to be a “troublesome task of crisscrossing cultural epistemologies” (p.9). She further explains in order for me to guide my research I need to follow four ways to guide my research:

a) experience as a legitimate way of knowing; b) Indigenous methods, such as storytelling, as a legitimate way of sharing knowledge; c) receptivity and relationship between the researcher and participants as a natural part of the research ‘methodology’, and d) collectivity as a way of knowing that assumes reciprocity to the community (meaning both two-leggeds and four leggeds) (p.9).

Weber-Pillwax (2001) also explains, “The meaningful integration of new knowledge happens in the day-to-day events, sitting around the table with people whose lives are being affected in the concrete ways by “self-government” or “education” (p. 169). By using a conversational approach I have gained the knowledge from the participants who have responded to my invitation to participate in the research. Kovach (2010) states, “The conversational method aligns with an Indigenous worldview that honours orality as means of transmitting knowledge and upholds the relational which is necessary to maintain a collectivist tradition (p.42). This

knowledge gathered in this study is from six (6) Executive Directors who have experience working with cultural planning and have been able to articulate their lived experience and insightful information. They (Executive Directors) will be as Creswell (2005) discusses, “a voice for individuals not heard in the literature” (p. 102) and further describes this methodology by citing Barritt (1986):

is not the discovery of new elements, as in natural scientific study, but rather the heightening of awareness for experience which has been forgotten and overlooked. By heightening awareness and creating dialogue, it is hoped research can lead to better understanding of the way things appear to someone else through that insight lead to improvements in practice (102).

In the next section, I will explain the process and steps I took to recruit participants for this research study.

Recruitment

The Executive Directors of the Aboriginal Agencies have a major interest in the research question, *What is required for Aboriginal agencies in BC to provide cultural planning for Aboriginal children in care?* and were able to share their valuable input for the “best interests” of Indigenous children they serve and were able to guide what traditional information may need to be protected such as any sacred traditional ways of being.

Minkler and Wallerstein (2003) state “Community-based research begins with a research topic of importance to the community with the aim of combining knowledge and action for social change” (p. 4). As mentioned previously I believe the Executive Directors have a vested interest in maintaining cultural connections for adopted Aboriginal children as they are the major stakeholders and political leaders representing the Aboriginal communities; therefore making them accountable to the Indigenous communities they serve.

Absolon and Willet (2005) explain “...Aboriginal knowledge is conducted with the goal of enhancing life for Aboriginal Peoples and communities” (p. 98). Aboriginal agency Executive Directors have the everyday experiences of living and working in the communities they serve. Due to this, they are important stakeholders in determining the process of cultural planning from an Indigenous perspective in British Columbia.

There are twenty-four Aboriginal delegated agencies in BC (MCFD 2012) and they meet on a regular basis as coordinated by the Caring for First Nation Children Society (CFNCS) in Victoria. The role of CFNCS is to provide support to the delegated Aboriginal Agencies through disseminating government policies affecting Aboriginal people and child welfare, providing technical support at Partnership and Directors meetings, providing delegation and other related

training, and facilitating other meetings and events. There were no issues of power as neither entity has power over the other. I have had the honour of working with CFNCS for almost 6 years as an instructor and have had the ability to build knowledge and relationship with CFNCS to assist with recruitment of participants for this research. Wilson (2001) explains, “our systems of knowledge are built on the relationships that we have” (p. 177).

One of the main reasons I chose to use a third party recruitment process was that I was concerned that the email I sent to the agencies may go their junk mail as I am not a recognized sender from my home or university email address. In consultation with my supervisor, Dr. Jeannine Carriere, it was agreed that I would ask the Executive Director, Linda Lucas of CFNCS if she would be willing to distribute my recruitment letter (Appendix A) as I have built a trusting relationship with the CFNCS. This strategy approach is consistent with Kovach (2005) and Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest and Namey (2005) guide to research strategies.

I contacted the Executive Director, Linda Lucas on May 30, 2011 explaining my research proposal and strategy to recruit Executive Directors of the Aboriginal agencies. She had requested the Letter of Introduction (Appendix A) prior to approving supporting the research study on June 3, 2011 which I had sent out immediately. On June 14th, CFNCS had agreed to support me with the recruitment and provided me with a support letter that I included with my Ethics Application.

In my recruitment letter I asked for a maximum of 6 Directors to participate in this research. According to qualitative research principles, the number of participants is not as critical as the quality or depth of the research content. Creswell (2007) discusses by implementing a narrative approach it “is best for capturing the detailed stories or life experiences of a single life or the lives of a small number of individuals” (p. 55). He further discusses the number of

participants for qualitative research varies can vary in numbers as high as 20 people with the recommendations of interviewing 3 to 10 people. In module one of *Qualitative Research Methods: A Data Collector's Field Guide* (Mack, Woodson, MacQueen, Guest, Namely, 2005) describes recruiting participants who are “most likely to experience, know about, or have insights to the research topic...using recruitment strategies appropriate to the location, culture, and study population-find people who fit these criteria, until we meet the prescribed quotas” (p. 5) known as quota sampling.

My recruitment letter had to be sent out a couple of times to the Executive Directors because I was not getting a response from anyone and one of the main reasons I was given it could be because Executive Directors were on summer holidays. My letter went out again in the fall and when I did get my first response, the Executive Director had asked if they could still participate in the research study. I had explained my dilemma of not getting responses and this participant suggested they would send out an email to the Executive Directors and believed I would get responses. I had explained I would have to consult with my supervisor and would contact this participant back. After consultation with my supervisor, I was given permission to have the Executive Director, send out my recruitment letter to the Executive Directors. I was amazed and grateful how quickly Executive Directors had responded to the Recruitment Letter and the email; while still maintaining confidentiality throughout each of the responses.

When the Executive Directors contacted me and expressed an interest in taking part in the research, I sent the Information Letter (Appendix B) and the consent form (Appendix D) that explained in further detail: what the research is about, how the interviews will take place, informed consent, autonomy, audio recording of the interviews, how the information will be stored, when the information will be destroyed and how they are able to contact myself to set up

a time for an interview or if they have any further questions and how they can contact the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Office for any further explanation. When the participants were interested at this stage of the research study, I set up a face to face appointment with each of them and gave them the choice if they wished to have the interview at their office setting or another office setting of their choice or at their residence to ensure noise is not a factor and confidentiality could be maintained. They were also given the choice to make the decision if they wished to do the interviews either during working or after working hours.

I was also prepared to do telephone interviews as the delegated agencies are situated throughout the province of British Columbia and had an Implied Consent for Telephone Interviews (Appendix E) prepared to complete the interviews as approved by the University of Victoria Ethics Review Board with any Executive Directors who I was not able to meet face to face. Fortunately, the Executive Directors meet on a regular basis either in the Victoria area or Vancouver areas and I had made the decision to drive to the locations in order to have face to face interviews with each of them as I felt this was respectful of their time to engage in the research study and part of my Indigenous way of being.

The University of Victoria Ethics Review Board have numerous protocols that must be adhered to prior to having any contact with human participants for research purposes. I will explain in the next section of the steps I took as outlined in my approved ethics application to ensure accountability to the University as well as the Executive Directors in this research study.

Ethics

In accordance to the Ethics Committee of the University, I could not proceed with this research study until I had received approval for my proposal, and also my Ethics Application. Upon approval, as mentioned previously, I sent my Letter of Recruitment (Appendix A) and when an Executive Director made contact I first presented each of the Executive Directors with the Information Letter (Appendix B), and informed consent forms, explaining the reason for the research, about the process of confidentiality of the material, possible nicknames for each of the Executive Directors if they do not wish to be identified, how the information will be stored, how the University of Victoria has ownership of the material, how each of the Executive Directors could have a finalized copy, and an explanation that the Executive Directors may withdraw from the research at any time. I also explained that I required each of them to sign the consent forms, dated and witnessed.

When I met face to face with each of the Executive Directors, I explained that there may be small risk of psychological or emotional discomfort to them during the interview process; explaining it would depend how adoption has impacted them and asked each of them if they had a self-care plan. I explained to each of them I wanted to ensure there was support for them during or after the interview if it was required. I was also prepared throughout each of the interviews to monitor if the participant was demonstrating any signs of being uncomfortable and was prepared to end the interview if necessary and give the participant an opportunity to withdraw from the interview. This continues to be an important part of my “relational accountability” to the executive directors as I did not wish to do any emotional harm to any of the executive directors which could of possibly impact the research outcomes. I discussed the

self-care plan with each of them during the interviews and explained I would follow up with a phone call to ensure they receive any support if they required any. All of the participants had explained they each had a strong work and family support network if it was required.

I believe it is also important to point out ethically that Executive Directors are not all Aboriginal even though they are working for an Aboriginal delegated child welfare agency. The proposed population for this group has been hired by the community to represent their communities in a good way. I am not aware of Executive Directors who have not taken on the role of what is in the best interests of Indigenous children and families in their communities.

As I have mentioned previously, the agency Executive Directors meet the province on a regular basis and needless to say, not all Executive Directors are able to always attend the, “Partnership Meetings” which is done with the support of Caring for First Nations Children Society. I have had the honour of sitting at the table with the Directors, the various representatives of the Province and community stakeholders such as representatives from Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada and the Children’s Representative and the discussions involve how to work in collaboration for the “best interest” of children in the province in British Columbia.

As part of my Indigenous methodology and my own Cree teachings, values, beliefs and protocols of the Aboriginal community, I had a responsibility of a “give away” (small gift) to demonstrate to the Executive Directors who are major stakeholders in the province of British Columbia, the respect for sharing their voices, time they shared and their valuable input into the research. This Indigenous protocol is common amongst First Nations Peoples and no financial compensation was given. I also explained to each of them if they had decided to withdraw from

the research they would not have to return my token of appreciation (small gift) of their valuable time they had shared with me.

I used narrative storytelling approach in order to hear the stories from Executive Directors of Aboriginal agencies for them to be able to describe and reflect back on their experience of cultural planning for adoptive Aboriginal children. Prior to the interviews I provided each participant with the Consent Form (Appendix D) explaining I am following all of the protocols of the University of Victoria. Informed consent is one of the tools to demonstrate respect for persons participating in research and is defined as: “a mechanism for ensuring that people understand what it means to participate in a particular research study so they can decide in a conscious, deliberate way whether they want to participate (Mack, etal 2005, p. 9). Wilson (2001) discusses, “relational accountability” (p. 177) and Kovach (2005) the importance to accountability not only to the participants, but also to the community which I am working in and “being accountable to all my relations” (Wilson, 2005, p. 177).

All interviews were audio taped to facilitate the interpretation and reflecting back of information to participants and for myself as the researcher. Gerhardt (2004) states, “Audio recordings are a valuable tool in research for validity reasons, because they allow answers to be documented verbatim (p. 6) thus enhancing the credibility of this research.

The interviews were conducted between October to December 2011 and all were face to face interviews. They were semi structured in order for the Executive Directors to be able to tell their stories openly and allow them to express their experience, opinions and ideas in their own words. In Appendix C, I have included a question guide that was used to guide the interviews.

I have been working in the field of child welfare for approximately 13 years with experience in interviewing techniques of child protection issues, and participated in two recent

research studies with Dr. Jeannine Carriere. I had to be listening attentively and had to clarify some answers by asking probing questions based on their responses, to ensure the story that is being told was clear to the researcher and to not make assumptions. I also took short notes during the interview, to also clarify information; however I used this method sparingly as I recall one Elder saying at a conference I attended in May, 2010 that: oral tradition is about listening and when we are writing when someone is talking we are not hearing and completely present during the conversation.

At the beginning of each interview I had asked the participants of the research study if they wished to use a nickname and all of the participants agreed for the research to be coded as participant one to six.

Once the individual interviews were completed and transcribed I provided each participant with their verbatim transcript as promised; gave them an opportunity to review, clarify and to ensure the transcription was accurate and appropriate. They were also asked once again for their continued consent to be a part of the research study and all consented. I wanted to ensure that I was following the University of Victoria's *Protocols & Principles For Conducting Research in an Indigenous Context* (2003) and continued to check the protocols throughout this research study. There was no follow up interviews after the initial interview.

When all of the data had been collected I had identified themes in each of the interviews, called a within-case analysis according to Creswell (2007), which I will explain in the next section, the steps I took to analyse the data.

The Participants

After reviewing the Consent Form (Appendix D) to participate in the research study and self care strategies of each of the participants, each Executive Director was asked to describe the delegated Aboriginal agency they worked for. From the preliminary examination of the interviews a number of main characteristics were formed by implementing thematic analysis and sub-themes level of delegation, First Nations Communities being served by the agencies, number of children in care and number of staff employed.

One of my commitments to the research study was to protect the identity of the Executive Directors who were participating in this research study. For this question only, I will need to summarize the findings to ensure I am protecting their identity as readers may be able to identify which Executive Director is sharing from their Aboriginal Child and Family Agency due to their location.

Out of the six (6) participants, four (4) participants were working in an agency with Child Protection Delegation and the remainder two (2) participants were working in an agency with Guardianship Delegation. As of May, 2012 there are nine (9) Aboriginal Child Welfare Agencies in the Province of British Columbia with Child Protection Delegation and ten (10) Aboriginal Child Welfare Agencies with Guardianship Delegation.

There are 198 First Nations in the Province of British Columbia (BC) and the six (6) Executive Directors represent forty-five (45) First Nations communities all over the Province of British Columbia. A couple of the Executive Directors expressed they also support Aboriginal children in care whose First Nations communities are located outside of British Columbia.

All of the Aboriginal agencies have Guardianship responsibilities offering a full range of services for children in care and children who are in the continuing care of the Director. Five out of six participants shared the number of children in care of the Director, totalling 1,200 children who require cultural planning. Three (3) of the participants during their interviews; identified 400 children in total, who were in continuing custody of the Director who would require permanency planning if the First Nation community agrees to the adoption of their children from their communities.

All of the participants shared their stories of the various roles of staff in their agencies, ranging from child protection social workers, guardianship social workers, cultural program workers, clinical counsellors, traditional counsellors, Elders, administration staff and how each of the delegated agencies is required to have 51% of Aboriginal staff or more.

The Findings

The next question I had asked of the participants, if their agency had children adopted and what was their experience. All of the participants in the research study have had prior experiences in cultural planning for Aboriginal children who have become wards of the state; experiencing both positive and challenging experiences. All of the participants' experiences are with the working relationship with MCFD adoption social workers in planning for Aboriginal children who are being adopted into non-aboriginal homes. The challenges the participants had shared when they answered this question will be captured under the theme heading *Challenges with Cultural Planning*.

i. Challenges with Cultural Planning

First Nations communities across Canada historically have had negative experiences of losing their children to adoption as mentioned through residential schools and the “60’s Scoop” and from my own personal experience with Aboriginal communities and agencies, the communities continue to be wary of their children being adopted into non-Aboriginal homes or communities refuse to have the children of the community adopted into non-Aboriginal homes. Each of the Executive Directors shared a common theme that they did not want to repeat the historical practices of adoption and some shared their experience of the historical loss of children.

Participant 4 explained,

“because of the historical loss of the children to that program area, where they just simply lose contact with them...the word [adoption] is not necessarily a positive one when you talk about child welfare programs...there is a reaction to the word adoption..”

Due to the impact of the historical adoption practices with the communities this agency has experienced, the plan for children in the care of their agency participant 4 explained is,

“the placement remain as it is; continue in care order and permanency plan with a foster home.”

Participant 2 explained their experience with past practice,

“the Band was serviced by the Ministry for adoption planning...ahm...we had few opportunities where we worked with the BC Adoptions Exceptions Committee but those adoptions in regards to cultural planning specifically, around long term planning, protecting the cultural and inherited rights of children who were adopted out that was not. The Band did not have a whole lot of involvement they were just looking for support for the plans and so, there were three or four of those situations where the Band supported the plans in that time the Ministry did not have cultural plans of care.”

Participant 5 shared their personal experience of searching for connectedness and belonging due to historical practices in adoption. This participant shared the following:

“it took me like 20 odd years to do it and I do not want that to happen for these kids...when kids are adopted out at a really young age or even when they are taken into care at a really young age ahm if that attachment has not been formed to their biological parents it is really difficult to re-create that...it is almost like ripping an umbilical cord right...and I do not know if we can really ever repair it. I think that it is something that is internal for everyone who has been adopted or been removed...ahm...to repair that on their own; but if there is anything we can do as an agency or workers to help repair that on their own...I think it is incumbent upon it to do the outmost to make that less painful for a child so, when they are 35 they are not searching...and we could eliminate some of those journeys for people and vie them a healthier start in life.”

Participant 6 shared,

“...we carry the children and youth ahm we also, have a priority to ground everything we do to our history as Aboriginal people and in our cultural practices, our cultural knowledge, and our Indigenous world view.”

Some of Executive Directors have been around for many years in other capacities of child welfare and remember experienced these historical practices.

Cultural Planning for Aboriginal adoptive children has been implemented by MCFD for approximately 15 years. Social work policy is never static and we continue to learn from the research or tragedies in the field of child welfare. Therefore, I thought it was important to ask the participants if there were any challenges with cultural planning and not make the assumption there were no challenges.

All of them have expressed their challenges with cultural planning and there are identified sub-themes: broken promises of not adoptive parents not following through with the cultural plan; cultural planning not being “just as it is, an agreement” which is not legally binding; staff and adoptive parents requiring training of the historical experiences of Aboriginal peoples; funding for under resourced resources to be able to practice in a culturally appropriate way. Each of these sub-themes has been identified not only by the question of “What challenges have you experienced with cultural planning?” but has been interwoven throughout the remainder of the questions. I will continue to share the voices of the Executive Directors and their experience with the challenges they are faced in the field of child welfare.

ii. Broken Promises with Cultural Planning

When MCFD and Aboriginal Agencies are working with potential adoptive parents one of the components of the cultural plan is the “willingness” of the adoptive parent/s to support the Aboriginal child or children with maintaining their culture identity, connection with their

community and extended family relationships. All of the participants agreed they struggle when cultural agreements are not followed as agreed upon when the adoption order has been completed and signed off by the Superior Court of Canada.

Participant 5 explained,

“I have had those conversations with the perspective adoptive parents and they are totally on board and then to find out two months later that they are not fulfilling their end of the agreement is really kind of sad...which is why I think this agency is a little bit gun shy to moving into adoptions plus it is a huge ethical dilemma.”

Participant 4 had also explained they had the same experience with adoptive parents who:

“simply changed their minds and just said they want to withdraw their agreement to have open access to the Band and have lost track of those kids.”

One of the participants shared their attempts of mediation between the agency and the adoptive parents after the adoption order had gone through the courts:

“we had taken them to mediation twice already to try to get them to comply and...do what they say they were going to do...can we make them sign a legal document that you know that says I understand and I agree to abide by this; whatever it is and if don't then what should we do, throw them in jail? I don't know, that seems a little harsh. I wonder...you take the kids back...that is not going to work either.”

It appears not only are Aboriginal agencies experiencing the same issues with broken promises; MCFD adoption workers may be sharing the same challenges with adoptive parents who are not going to fulfil their obligations of maintaining the cultural agreement.

Participant 5 shared their experience:

“People can say all the right things but once the papers are signed, they can do whatever they want and unfortunately, it is not our social workers at [Agency], it was also the Ministry social workers saying we do not believe this family is actually going to fulfil what they said they were going to fulfil in terms their kids' cultural growth...the [MCFD] social worker had a really really difficult time signing off on it because none of the cultural planning was really followed through on but they signed off on it none the less, because it meant permanency for the kids....So, it is weighing that and the social worker

for the Ministry and the supervisor for the adoptions team made that call because you know we had input into it; but it was their call at the end of the day and we did not feel great about it; felt somewhat lied to.”

Participant 1 explained the same frustrations of cultural agreements not being legalized:

“it is just done in good faith and you trust the people...but once the ink is dry, they’ve forgotten about it...”

iii. Legalizing Cultural Agreements

All of the Executive Directors shared their concern that adoptive parents are not accountable for following the written cultural “agreements” because the agreement is what it is; an agreement, not a contract and should be a part of the legal document when the adoption is granted by the Supreme Court of Canada.

Participants shared their frustrations when adoptive parents do not follow through with the Cultural Safety Agreement:

“the challenge is getting people to buy into the plan and to actually follow through and probably, I can say we have more good experiences than bad, you the majority of people who do sign them in good faith and do try to follow through and do what they say they are going to do but then there is the other bunch...” (Participant 1)

It is important to note, Participant 1 also shared their experience of the percentage of adoptive parents “who do” follow through with the cultural agreements:

“probably say 80 %.”

Participant 5 shared the same sentiments of the previous participant that:

“in legislation there is nothing that has teeth in it.. ahm you can’t hold people accountable once those papers are signed.”

iv. **Lack of Funding with Cultural Agreements**

Many of the participants expressed there is an ongoing concern of the lack of funding for Aboriginal child welfare agencies in British Columbia.

One of the concerns explained by Participant 5 was the shortage of staff:

“everyone is totally overwhelmed as it is oh, yeah so if someone wants to take that on, “go for it”...it is always on the side of your desk...we have an obligation [to the adoptive child] and a responsibility.”

There was a concern of the lack of MCFD adoption social workers, aboriginal social workers and strategies to recruit aboriginal adoptive parents:

“we know there are hundreds of aboriginal children in the provincial system who have been designated for adoption and when we look at the lack of adoption social workers in the province of BC and knowing that our scope of service right now is restricted to the nation but knowing there is so much more to do provincially around aboriginal adoptions is really frustrating..there is no aboriginal recruitment strategy for aboriginal adoptive parents...there are very few aboriginal adoption social workers in the province. Protection workers out number adoption workers 20 to one.” (Participant 2)

Another participant shared the similar challenges with shortage of staff:

“...it has been off the corner of somebody’s desk, so you know that is a barrier, I would also say another barrier would be...forming those relationships with the communities that open the door for planning, say a homecoming event or a Fish Day...you have to build some important ahm connections with the communities to make those kinds of ideas to work and access the people in the communities that are the keepers of the knowledge around just those cultural practices.” (Participant 4)

Some of the participants shared their frustration with the lack of funding to incorporate cultural ceremony within the Aboriginal agencies; one of the participant’s expressed:

“Cultural events are not seen as equivalent to doing delegated work.” (Participant 3)

Another participant shared the agency would like to have more homecoming ceremonies and requires support with funding:

“homecomings are expensive and they are time consuming and ah we need, you know that is not an excuse but...it needs to be emphasized in our program that we need to do more of those things, but we need help to get it done well...homecoming[’s] I think it costs at least 15 thousand dollars.” (Participant 4)

As previously mentioned, there are Aboriginal agencies that are faced with the challenge where 50 % of the children they represent are Nations outside of British Columbia.

v. Training for Staff and Adoptive Parents

One of the participant’s shared the challenge of staff not being strong with their own culture identity to support aboriginal children in care:

“the idea goal that people [social workers] have identified is to have resource people for all of the various Nations...it would be a passport to all of the different cultures. They [children] have all kinds of questions, so we need to..make sure that people can answer questions you know about their culture. [The challenge is] a number of staff professional staff that are not strong in their identity. (Participant 6)

I was curious about how the Cultural Safety Plan supports adoptive parents to address racism in order for them to support the Aboriginal children they were adopting. Research indicates Aboriginal children who have been adopted into non-aboriginal homes are being raised in homes of privilege (Carriere and Sinclair, 2009; Sinclair 2007; Nuttgens 2004;); and non-aboriginal adoptive parents are ill equipped to deal with racism as they have never encountered racism themselves. As mentioned previously, I was curious to hear the voices of the Executive Directors if cultural planning is addressing racism for Aboriginal adoptees. The question I asked was awkward and poorly worded and I am unsure if the Executive Directors understood what I was questioning, which was my misgiving. However, each of them discussed the importance of connectedness to the child’s culture and having a positive racial identity.

This participant shared the importance of being connected to culture and grounded in their culture:

“I think that if kids are really grounded and proud and have a good sense...are grounded in their identity and in their culture...it is so important to make them feel to that, to help them make them proud of who they are right, and I think that whether it is racism or whether it is being bullied at school, whether like kids who have that grounding are better to deal with that kind of stuff and I think racism is bullying them...how do you teach your kids to stand up to bullies, to stand up to racists? If they are really grounded and proud of who they are and know they can...how do you do that in the Cultural Plan by doing all of those things...I don't think there is any one part of the Cultural Plan that speaks to this, how to deal with racism but it is all those things together that help kids to deal with it.”
(Participant1)

Another participant voiced training should be incorporated into the adoptive training:

“Any, the part of the adoption contracted has an impact on that is around identity and the connection to community and that is installing a sense of belongingness and pride of who they are and where they come from..ahm..but I believe...there is big learning's for many of us around adoptive training because that is where we ought to be dealing with the issue of racism and I mean there are adoptive parents both aboriginal and non-aboriginal who do not have the awareness or the knowledge or the education or the intervention tools to help deal with racism...I think that part of it for aboriginal parent is that there are many aboriginal parents who do not as adults [know] how to deal with racism. I think there are components that can be derived out of the cultural agreement but, I really believe where it needs to be address is in the training.”

From my experience in child welfare, numerous Aboriginal children in care of the state are placed into non-Aboriginal foster homes and are unsure how to ask questions about

Aboriginal culture. One of the participants shared:

“I know of foster parents who want to support the cultural identity of the children in their homes but yet, are afraid to step forward and to ask for that help because they feel they will be judged for not knowing. (Participant 3)

Another participant also supported shared the importance of education:

“I think...they understand about white privilege and that they understand the immigration laws of Canada and how they have been racist. They understand the whole process of how Caucasian people throughout the world have dominated; people of colour....the child

will inevitably come across racism in the urban environment and they have to understand that it is a product of history and how other children are socialized to believe that. I think that education on racism for adoptive parents would also be very important, ahm, I think it is really important for them to really focus on ahm, helping the child develop a healthy sense of self and what that looks like.” (Participant 6)

vi. Positive Experiences with Cultural Planning

Cultural planning for Aboriginal children has been in effect for approximately 15 years in the Province of British Columbia. With the recent changes, agencies are taking an active role to support adoptive parents and the children they are adopting.

Participant 1 explains the process their agency begins with the adoptive parents with the Band Representative and the Executive Director:

“I [Executive Director] would take a field trip and would go visit the adoptive family and just to say we want to meet you, this is who we are...this is what our expectations are if you adopt a child from our Nation and you know just sort of build those connections and establish those connections and start the relationship building.”

Participant 5 shared one of their experiences where the Roots Social Worker had developed a plan with the adoptive parents, social workers and asked the community for:

“concrete things supporting the family, supporting the child to get to know their culture, get to know their community, who is here in the community in [city] who can support them that has knowledge or is from their home community and we actually ended up having a circle here at [Agency] and we there must have been about 20-25 people here and what I was really surprised about is there is four or five people of that child’s home community that we did not know about that came...We all sat around and talked about how we would support the child and how we would support the adoptive parents in helping raise the child.”

A Roots worker objective is to connect or re-connect children to their cultural community and family.

Participant 5 explained they had helped the adoptive parents to make something for the child they were adopting, explaining the positive experience:

“traditionally, when mothers were expecting they would start to make things for this unborn baby, ahm you know like whether that would be a pair of moccasins or a cradle board...this woman made a pair of really beautiful moccasins that were beaded like we taught her, brought in an elder to show her how to bead, how to make the moccasins and that is what she gifted to her daughter that she was adopting.”

Participant 5 explained the circle of support had explained to the adoptive parents:

“It is not giving them our kids say here you are taking care of them it is, no we are inviting you into our culture and you become part of our family and as part of the family we are asking you to take care of these children which is much different. That we are going to hold you accountable so if you are not at a ceremony, you can bet someone is going to be calling you or the next time they see you, say, “hey where you, you know we thought you would be here” and to allow more of that peer to peer kind of accountability rather than being the heavy as the delegated agency saying, “hey you need to take this kid to this event...so it changes the feel of it quite a bit.”

vii. Current Experiences with Cultural Planning

The next question I had asked each of the participants was to explain their experience with cultural planning. Each of the participants explained the importance of “connectedness” to community, family and culture and how they each have the relationships with each of the nations as opposed to MCFD.

Participant 2 shared:

“cultural planning has been this kind of process that has been driven by the wrong people...cultural planning is a process that basically, is driven by the guardianship worker as it pertains to children in care...we said that cultural planning for children needed to be approved by governments, elders and community members...we talked about not only children being connected to their nation but, not only their nation collectively but, the villages within the nation that have separate family structures, separate teachings, separate beliefs, separate customs. Cultural planning talked about what that connection and belongingness looked like, it talked about making more concrete connections around who will that child connect with...right, what practices or customs will that child be involved with and all of those components of the cultural [agreement to be] driven by the

elders, the government's people and the people from the community....as opposed as guardian directed.”

Participant 4 explained the Aboriginal agency has a different relationship with the Bands versus MCFD and explained:

“we always try to be mindful to the need to maintain connections for kids in care and ahm, I think we do a better job than the Ministry, at least I think we do...we have to remind ourselves that we are not just another office performing delegated services. Unlike the Ministry we have special relationships and connections with the Bands...ahm...and our plans of care for kids need to reflect that special connections that we have...we have an enhanced ability over the Ministry to work with families and...build relationships...those kids are returned home for visits and for ceremonies...so there is a real need for the Nations to understand where their kids are...[and] language development is another really critical piece.”

The Executive Directors were asked the following question, “What have been the most gratifying features of the cultural plan?” This continued to build on their positive experiences with cultural planning and what they thought was positive about the cultural plan. The identifying themes shared by the participants were: the witnessing of children learning about the connectedness of their extended family, Nation and culture by attending homecomings and ceremonies that was organized by the agencies and communities.

This participant shared their gratification by knowing the children were connected to the community, cultural teachings and maintaining their identity.

“the connections with children and their biological family and siblings, the connection with children and their extended family, the involvement of children in their cultural practices, the protection of their names for example, every child...every child that has been adopted by both First Nations and non-native adopted parents; that the cultural planning recognized the importance of the name. Every one of those kids kept their name. Our cultural planning recognized the importance of identity.” (Participant 1)

viii. Importance of Ceremony with Cultural Planning

A couple of the participants had shared their experience of the importance of the community witnessing the adoptive parents and children's experience coming home to their communities.

Participant 3 shared:

“let the people who are witnessing that ceremony whether it be family, whether it be community member, their responsibility is to ensure that they support this [adoptive] family. You will experience challenges as a family and you will have very difficult times but, not only are we still here to support you but the people here witnessing are here to support you as well...so, I think it is really providing a larger support system”

One of the participants spoke about observing an Elder and a child during a homecoming ceremony:

“I watched a child...sit down beside an Elder..and the child did not even know the Nation that he was from..the Elder talked to this child, you know he started to build a genogram in his head and ah he told him about his grandmother, about his relatives and how there were some great wonderful artists in his family; just watching this child was really cool.” (Participant 4)

Another participant shared their gratification by observing an Elder and a child:

“this one little kid I guess he is about 10 and he was in the Smokehouse cutting up fish and he says, “ You know I fell like...he just feels like this is in my blood.” We looked at him and we said that is because it is in your blood. But you know it was just that aha moment where you know that he had made that connection and that to me is gratifying those moments where kids...connecting with their culture and it who they are and they feel it...it is the most basic of human right, is to know who you are and where you come from.” (Participant 1)

One of the participants shared the gratification of the adoptive parents learning about ceremony:

“I think the relationships, the connections, and the actual experience of what culture is...but also getting them involved with ceremony, helping them understand the structure of the culture prior to them adopting.” (Participant 6)

The next section of this research will be addressing what are the recommendations of the Executive Directors in order to enhance, strengthen cultural planning in the best interest of Aboriginal children.

ix. Resources are Required for Cultural Planning

One of the participants discussed the many tasks they perform in order to ensure the Agency is connected with the children they are representing on top of their regular duties:

I would really like to have a cultural worker...to keep in touch...with [adoptive parents] and these kids. I would love to have someone on staff who could [be] ...sending out mail outs...a cultural package that included a life-book...a genealogy, a clan blanket...books, story books written by you know elders in our community...I have all these good intentions but just not enough hours in the day to do them and..I track about another 50 kids throughout the province that like that come from our community...kids that have been adopted out or in care in another area...so that is a 100 kids that I am following at any given time...trying to keep on top of that stuff and know even things like sending birthday cards to the kids every year and a Christmas card...stuff like this to let them know that you do belong here and your community does care about you and try to it but I am one person right?" (Participant 1)

Participant 2 shared the importance of: the Cultural Agreement to be legally binding, resources for post adoption services, forming an Aboriginal Adoptive Parents

Association and resources to support the cultural plan:

"...that the cultural [agreement] is not legally binding...because if we look at the Convention of the Rights of Children and if we look at the Rights of Children in Care...if we look at...Indigenous Rights that it is possible to make that [cultural agreement] a legally binding document and where...I think we would see more compliance...I believe that it ought to be between the agency, the parent, the child and the nation...I really believe a one-time shot on cultural plans is not a smart thing to do. Resources attached to cultural plans...cultural plans ...sometimes are not resourced for post adoption services...there is no room for cultural ceremony, there is no room for involvement with Elders, there is no room for what I see as a community based...healing or like if you need to go and have a bath and or if you need to go to an Elder for teachings or if you need to go and get ready for an initiation or any of that stuff there is no room for that. I would love to have an Elder attached to every cultural plan, a designate...until a child reaches the age of majority. We have a cultural obligation to ensure that there is compliance to those plans...re-aligning *Post Adopting Assistant Services* with cultural plans and they are

two separate and distinct pieces...nowhere in there does it talk about the cultural supports for adoptive children.”

Participant 3 shared for their agency they require resource supports in the agency:

“we need more Elders to work directly with the agency...more training for the staff to help them feel more confident to actually develop and implement the cultural plan...funding [for] ceremonies.”

Participant 4 shared the same sediments of more funding and resources for the agency:

“a cultural coordinator...that helps us put some programming together...we have to stop having workers doing it off the corner of their desk...I mean the irony is that the Ministry developed a Roots Program but, they really saw it as a Ministry program as their program. They [MCFD and AAND] have not been forthcoming with the dollars to build roots programs in delegated agencies. I think there is an assumption that because we are a delegated agency...we have somehow by osmosis we have the capacity. You know we somehow have all the other responsibilities that you know any Ministry office has around delegated service so, it is strictly a question of capacity and the resources available to do it.”

Participant 5 also discussed the importance for funding of resources and Elders in the community:

“cultural resources...and we need the time to really do it justice... ..financially to allow us to hire the people we need to hire ahm to use the resources we have in our community like our Elders and honour them for the information that they are giving us ahm I think we are doing them a great dis-service sometimes.”

Participant 6 was also shared the agency they require further resources and funding to support the agency with cultural planning:

“we have to be resourceful to the adoptive parents...identifying people in the urban area...ceremonial access...cultural intervention monies are very specific to whatever the child requires.”

x. Cultural Planning Recommendations and additional comments

The following is the continued shared voices of the Executive Directors for recommendations for change and additional comments:

Participant 1 shared:

- “Training is necessary for workers in developing meaningful cultural plan,
- Mandatory training for adopted parents so they understand the significance of a cultural plan as many of them don’t understand why culture is important,
- Facilitate a process for the adoptive parent and biological parents to meet and to keep the extended family connected.”

Participant 2 shared:

- “To have legally binding cultural agreements,
- Cultural agreements should be between the agency, parent, the child and the nation,
- Cultural agreements to be a living document, instead of a one-time document,
- Resources attached to cultural agreements,
- Resources to be in-align with the *Cultural Agreement* and *Post Adoption Services*, such as: cultural ceremony, involvement with Elders, teachings of the community,
- Monitoring of the cultural agreement to ensure compliance..and re-adjusting to the child’s needs,
- Develop an Aboriginal Adoptive Parents Association,
- Cultural Agreements to be written in the child’s language,
- Ensuring children are involved in language programs from their Nation,
- Developing two Cultural [Agreements], one for a child who has been adopted into a non-delegated home or an aboriginal family to who nation is different than the child’s,
- Ensure children are connected to their family system, know who the Elders are from their community, aware of the teachings, values, beliefs, practices..so you are not dictating culture,
- Creating life books when children first come into care, so children have their story of where they began,
- Extensive genogram, a family tree that say who they are and where they have come from.”

Participant 3 recommended the following:

- Training at community colleges, universities of the importance of cultural planning for children,
- Having the capacity to provide resources for cultural planning, elders who are associated with the family, being able to identify protocols with the Nations.”

The following are Participant 4’s recommendations for cultural planning:

- “Developing Advisory Committees by hooking the community in planning with kids who are in care...what can an adoption like from their community’s perspective,

- Cultural camps for youth
- Developing a Cultural planning committee with all of the agencies to generate ideas of what a good cultural plan can look like,
- Federal government to follow through on their promises for prevention services...I think prevention services is preventative work,
- Federal government to fulfil promises of Agency operational dollars...currently operating on the same dollars when the agency first open we are operating on 60 cent dollars if you consider the cost of living...talk about systematic racism,
- Funding for resources

The following are the recommendations from Participant 5:

- “Adoptive parents to go through a year long process of cultural teachings and to be involved in the child’s community. The adoptive parents to learn about the child’s food, when they fish, traditional songs, names, ceremonies, learning about the child’s Nation’s creation stories,
- To be able to offer cultural teaching to caregivers who are foster parents.”

Participant 6 shared the following recommendations for cultural planning:

- “A strong definition for cultural planning,
- “The adoptive parent to participate in the child’s identity.”

The Executive Directors were very compassionate during their interviews with positive changes for cultural planning and made numerous recommendations that were previously made by Carriere (2008, 2010, 2011) in her previous research. All of the research supports inadequate funding for cultural planning for children to be able to travel to their communities; training is required for adoptive parents and staff including Aboriginal agencies which was identified in the previous research.

Analysis

The next step was to interpret all of the stories shared through a thematic analysis across all of the interviews collected. Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as “a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (p.6). When the interviews were completed; each interview was transcribed verbatim containing 140 pages of rich data. One of the first steps I took was reading each interview, re-familiarizing myself with the interviews and case notes (Bryman and Burgess, 2002) and trying to establish if there were any themes that were transcending and how they related to the literature. Braun and Clarke, (2006) state, “a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set” (p.10). I took notes from each interview and started comparing each of the interviews, which I found overwhelming because I was jumping back and forth and there did not seem any structure and I required mapping (Bryman and Burgess, 2002) to structure the data in some kind of sequence. At this point, I made the decision to compile all of the interviews into one document because I realized I required a systematic system of answers to the questions as there were themes that were emerging.

I copied each of the questions from the Interview Guide (Appendix C) on to one document and then copied each of the participant’s answers under each of the questions they had answered. I then made the decision to take out my some of my minor replies to the participants and these minor replies were the following words: okay, yeah, hmm, uhm and oh. I was very

surprised by doing this simple exercise that I had reduced the written data to 81 pages. I was able to establish themes from each of the questions asked during the interviews.

The next task was to start labelling or coding each of the themes as the answers of the participants in some cases interwove in all of the data to answer the research question, “What is required for Aboriginal agencies in BC to provide cultural planning for Aboriginal children in care?” The following main themes emerged from the stories shared funding

Theme 1: Funding for Aboriginal Child Welfare Agencies

Of all of the stories shared, I was most shocked when the Executive Directors shared there is no federal funding for cultural ceremonies and to have an Elder to support staff in their agencies. Cultural ceremonies are an integral part of Indigenous people spiritually. I am not sure why I assumed there was funding and I believe it was because all through the *AOPSI Standards* I have trained social workers previously they “must” practice in “culturally appropriate” ways as set out in the Standards. Ceremony was demonstrated on a daily basis throughout the delegation training with CFNCS with a large ceremony at the end of the Voluntary Services Delegation Training where Provincial and Federal government were invited and attended. The research of Kozlowski et al. (2010) states there is an expectation for social workers who are employed by Aboriginal agencies to be able to provide cultural ceremonies for children.

The question remains if the Aboriginal agencies are not receiving the Federal funding and are mandated to provide these services to children; how does the Federal government expect the agencies to provide these services including the remainder of expectations as outlined by Kozlowski et al. (2012)?

Another disturbing comment was shared by Participant 5, was the underfunding the agency has been receiving since the agency first opened, stating “the Federal Government has been providing the same operational dollars from when their office first opened numerous years ago.” I am unable to say how many years ago because this may identify this Agency and I want to ensure I am held accountable to my participants for anonymity. If this is happening for this Aboriginal agency I was guessing at the time of the interview this was the same for all of the Aboriginal child welfare agencies who reside on reserve! Participant 5 also shared, the Auditor General of Canada and the Auditor General of British Columbia had released a report in 2008 recommending more dollars are required for Aboriginal children. Needless to say, I wanted the report and researched it further and The Auditor of Canada acknowledged, “children were among the most vulnerable people in society” (p.1); recommending funding services for support services, policies that are culturally appropriate; have recognized these services for First Nations communities and families require more resources and are more time consuming (p.2) and recommended both governments to act promptly to these recommendations. I don’t understand why, there continues to be inequities for our most vulnerable children and believe we continue to live in a colonial racist system that lags in “prompt” funding for First Nations children and families in a culturally appropriate manner. If the First Nations child welfare agencies and MCFD are not able to receive adequate resources and funding for culturally appropriate services, how can one expect adoptive parents to support Aboriginal children to be connected to the families, communities and their culture?

Blackstock (2010), who works for the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, has launched a class action Human Rights suit against the Government of Canada for the “underfunding” of First Nations child welfare agencies in comparison to the Provincial child

welfare agencies across Canada. She is reporting the underfunding continues to oppress Aboriginal people for services that are required for Aboriginal children and families and the Auditor General's report further supports her class action suit.

As I have mentioned previously, there were sub-themes identified under the heading of funding and in the section I will discuss proposed training ideas from the stories, the Executive Directors shared.

Sub-theme i: Training to Support Cultural Planning.

One of the sub-themes identified with stories shared by the Executive Directors was required funding for training for foster parents, adoptive parents, agency staff including MCFD, colleges and universities.

Throughout all of the stories shared each spoke about the importance of adoptive parents having "mandatory" training encompassing cultural awareness training, the skills to keep children connected and have the skills to help Aboriginal children deal with racism. From the literature review, Harding (2010) discusses the importance training of self awareness and developing cultural competency skills prior to working with Aboriginal families, children and communities for professionals and I would also recommend the foster parents, adoptive parents, Agency staff, MCFD staff as well as students at universities/colleges as per the recommendation of the Executive Directors. The vast amount of information in the literature review supporting why training is required as Atkinson explained, "most "white" people do not know how to deal with racism;" Sinclair's research reports of the high numbers of adoption breakdowns during adolescents due to children in search of positive racial identity; Carriere's recent research, (2008,

2010, 2011) to name a few. I strongly believe training should become “mandatory” for non-Aboriginal adoptive parents who are considering adopting an Aboriginal child to support them with their self awareness of Aboriginal people and build competency skills for themselves to support their child or children maintaining connections to their family and community.

Participants in Carriere’s (2008) research also supported training for adoptive parents. CFNCS has an excellent program that is currently being funded by MCFD; however, as mentioned previously this has not been a mandatory training program and I hope with adequate funding as recommended by the Auditor General of Canada and British Columbia to provide culturally appropriate services this program will have the sufficient funding.

First Nations children should not be adoptable to ill equipped non-Aboriginal adoptive parents; especially when one hears the shocking words of one of the adoptive parents in Carriere’s (2008) research saying: “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” (p. 33). My question to this participant is how does one unlearn their racism when it is embedded in our Canadian society? This is a fine example why people need to take training about colonialism, residential schools, cultural competences, self awareness of their own knowledge because when you educate people, from my previous experience with knowledge about what occurred to Aboriginal people in Canada, they may have reactions of outraged, embarrassed, saddened, shock or denial as they were not aware of the atrocities. They do require support and the ones who believe in the upper quote, are easily identifiable through training and instructors can make recommendations to MCFD either for further support or not recommend the adoptive parent to adopt an Aboriginal

child or the other is the adoptive parent realizes they are ready for this kind of a commitment to keep children connected.

Carriere's (2010, 2011) also supports the recommendation of further training in her research for professionals and youth who discussed the importance of being connected to family members and their communities. I believe as professional in the child welfare system, it is the children and youth, families we serve in regards to the "best interests of children" and they have spoken and the majority of the youth adopted and or one who were in care believed in cultural planning and recommended cultural planning should happen when a child first comes into care as the Executive Directors had share in this study as well. As Carriere and Richardson (2009) explain connectedness "is to provide balance in their lives by providing them with culture and ancestral knowledge" (p.63).

The next sub-theme continues with the shared stories of requiring further resources in order to adequately provide support services to children, families and the community in a culturally appropriate manner for their Agencies and MCFD for culturally appropriate services.

Sub-Theme ii: Resources required for Cultural Planning

As mentioned previously, it is unsure when the Government of Canada or Provincial governments are going to be able to adequately be able to fund for culturally appropriate support services for children and families or when First Nations agencies will have the adequate funding for administrative or operational dollars. MCFD is also included in this equation of not have enough supportable funding for support services for Aboriginal children on their caseloads; which is extremely alarming as First Nations children are the highest number of children to be in

care, remain in care the longest, become continuing care wards and would be placed on the adoption list when the continuing care order is granted.

The Executive Directors shared their stories throughout the interviews of social workers trying to help MCFD adoption social workers support cultural planning for children who were being adopted in their communities. They have all reported social workers at every level have enough responsibilities in accordance to the *APOPSI Standards* (2005) and MCFD as well and have requested cultural workers to assist with cultural planning, support with staff, Elders to support staff in the agencies as well as children, youth and families. I was very surprised to hear the Aboriginal agencies at the time when they were sharing their stories they were also advocating for additional staff for MCFD as one participant had shared, there are too many children waiting for forever homes; meaning adoptive homes. In hindsight if one has an excellent cultural plan and an adoptive parent who has the skills and willingness to keep a child connected this would reduce the number of adoption breakdowns as indicated in the above research already mentioned. Nuttgens (2004) supports children being adopted into non-Aboriginal homes as long as the homes are connected to the family, community and to the culture. Berge's (2006) research also recommended "white" children and youth to be connected to their biological mothers and extended family and the research as these are too of youth who too wish to be connected to family.

Another sub-theme under resources is for adoptive parents to have adequate funding to be able to travel to far communities in their Post Adoption Services as this funding is not available for the adoptive parent or their Aboriginal child; which does not make any sense which so ever in my mind. If you have an Adoption Act and policies in place for a cultural plan to support a child to remain connected to his or her nation and the adoptive parent lives in a far

away community how is Provincial funding system supporting Aboriginal children to remain connected that will be significant for the child to have a sense of positive racial identity? I believe this is another area the Provincial and Federal government need to explore to ensure Aboriginal children are being provided with the best possible supports.

Theme 2). Legalizing Cultural Agreements

Most of the Executive Directors, with the exception of one participant in this research study shared their stories and concerns about adoptive parents not following through with the cultural plan as each of them have had negative experiences of adoptive parents who would not follow through with the agreed set out cultural plan and what each of them all shared is, “there is no teeth” legally to hold adoptive parents accountable for not following through by ensuring the children are attending cultural events, contact with family and the community, or they just disappear with no forwarding address and the Agency does not know where are the children they are accountable for. One of the Executive Directors has gone to great lengths to have mediator engage in a process to come up with another plan to support the adoptive parents and the children; however in this process was unsuccessful.

Another story shared by one of the Executive Directors was their Agency and the community to which they are accountable, worked very hard on the cultural agreement and through the whole process, everyone was concerned about the adoptive parents not honouring the cultural agreement. This Director explained during the six month placement the adoptive parents did little to follow through; however at the end of the day the struggle was the children were strongly attached to the adoptive parents and who makes the decision to not sign off the adoption

because of concerns of re-traumatizing the children? The Executive Director of this Agency, the community and the MCFD adoptions social worker left the decision up to the MCFD team leader and as difficult as it was the decision was made to sign off on the adoption and grant the adoptive parent's custody. Cases such as these were expressed by all of the participants of the concerns of trauma to the children; hence I go back to the Executive Directors recommendation that there should be mandatory training prior for pre-adoptive parents.

This situation had to be extremely difficult especially when one sees how happy the children are and they are aware the caregivers want to adopt them; however they are not aware of possible future scaring because of adoptive parents not understanding the cultural loss and how children need to be connected and have a sense of belonging.

Lalum'utul' Smun'eem Child and Family Services has incorporated a cultural contract for adoptive parents, outlining the adoptive parents' responsibilities to ensure Cowichan children are maintaining contact as outlined and it also outlines the responsibilities of Cowichan Tribes for the adoptive parents and the Cowichan children. This agency has been very progress and is now embarking on a new project of developing Cowichan child welfare legislation in collaboration with the community and various other partners.

The Executive Directors in the research study shared the importance of developing a committee to work on what does the best cultural plan look like so everyone is not reinventing the wheel and are working collaboratively together.

Recommendations from the Findings

A summary of the recommendations shared by the Executive Directors are as follows:

- Cultural awareness training for adoptive parents, foster parents, social workers and students,
- Identified people in the Aboriginal community to support Adoptive parents i.e. Elders,
- Legally binding cultural plan agreements,
- Cultural agreements to be between the Aboriginal agency, adoptive parent and child,
- Financial resources available to carry out responsibilities outlined in the cultural plan,
- Monitoring of the cultural plan,
- Resources available for education needs for the child and adoptive parent,
- Develop an Adoptive parents association,
- Cultural agreements in the child's language,
- Cultural planning needs to start when a child comes into care,
- Extensive genogram of the child,
- Developing two cultural agreements one for non-aboriginal families and another for Aboriginal families who are not of the same Nation as the child,
- Developing Advisory Committees to support Agencies with adoption,
- Adequate financial funding for culturally appropriate services and supports.

The Executive Directors were able to define a clear list of reasonable list of resources in order to provide culturally appropriate support and administrative services required for cultural planning. Even light of the slow response of the recommendations of the Auditor General Report of Canada and British Columbia, I would recommend the Federal Government and Provincial Government following the recommendations to provide culturally appropriate services for operational and administrative fees as soon as possible. It is very alarming we have our Canadian government officials reporting children are the most vulnerable group in our society and Aboriginal children who are receiving services from child welfare agencies both on and off reserve are not receiving adequate services; very concerning.

Training should be provided for adoptive parents, social workers and foster parents to ensure they have the appropriate skills of knowledge, skills and commitment to fill the obligations of the cultural agreement.

Can the Cultural Agreement be legalized? Lalum'utul' Smun'eem does have adoptive parents signing "Cultural Contracts" which is different commitment in terms of wording and the commitments for both parties are outlined. There is on-going contact with the adoptive parents and as one of the Executive Directors shared, cultural planning is not a one time agreement and should be monitored on a regular basis. The cultural contact appears to be working for Lalum'utul' Smun'eem and I would suggest the Provincial government, MCFD explore using this tool to as another way for accountability of the adoptive parenting following through with the cultural plans.

Limitations

It is important to recognize that each of the Agencies is distinct from each other, as they represent a wide array of First Nations people.

There are currently 22 Aboriginal child welfare agencies offering various levels of delegation service ranging from voluntary services, guardianship of children in continuing care, full child protection and one agency with adoption delegation. There are 198 First Nations bands in British Columbia and 148 of them are being served by Aboriginal delegated agencies. It is also important to note there are three Métis and four additional agencies in the planning stages and one in the start stage representing an additional 26 First Nations bands in British Columbia (MCFD, 2012).

This research could be used in other Aboriginal communities; however it would be important to recognize each Aboriginal Community is distinct from one another, there will be differences and it is not possible to represent all Indigenous people in this research. Absolon and Willet (2004) write, “It is impossible to represent all Aboriginal people in research and one should not try to do so. It is better to focus on specific areas of Aboriginal theory and research development than attempt to take broad sweeps with one brush” (p. 14).

Qualitative research provides a large amount of written data from the transcribed interviews including observation notes and including reflective notes which can be time consuming and intensive. However I believe by using this approach, I have been able to provide rich data from the Executive Directors on their experiences with cultural planning that has not been heard previously in the literature, creating a space for deeper “understanding of how those who are being studied think, feel, believe, reason, and see reality.” (Brown, L; Strega, S, 2005, p.

206). My goal with this research study was to be able to share the knowledge not only with the University but also share the voices of the Executive Directors with the Aboriginal agencies, Caring for First Nations Children Society and the Director of Adoption, Anne Clayton with Ministry for Children and Family Development. I believe Anne Clayton will be greatly interested in this research as this is continued knowledge for the three previous research studies on cultural planning; *“You Should Know that I Trust You” (MCFD 2008, 2010, 2011)*.

Another limitation to the research is my own personal bias concerning cultural planning and the importance for achieving the best possible plan for Indigenous children being adopted in non-Indigenous homes. It has been my experience that some Indigenous social workers believe adoption should not be an option for Indigenous children to be adopted into a non-Indigenous home. Their concerns of children not being connected to their culture, communities and extended family has been documented in the literature and they are concerned about the damage it causes for Indigenous children. It was difficult to predict if any of the participants who volunteer for this research study also had the same beliefs of Indigenous children being adopted into non-Indigenous homes; however this did not transpire during this research study. Creswell (2005) cites Moustakas, (1994) recommending one of the first steps in phenomenological research is to set “aside, as far as is humanly possible, all preconceived experiences to best understand the experiences of participants in the study” (p. 235).

I recognize and acknowledge my own biases as I would prefer to have Aboriginal children being adopted into homes with the best possible cultural plan to ensure children are being connected to their culture, communities and extended families. Being involved as a research assistant previously, I have had the opportunity to write down my reactions after interviews and also debriefed with the principal researcher about my feelings that came up

during the interviews and strategies to deal with them, and I continued to do so with my University of Victoria supervisor during the interview stages and data analysis for this research study (Brown, L., Strega, S. 2005).

Benefits of the Research

The primary goal in social work practice in child welfare is to ensure we have a system that meets the needs of children, families and the community and this includes Indigenous children being adopted into non-Indigenous homes.

One of the benefits of this research study was being able to interview several Executive Directors who have had experience with cultural agreements and being able to identify themes throughout the descriptive interviews.

As I have mentioned previously, this research will provide a voice for the Executive Directors of the Aboriginal agencies in British Columbia on their experiences, attitudes and recommendations to change in policy for cultural planning. The Executive Directors of this province are major stakeholders in the province of British Columbia and understand the importance of connectedness for Indigenous children which has been heard through this research.

Conclusion

This research study has been a long term goal for me. Working on two reports: *You Should Know That I Trust You Phase 1* (Carriere, 2008) and *Phase 3* (Carriere, 2011) helped to advance my interest and in consultation with my supervisor, Dr. Jeannine Carriere, we discussed how the voices of the Executive Directors would give some completion to this research. I am honoured and excited to be the conduit for those voices and for the voices of Indigenous children in care in British Columbia. The hope of this research study is the findings will be able to support adoptive Aboriginal children, adoptive parents, and Aboriginal communities in the province of British Columbia and Aboriginal people in Canada. Ceremony was stressed throughout the interviews and is an integral part of Indigenous people and adequate funding needs to be re-addressed to support Aboriginal children in their best interests. Training continues to be a factor for adoptive parents to learn about the history of Aboriginal people and learning ways to best support the children they are adopting by learning about the rich cultures they belong to and how they will be able to make those connections.

Funding of operational dollars for Aboriginal agencies appears to be at the fore front in every aspect of the cultural planning and supports Blackstock (2003, 2010) that there is inadequate funding by the federal government to support Aboriginal child welfare agencies to provide culturally appropriate services.

I would also hope that in the future Métis Child Welfare Agencies have the opportunity for research to discover how cultural planning is working for them as they were not a part of this research study.

In summary, I hope that with the support of appropriate training and adequate funding First Nations children will be adopted to adoptive parents who believe in their cultural needs and not to non-Aboriginal adoptive parents who believe, "...it's good to expose them to their culture if it still exists.." and "...that teaching them about their roots is "a mess these days.." (Carriere, 2008, p. 33). After speaking with Directors, I am cautiously optimistic. All my relations.

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APPENDIX A: Letter of Introduction

Recruitment Letter for Executive Directors of Aboriginal Agencies in British

Columbia

Title: Invitation to Executive Directors to Inform the Cultural Planning Process for Aboriginal Children

Good Day:

My name is Kim Grzybowski and I am in the process of completing my Masters degree in Indigenous Social Work with the University of Victoria. I am a Cree woman, member of the Peguis First Nation in Manitoba, living in the Cowichan Valley and have had the honour of working in the province of British Columbia for the past 13 years in various roles in child welfare.

It is with great respect that you have been identified as being an Executive Director of an Aboriginal Delegated Agency in the province of British Columbia. This research requires the input of at least 6 Directors and I want to hear from First Nation and Metis agencies. The goal of this research is to identify how Aboriginal agencies can be involved in cultural planning and the resources that are necessary to conduct this important work.

I am conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Jeannine Carriere with the University of Victoria and would like you to invite you to discuss the cultural planning process for Aboriginal children who are being adopted. If your agency has been involved with cultural planning for a child or children who are being adopted, I would really like to hear from you.

Please feel free to contact me at the following phone number or email below and I would be happy to provide you with more information. Thank you.

All My Relations,

Kim Grzybowski
MSW Candidate
University of Victoria, B.C.

Dr. Jeannine Carriere, Associate Professor
University of Victoria, School of Social Work
Phone: 250-721-6452
Email: carriere@uvic.ca

APPENDIX B: Information Letter

Kim Grzybowski
MSW Candidate
University of Victoria
Victoria, B.C.
Phone: 250-701-4222

EXPLORING CULTURAL PLANNING INFORMATION LETTER

Thank you once again for being for taking the time to be interested in being a participant in this research and as promised I am sending you more information. This research is designed to examine the Cultural Planning for adopted Aboriginal children and how it is working for Aboriginal Delegated Agencies in British Columbia. The intent of cultural planning was to ensure Aboriginal children who were being adopted were maintaining their cultural identity, connection to their families and community.

I will be conducting interviews in a place that is convenient for you. Some of the interviews may have to be conducted by phone depending on the location. Prior to our interview, you will be asked to sign a consent form and the interview will not take place until is it reviewed and signed by you.

Your name will not be used for this research and I will be asking you for a nickname that will be attached to your interview. I will be using a tape recorder during our interview in order to give you my full attention and also to remember all of the important information you will be sharing with me. I may take some notes during our interview as well.

When the interview is transcribed, I will notify you and send you our interview to make sure you are satisfied with your participation. If you do not contact me then it will mean that you are agreeing with the content of your interview, are satisfied with the results and I will be able to examine for themes that will go into my final report for my thesis.

It is important to know your name will not be shared with anyone and our interview tape, notes and transcripts will be stored in a locked cabinet at the university. After a period of six months once the research is complete the tapes, notes and transcripts will be destroyed.

I hope this clarifies how the interviews will take place and my intension with the research. I will be contacting you as soon as possible to set up an appointment for an interview and answer any questions you may have.

This research has received ethical approval from the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria. If you wish to contact them or have any concerns, please contact them at 250-472-4545 or by email at ethics@uvic.ca. Thank you for taking the time to be a part of this research and I look forward to meeting with you.

APPENDIX C: Interview Guide

Interview Guide for Executive Directors

1. Can you please tell me about your agency?
2. Has your agency had children adopted and what has been your experience?
3. Can you explain your experience with Cultural planning?
4. What have been the most gratifying features of the cultural plan?
5. Please describe any challenges with cultural planning?
6. What parts of the cultural plan do you see helping the adoptive parents support their child deal with racism?
7. Do you have any recommendations about cultural planning and adoption?
8. What would your agency require in order to provide cultural planning for the children in your care?
9. Do you have any other comments you would like to add?

APPENDIX D: Consent Form

Title: Voices for Cultural Planning for Aboriginal Children and Adoption

Researcher: Kim Grzybowski

MSW Candidate
University of Victoria
Victoria, B.C.

This research has received ethical approval from the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact them at 25-472-4545 or you may email them at ethics@uvic.ca.

Participant Consent

Please circle your answers:

Do you understand that you have been asked to participate in research about Aboriginal adoption and cultural planning?	Yes	No
Have you received and read the Information letter about the research?	Yes	No
Do you understand the risks and benefits in taking in part in the research?	Yes	No
Have you had the opportunity to ask questions and talk about the research?	Yes	No
Do you understand that you can withdraw from the research at any time?	Yes	No
Has the researcher explained how personal information will be dealt with?	Yes	No
Do you understand what the information you share will be used for?	Yes	No
Have you been advised that you will receive a summary of the thesis?	Yes	No

The research was explained to me by: _____

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

Signature of Research Participant

Printed Name

Date

Witness: _____

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

Signature of Researcher

APPENDIX E: Implied Consent Script for Telephone Interviews

Hello and thank you for agreeing to participate in this research.

Prior to starting your interview, I had mentioned in the “Information Letter” I would review the consent form I had emailed to you. Have you had a chance to review the consent form?

I have a blank copy of the consent form in front of me and I will be circling your answers as we review the form.

Let’s take a moment to review the consent form together.

Do you understand that you have been asked to participate in research about Aboriginal adoption and cultural planning?

Have you received and read the Information letter about the research?

Do you have any questions about the Information Letter?

Do you understand the risks and benefits in taking in part in the research?

As I had mentioned in the Information Letter, some participants in research may experience some emotional discomfort. Do you have a self-care plan at work and have available supports?

Have you had the opportunity to ask questions and have any other questions about the research?

Do you understand that you can withdraw from the research at any time?

Do you understand how your personal information will be dealt with?

Do you understand what the information you share will be used for?

Have you been advised that you will receive a summary of the thesis? Do you have any questions about this?

I will be filling in the line that says this information was explained to me by Kim Grzybowski.

Do you understand what the research is about? Do you agree to take part in this research?

I am printing your name, date and my signature on the consent form that you are verbally consenting to this research and understand what is involved in the research and you are voluntarily agreeing to participate.

Thank you and let’s get started with the interview questions.

Appendix F:

Application for Exception to Policy

Adoption Placement of an Aboriginal Child into a Non-Aboriginal Home

Guidelines

Definitions:

According to the Child, Family and Community Service Act :

Aboriginal Child means a child

- (a) who is registered under the Indian Act (Canada),
- (b) who has a biological parent who is registered under the Indian Act (Canada),
 - (b.1) who is a Nisga'a child,
- (c) who is under 12 years of age and has a biological parent who
 - (i) is of aboriginal ancestry, and
 - (ii) considers himself or herself to be aboriginal, or
- (d) who is 12 years of age or over, of aboriginal ancestry and considers himself or herself to be aboriginal

Aboriginal Community means an aboriginal community designated by the minister

Child means a person under 19 years of age and includes a youth

Child in care means a child who is in the custody, care of guardianship of a director or the director of adoption

Designated Representative, when used in relation to the Nisga'a Lisims Government, and Indian band or aboriginal community, means a representative designated in accordance with the regulations

Indian Band means a band as defined in the Indian Act (Canada) and includes a band council

Parent means

- (a) the mother of a child,
- (b) the father of a child,
- (c) a person to whom custody of a child has been granted by a court of competent jurisdiction or by an agreement, or
- (d) a person with whom a child resides and who stands in place of the child's mother or father

Youth means a person who is 16 years of age or over but is under 19 years of age

Purpose:

The adoption of Aboriginal children by non-Aboriginal families has long been a concern expressed by the Aboriginal community. As such, this must be the starting point for any and all exceptions. The adoption of Aboriginal children by non-Aboriginal families should not occur unless it has been determined conclusively that there are no other choices, and then it should be approached with due diligence. Furthermore, permanency planning, which includes cultural connections, starts at intake, not adoption.

For many Aboriginal people, adoption outside one's extended family and community by non-Aboriginal families has resulted in significant losses – loss of rights, culture, identity and sense of belonging. In response to these outcomes and protests from the Aboriginal community, a Moratorium on the adoption of Aboriginal children by non-Aboriginal families was put into place from 1992 to 1996.

Through research and countless personal testimonies we have gained greater insight into the strong correlation between cultural continuity, connectedness to family and community and improved outcomes for Aboriginal children. We recognize that maintaining a child's heritage requires skill development that is action oriented and evidenced based. Furthermore, sustaining a permanent relationship with caregivers who understand a child's origin and identity are birthrights that must survive in the life history of an adoptive child. As such, the provincial government introduced new practice standards and child welfare legislation in 1996 (Child, Family and Community Service Act and the Adoption Act) which affirm this correlation.

The Health and Human Resources Library has many resources available on the topic of Aboriginal Adoption. A number of recommended readings have been listed below. The Health and Human Resources Library can be contacted at:

<http://gwww.hhslibrary.gov.bc.ca/libinfo/contact.html>

Articles

- Simon Nuttgens - "Life Stories of Aboriginal Adults Raised in non Aboriginal families" 2005
- April Arsenault - "The Life Cycle Experiences and Influences of Adoption Through Aboriginal Adult's Stories" 2006
- Jeannine Carriere - "You Should Know That I Trust You: Cultural Planning, Aboriginal children and Adoption." 2008
- Jeannine Carriere - "Connectedness and Health of First Nations Adoptees." 2005
- Raven Sinclair - "All My Relations: Native Transracial Adoption: A Critical Case Study of Cultural Identity." 2007
- Jeffrey Peterson - "Lostbirds: An Exploration of the Phenomenological Experience of Transracially Adopted Native Americans." 2002
- Rita Sindelar - "Negotiating Indian Identity: Native Americans and Transracial Adoption." 2004
- Darin Keewatin - "An Indigenous Perspective on Custom Adoption." 2004
- Kenn Richard – "A Commentary Against Aboriginal to Non-Aboriginal Adoption." 2004
- Kenn Richard – "On the Matter of Cross Cultural Adoption." 2002

"Strangers in a new culture see only what they know" - unknown 5 October 2009

Videos

- "A Place Between: The Story of an Adoption" - NFB - Curtis Kaltenbaugh. 2007
- "Confronting the Past" - Rajotte Productions. 2006
- "To Return: The John Walkus Story" - Global Totem Productions
- "The Kids They Took Away" – 1990
- "Kindred Spirits: A Native Perspective on Raising Children" – 1990
- "Patrick's Story" - NFB. 1999
- "From the Heart" – Yellowhead Tribal Services Agency - 1999

For the first time, provincial legislation mandated: a) the requirement that the Aboriginal community be involved in planning for children in care, b) the order of priority when considering placements for Aboriginal children, and c) the importance of preserving a child's culture and heritage. As a result of these new practice standards and legislation, the moratorium on the adoption of Aboriginal children was lifted and the Ministry of Children and Family Development established the Provincial Exceptions Committee.

The Provincial Exceptions Committee serves as a mechanism to ensure the integrity of practice standards and policies regarding permanency planning for Aboriginal children. Specifically, the Provincial Exceptions Committee verifies that: a) placement priorities have been explored, b) the Aboriginal community has been involved in planning, c) a plan to preserve a child's cultural identity has been developed in collaboration with the child's Aboriginal community, and d) the proposed adoptive parent(s) has committed to maintaining the child's connection to his or her Aboriginal identity.

Practice Standards:

Current practice standards, as well as the CFCSA and the Adoption Act require that discussions with the Aboriginal community occur before considering a non-Aboriginal placement.

Please refer to the following practice standards to guide your work:

- Guardianship Standards
- Adoption Practice Standards 18 pages 3-12 to 3-17 addresses adoption planning for an Aboriginal child in continuing custody.
- Adoption Practice Standard 19 pages 3-18 to 3-20 addresses planning for the adoption of an Aboriginal child by a non-Aboriginal family

As per Section 71 (3) of the CFCSA, when making placement decisions concerning an Aboriginal child, you must consider options in the following order of priority:

- Members of the child's extended family
- Other members of the child's Aboriginal community who are living either inside or outside of the community
- Approved Aboriginal homes outside of the child's Aboriginal community that have a plan to preserve the child's unique cultural identity

These options are to be explored together with the child's Aboriginal community(s) and/or the Aboriginal agency(s) that may represent the child. More than one Band, community and/or agency may be identified when working with both paternal and maternal relatives. 6 October 2009

Only after these options are fully explored do policy and practice standards permit us to consider non-Aboriginal families, again with the involvement of the child's Aboriginal community(s) and/or agency(s).

Any proposed adoption of an Aboriginal child into a non-Aboriginal home is required to have an approved Exception to Policy for Placing an Aboriginal child in a Non-Aboriginal Home from the Provincial Exceptions Committee.

Applying for an Exception to Policy

This section provides recommended procedures to follow when preparing your Application for an Exception to Policy. In order to receive full approval for the exception to policy, a signed Cultural Safety Agreement must also be submitted to and approved by the Provincial Exceptions Committee. Please refer to the Cultural Safety Agreement Guidelines.

General Guidelines

- In determining all placements for Aboriginal children, we are guided by Section 71(3) of the CFCSA. This section of legislation also applies when adoption is identified as the permanency plan for an Aboriginal child. There are, however, circumstances in which an exception to policy may be required. Some of the more common reasons for seeking an exception include:
 - A child, over the age of 12, expresses his or her desire to be adopted by a non-Aboriginal family;
 - To preserve a sibling unit;
 - When a child has a significant medical condition and requires the care of a specialized caregiver who may not be Aboriginal;
 - When the child's birth family and/or Aboriginal community strongly supports the adoption by a non-Aboriginal family believing that it is in the child's best interest and is confident that the non-Aboriginal family will preserve the child's cultural heritage.

- When a child or parent is consenting to the adoption, it is the responsibility of the social worker to thoroughly explore and reflect on the legal ramifications and implications for the long term influences on the child. It is recommended that the birth family and/or youth be referred to an Aboriginal service provider, such as a Friendship Centre, Delegated Aboriginal Agencies, Métis Child and Family Service Agency, Métis Commission for Children and Families of BC, a First Nations Band, etc., who can assist in facilitating an understanding of the possible immediate and long term implications of adoption outside of a child's family and/or cultural community.

- However, regardless of the reason for requesting an exception, **policy requires that a search for an Aboriginal home be completed.** Therefore, Applications for an Exception to Policy must demonstrate that a search for an Aboriginal home has been completed. The results of the search must be documented within the Application.

"As the child is seen as the embodiment of her culture, she is, as a result, required to be nurtured within it" – Kenn Richard, 2004 7 October 2009

- If an Aboriginal home is identified, but there are reasons, such as those noted above, as to why adoption with a non-Aboriginal family is believed to be in the child's best interests, it is important that the Application clearly explain the reasons. Any documentation, such as letters from professionals, the child's Aboriginal community, birth family, etc., which supports this decision, is strongly recommended.
- When planning for an Aboriginal child, the child's Aboriginal community (both maternal and paternal) should be involved in planning. Where this is not possible, provide an explanation as to why the Aboriginal community has not been involved in planning.
- Where a child's community is served by a Delegated Aboriginal Agency, involve the Agency in planning. Delegated Aboriginal Agencies can often facilitate communication and planning with a First Nation, Métis or urban Aboriginal community. Often, a First Nation or Métis community served by a Delegated Aboriginal Agency will defer this responsibility to the agency. However, the involvement or support of a Delegated Aboriginal Agency does not negate the need to seek the involvement and/or views of the child's community.
- Where Regional Exceptions Committees exist, Applications to the Provincial Exceptions Committee must be accompanied by a recommendation from the respective Regional Exceptions Committee to proceed to the Provincial Exceptions Committee. Applications will not be reviewed without this accompanying documentation. Please note, that a recommendation from a Regional Exceptions Committee does not guarantee approval by the Provincial Exceptions Committee. Should additional amendments be requested, the amended Application must be reviewed by the respective Regional Exceptions Committee prior to being resubmitted to the Provincial Exceptions Committee for further review and/or approval.
- Be mindful that a child may wish to review his or her file at some point in his or her life. This is a significant chapter in the child's life history and it is important that the information is written in a respectful manner.
- The information in the Application should demonstrate that every effort was made to establish the best possible permanency plan for the child – one that honours a child's extended family, community and cultural heritage. The use of Collaborative Practice and Decision Making Processes, such as Family Group Conferences, Mediation, and/or other Traditional Dispute Resolution processes, and as outlined in ministry policy, are effective tools in obtaining the best possible plan for children in care. Applications should explain what forms of collaborative practice were used in planning for the child and what the outcomes were.
- In summary, it is important that the Application describe:
 - The planning that has occurred to achieve permanency for the child;
 - The efforts made to engage the child's family and Aboriginal community in planning.
 - The efforts made to seek an Aboriginal home; and
 - The efforts made to preserve the child's cultural identity and relationship with siblings, family and community.

When completing the application, the following headings and corresponding content should be included.

1. Background

- This section will describe the child and provide a brief summary of the circumstances that brought the child into permanent care, including a review of the parents' circumstances to date and whether or not the parents' situation has changed since the child came into care. It is not necessary to provide extensive details about the factors that caused a child to be placed in permanent care, but just enough detail for the committee to have an understanding of the circumstances.
- Indicate how it was determined that a child is Aboriginal.
- Describe how the child is currently connected to his or her Aboriginal community and culture.
- If a child is described as possessing certain physical, mental and/or emotional limitations, the appropriate professional assessments are to be on file to support the findings and such assessments are to be noted in the Application. Avoid describing the child as having special needs if such assessments have not been completed to substantiate this.
- Identify whether or not a child is registered as a Status Indian. If a child is not eligible to be registered, explain why not and include a letter from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada explaining the reasons a child is found to be ineligible to be registered as a Status Indian.
- The Ministry recognizes Métis peoples' right to self-identification. Some Métis children may be eligible for Métis citizenship through Métis Nation British Columbia and/or may be eligible for membership through a local Métis Charter. The decision to register a Métis child should be made in consultation with the child and the child's family and extended family if possible. Please identify if Métis citizenship or membership through a Métis Charter has been considered. Indicate why or why not. Any questions around Métis citizenship can be directed to the Métis Nation British Columbia.
- Provide details about the permanency planning that has taken place since the child came into care.
- Avoid expressing opinions or judgements about the child, the child's birth family, including extended family, and/or any significant others.

"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" – Jeannine Carrier, 2008 9 October 2009

2. Birth Parents' Views on the Adoption Plan

- When a child or parent is consenting to the adoption, it is the responsibility of the social worker to thoroughly explore and reflect on the legal ramifications and implications for the long term influences on the child. It is recommended that the birth parents' be referred to an Aboriginal service provider (Friendship Centres, Delegated Aboriginal Agencies, Métis Child and Family Service Agencies, Métis Commission for Children and Families of BC, First Nations Bands, etc.) who can assist in facilitating an understanding of the possible immediate and long term implications adoption outside child's family and/or cultural community. Describe how this has taken place.
- Include information about the outcome of a Family Group Conference, mediation or other traditional form of collaborative practice and decision making process that occurred in an effort to seek permanency for the child.
- Supporting documentation is recommended. Letters from birth parents indicating their view of the adoption plan are strongly recommended and will serve as important records for the child should he or she wish to review his or her file later in life.
- Indicate whether or not Openness is being considered with the child's birth parents. If Openness is being considered, describe in detail what it will look like. If Openness is not being considered, explain why not. If there are reasons Openness is not being considered at this time, indicate whether or not the prospective adoptive parents will register with the Post-Adoption Exchange Registry in an effort to establish some form of Openness with the birth parents. Once an approval has been granted by the Adoptions Exceptions Committee, Openness Agreements can be signed formally with the child's birth parents.
- Avoid expressing opinions or judgements about a child's birth parents.

3. Attempts to Involve Extended Family

- The maternal and paternal sides of a child's family and heritage are to be explored and included in permanency planning. The following bullets will assist with this exploration.
- Include a copy of the child's genogram. A genogram assists the reader to understand the dynamics within the child's family. Further, a genogram demonstrates that the child's extended family has been identified. It is important to include both the paternal and maternal sides of a child's family.
- Provide a detailed description of the search for placement within the child's maternal and paternal family and extended family.
- Elaborate on who was contacted, when they were contacted and the reasons why they were unable to care for the child or considered to be unsuitable. It is not sufficient to simply say that someone declined or is deemed to be unsuitable. A child may read this later in life and may want to know why.

- When planning for permanency for an Aboriginal child, efforts should be made to meet face-to-face with the child's extended family. This personal contact will often facilitate collaboration and promote a more positive working relationship with the child's extended family, ultimately improving outcomes for the child. If face-to-face meetings did not occur, explain why not, and describe other methods used to engage the child's extended family in planning.
- Include information about the outcome of a Family Group Conference, mediation or other traditional form of collaborative practice and decision making process that occurred in an effort to seek permanency for the child.
- If a Roots Practitioner has been involved in planning for the child, have the Roots Practitioner prepare a letter to accompany this application outlining what attempts have been made to search for family and extended family.
- Letters from family members indicating their views on the adoption plan are strongly recommended and will serve as important records for the child. Supporting documentation is recommended.
- Describe clearly what Openness will look like with the child's extended family. If Openness is not being considered, describe why not. If Openness is not being considered at this time, indicate whether or not the prospective adoptive parents will register with the Post-Adoption Exchange Registry in an effort to establish some form of Openness with extended family members at a later date. Once an approval has been granted by the Adoptions Exceptions Committee, Openness Agreements can be signed formally with the child's extended family members.
- Avoid expressing opinions or judgements about a child's birth family, including extended family. Factual information, documented in a respectful manner, is helpful to the process and to the child in the future.

4. Aboriginal Community Involvement and Attempts to Explore Placements Within the Aboriginal Community

- Provide a detailed description of the search for placement within the child's community and other Aboriginal communities.
- Elaborate on who was contacted, when they were contacted, and the reasons why they were unable to provide a suitable home for the child. Once again, it is not sufficient to simply say that someone declined or is deemed to be unsuitable. A child may read this later in life and may want to know why.
- If both birth parents are Aboriginal, but come from different Nations or communities, ensure that both the maternal and paternal communities are explored.

"There are only two lasting bequests we can hope to give our children. One is hope; the other, wings" – Hodding Carter 11 October 2009

- Letters from the child's Aboriginal community indicating their views of the adoption plan are to be included with the Application. Such letters provide an important record for the child should he or she wish to review his or her file later in life.
- If a Roots Practitioner has been involved in planning for the child, have the Roots Practitioner prepare a letter to accompany this application outlining what attempts have been made to connect with the child's Aboriginal community and seek a placement within that community.
- It is recommended that a letter from the appropriate Delegated Aboriginal Agency expressing their views on the adoption be included as well.
- It is recognized that there are often unique circumstances around planning for an Aboriginal child. The following is a list of who to obtain letters from depending on the child's cultural heritage:
 - If the child is registered with and/or a member of a First Nations Band, obtain a letter from the band designate which expresses the Band's views on the adoption.
 - If the child is a non-Status Indian, but is affiliated with a First Nations Band, and the Band wishes to be involved in planning, obtain a letter from the Band outlining their views on the adoption.
 - If the child is a non-Status Indian, and is not affiliated with a First Nations Band, or the Band is not able to be involved, obtain a letter from the local Friendship Centre that outlines their views on the adoption.
 - If the child is Métis, obtain a letter from the Métis Commission for Children and Families Services of BC that outlines their views on the adoption. The Métis Commission will take responsibility for engaging a Métis service provider where available. The Métis Commission may request that this service provider provide a letter outlining their views on the adoption.
 - Additionally, there may be situations where Ministry offices have developed and signed protocols with local Aboriginal agencies. It is important that social workers be familiar with any existing protocols and practice in accordance to the content of these protocols.
- The adoption of Aboriginal children by non-Aboriginal people is proven to be more successful when the child's Aboriginal community remains actively involved in the child's life and shares in the responsibilities of the child's cultural formation. Describe how the child's Aboriginal community will work collaboratively with the prospective adoptive family throughout the child's life.
- While an adoption may be approved without the consent of the child's Aboriginal community, this is certainly not the desired process. Many Aboriginal communities have been significantly impacted by previous child welfare practices. Adoption outside one's family and community continues to be opposed by many Aboriginal communities. Some Aboriginal communities have subsequently developed their own policies in regards to the adoption of their children. Should a community oppose the adoption plan, attempt to obtain a letter from the community asking them to explain the reasons for their opposition. This demonstrates that their position has been acknowledged and provides an important record for the child's file. 12 October 2009

- Should the child's Aboriginal community not support the adoption plan, it is hoped that the community will remain actively involved in planning. In order to ensure the child maintains a strong sense of cultural identity and relationship with his or her family and community, efforts are to be made to encourage the community's participation in the development of a Cultural Safety Agreement and in maintaining a relationship with the child and his or her prospective adoptive parents. The social worker is to make every effort to encourage the community's participation in planning. Describe the efforts made by the social worker to engage the child's community in continued planning for the child.
- When an Aboriginal community opposes an adoption plan, describe other permanency options that were considered such as Transfer of Custody (Section.54.1) and/or any orders made under the Family Relations Act. Provide an explanation as to why such options were not pursued, or chosen. In some circumstances, for example, a family caring for a child with special needs may not be able to access the same level of supports under Section 54.1 that are available under post-adoption assistance, etc.
- Should you be unsuccessful in establishing communication with a child's Aboriginal community, document in detail all attempts made to engage the community:
 - Provide a list of dates that you attempted to contact the community;
 - Describe the manner in which you attempted to communicate with the community;
 - Indicate the person with whom you attempted to contact.

Efforts from the distant past will not suffice the current requirement to establish communication.

- Again, as a result of the historical relationship between the Provincial child welfare system and the Aboriginal community, significant efforts may be required in order to establish a mutually trusting and respectful relationship. When planning for permanency for an Aboriginal child, efforts should be made to meet face-to-face with the designate identified for a child's community. This personal contact will often facilitate collaboration and promote a more positive working relationship with the Aboriginal community, ultimately improving outcomes for the child. This may be completed through a Family Group Conference or some other form of traditional decision making practice. Describe what processes were utilized and what the outcomes were. If this type of process did not occur, please explain.
- In situations where a child's Aboriginal community chooses not to participate in planning, a secondary Aboriginal community, such as another First Nation, a Delegated Aboriginal Agency, a Friendship Centre or Métis organization, should be pursued. In such circumstances, please explain in detail the reasons for seeking the support of a secondary agency/community.

Identity formation from a tribal perspective includes providing experiences that will inform the child's spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical self" –Jeannine Carrier, 2008 13 October 2009

- The involvement of a secondary Aboriginal community is also strongly recommended when a child's own Aboriginal community is located at a significant geographic distance from where the child will be residing. In this situation, the secondary Aboriginal community does not take the place of the child's own Aboriginal community, but assists in carrying out the plan.
- Describe clearly what Openness will look like with the child's Aboriginal community. If Openness is not being considered, describe why not. If Openness is not being considered at this time, indicate whether or not the prospective adoptive parents will register with the Post-Adoption Exchange Registry in an effort to establish some form of Openness. Once an approval has been granted by the Adoptions Exceptions Committee, Openness Agreements can be signed formally.
- It is important that input from the child's Aboriginal community be considered during the Adoption Residency Period. Describe how the child's Aboriginal community will be engaged in planning for the child during this time. The Cultural Safety Agreement must be reviewed a minimum of one time during the Adoption Residency Period. Ensure that the Aboriginal community is involved in this review.
- Avoid expressing opinions and judgements about a child's community. It is helpful to restrict information to documentation that is factual and recorded in a respectful manner.

5. Child's Views on the Adoption Plan

- The child's views are to be outlined in the Application.
- It is recommended, based on the child's capacity, that the child be involved in any and all planning.
- Supporting documentation from the child is strongly recommended. A letter or some other form of expression from the child indicating the child's view of the adoption plan should be included in the Application.

6. Planning Involving Siblings

- It is important that plans are developed to ensure that contact between siblings can be maintained. This is crucial when siblings are not residing in the same home, or may not be adopted by the same family.
- Please include in the Application how contact will be maintained, and the frequency of the contact. It is important to note things such as phone and email contact, as well as face-to-face contact. Please outline who will be responsible for ensuring that regular, meaningful contact takes place.
- Describe clearly what Openness will look like with each of the child's siblings. If Openness is not being considered, explain clearly why not. If Openness is not being considered at this time, indicate whether or not the prospective adoptive parents will register with the Post-Adoption Exchange Registry in an effort to establish some form of Openness with siblings at a later date.

- When there is no recommendation or plan for any contact between siblings, provide a detailed explanation as to why these relationships will not be maintained.

7. Attempts to Search the Adoption Management System

- Provide a detailed description of the search for placement through the Adoption Management System (AMS).
- Elaborate on the reasons why the identified Aboriginal families were unable to care for the child or were not considered, within the parameters of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. It is not sufficient to simply say that someone declined or is deemed to be unsuitable. A child may read this later in life and want to know why.

8. How This Non-Aboriginal Home Meets the Child's Cultural Needs

- Describe any involvement the prospective adoptive family and their extended family have with the Aboriginal community.
- Include information that describes the prospective adoptive family and their extended family's views on cultural connectedness. Outline how the prospective adoptive family and their extended family plan to ensure that a child placed in their home will remain connected to their identity as an Aboriginal person. Ensure that the attitudes of the adoptive parents' adult children and/or any other children in the home are also explored.
- The adoption of Aboriginal children by non-Aboriginal people is proven to be more successful when the child's cultural heritage is integrated into the adoptive family's way of life. Essentially, when adopting an Aboriginal child, one is also "adopting" the responsibility for the Aboriginal child's cultural formation. Moreover, the adoption of an Aboriginal child by a non-Aboriginal family is proven to be more successful if the child's birth family and Aboriginal community embrace the adoptive family as their own, allowing the adoptive family, birth family, and the Aboriginal community to work collaboratively at nurturing all aspects of the child's development. Describe how the prospective adoptive family and their extended family will incorporate the child's cultural heritage into their every day way life and how the adoptive family will work collaboratively with the child's birth family and/or Aboriginal community.
- An Aboriginal child is likely to encounter racism at different times throughout his or her life. It is important for the adoptive family to be able to recognize these situations and respond appropriately. Describe how the adoptive family will recognize if a child in their home is experiencing situations of racism and how the adoptive family will address the situation. Please also describe strategies that the prospective adoptive family may use to assist the child to respond to such situations. Please also describe what strategies the adoptive family may use when situations of racism arise within their own family and/or extended family. Does the adoptive family have the skills to help the child survive and thrive in the face of racism without the child losing his or her identity?
- There are times when Aboriginal children and/or youth may express that they are not interested in engaging in their Aboriginal culture. Please outline how the prospective adoptive

family may approach this, and what strategies they may use to engage the child in his or her culture.

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- If the child is currently in the care of the prospective adoptive family, document in detail how the prospective adoptive family has demonstrated their commitment to preserving the child's cultural identity and relationship with the child's extended family and community. If this is currently happening, it is more likely to continue to happen following the adoption. If this is not occurring at present under the Ministry's current monitoring and expectations, what leads the worker to believe that the prospective adoptive family will honour the terms of a Cultural Safety Agreement once the adoption has been finalized?

9. Signatories

- All Applications must be signed by the appropriate authorities prior to being forwarded to the Provincial Exceptions Committee for review. These include:
 - The guardianship/adoption social worker submitting the Application
 - The guardianship/adoption social worker's team leader
 - The appropriate regional manager

"Adoptive parents who buy into a belief that racism does not exist may not be able

or willing to prepare a child to deal with issues that "do not exist" – Raven Sinclair,

2007

Appendix G:

Developing a Cultural Safety Agreement

Adoption Placement of an Aboriginal Child into a Non-Aboriginal Home

Guidelines

October 2009

Definitions:

According to the Child, Family and Community Service Act :

Aboriginal Child means a child

(a) who is registered under the Indian Act (Canada),

(b) who has a biological parent who is registered under the Indian Act (Canada),

(b.1) who is a Nisga'a child,

(c) who is under 12 years of age and has a biological parent who

(i) is of aboriginal ancestry, and

(ii) considers himself or herself to be aboriginal, or

(d) who is 12 years of age or over, of aboriginal ancestry and considers himself or herself to be aboriginal

Aboriginal Community means an aboriginal community designated by the minister

Child means a person under 19 years of age and includes a youth

Child in care means a child who is in the custody, care of guardianship of a director or the director of adoption

Designated Representative, when used in relation to the Nisga'a Lisims Government, and Indian band or aboriginal community, means a representative designated in accordance with the regulations

Indian Band means a band as defined in the Indian Act (Canada) and includes a band council

Parent means

(a) the mother of a child,

(b) the father of a child,

(c) a person to whom custody of a child has been granted by a court of competent jurisdiction or by an agreement, or

(d) a person with whom a child resides and who stands in place of the child's mother or father

Youth means a person who is 16 years of age or over but is under 19 years of age

Guidelines to Assist in the Development of Cultural Safety Agreements

These guidelines are meant to work in conjunction with the Application for an Exception to Policy Guidelines document. The following information will assist in developing strong, meaningful Cultural Safety Agreements.

Purpose:

The development of a positive cultural identity is the inherent right of every Aboriginal child. The formation of identity as it relates to culture is pivotal in ensuring that Aboriginal children are conscious of their histories, their families, and their roles amongst their people. Traditionally, children were exposed to and involved in cultural experiences right from birth. Sadly, many Aboriginal children in care have not had this opportunity. As such, it is crucial that we ensure that Aboriginal children have the opportunity to be involved in cultural practices as early in their lives as possible. Because cultural connectedness is a known protective factor in the healthy development of Aboriginal children, the name of this document has been changed from a Cultural Plan to a Cultural Safety Agreement.

The intent of the Cultural Safety Agreement is to facilitate a child's internalization of his or her culture. When an Aboriginal child in care is to be adopted by a non-Aboriginal family, that child must be provided with a plan to preserve his or her cultural identity and connectedness to his or her extended family and community. It is essential that the Cultural Safety Agreement serve as a guide and clearly describe how the adoptive parents and the Aboriginal community will share in the responsibility of preserving the child's cultural identity and connection with his or her siblings, extended family and community.

The Cultural Safety Agreement should be viewed as a living document that will change and grow over time. There is no expectation that a certain template be used in the development of a Cultural Safety Agreement. Each Agreement that is developed will be unique to the needs of the child, and each Agreement will be developed differently in order to reflect the child's circumstances. Creativity in the development of the Cultural Safety Agreement is encouraged and strongly recommended. Sample plans are available on the adoption website of the MCFD Intranet to aid in the development of effective Cultural Safety Agreements. Please see following link: http://icw.mcf.gov.bc.ca/cfdev/adopt/docs/ab/sample_cultural_plan.pdf

"Some of conventional adoption literature emphasizes the importance of instilling a cultural heritage in the child through books, movies, and culturally relevant events such as pow-wows. Unfortunately, these are idealized versions of Aboriginal culture and not realistic as means for instilling identity. – Raven Sinclair, 2007 October 2009 4

General Guidelines:

The Cultural Safety Agreement should be developed collaboratively between the child's prospective adoptive parents, Aboriginal community, family, extended family, and significant others. Each party must be willing to follow through on their commitments, in order to benefit the cultural growth of the child. If the child is a member of a First Nation (Band), a representative from that First Nation should be involved in the development of the Cultural Safety Agreement. Ideally, this would be a member of the child's extended family; however, may also be another representative from the First Nation. Many Aboriginal communities are represented by a delegated Aboriginal agency within the Province. It is important to determine if the child's community is served by a delegated Aboriginal agency. If so, the agency should be involved in all planning regarding the child. Delegated agencies serve as an important link to the child's community and can assist with communication as well as identifying available community supports and resources. Moreover, the child's Aboriginal community may defer planning to an agency representative. If the child is a Métis child, the Métis Commission for Children and Family Services of BC must be involved in all planning concerning Métis children, as per designation under the Child, Family and Community Service Act. The Métis Commission will involve other local Métis child and family service providers, where available. When a community is served by a local Métis child and family services agency, this agency must also be involved in planning. There may be situations where Ministry offices have developed and signed protocols with local Aboriginal agencies. Social workers must practice in accordance to the contents of these protocols. When a child is a non-status Indian, or if the child's own Aboriginal community is not able to participate in the development of a Cultural Safety Agreement, an urban Aboriginal agency, such as a Friendship Centre or Métis organization, should be involved in the planning. Many Aboriginal children in the Province of British Columbia reside in areas that are a long distance away from the child's Aboriginal community. When a child's prospective adoptive home is geographically located a significant distance from the child's home community, it is important to involve a secondary Aboriginal community in the planning. This may be an agency, or could simply be an Aboriginal person who is willing to make a cultural commitment to the child. This should be in addition to involving the child's Aboriginal community. In these situations, both the secondary Aboriginal community and the child's own community should be signatories to the Cultural Safety Agreement.

"As Indigenous peoples, we had systems in place through our Elders, ceremonies, and kinship supports to ensure that the identity and wellness of our children was intact" – Jeannine Carriere,

2008 October 2009 5

Ensure that opportunities have been made to assist the adoptive parent(s) and Aboriginal community in establishing a relationship prior to the finalization of the adoption. This will facilitate and promote the likelihood of future contact and collaborative planning. Each Aboriginal child has a right to visit his or her traditional territory. Prospective adoptive families should be willing to ensure that a child placed in their home is able to travel to visit their traditional territory. Significant costs can be associated with this type of travel, and it is recommended that this be explored with the prospective adoptive family prior to the adoption being finalized. Some Aboriginal communities may be willing to share in the costs associated with such travel and this option should be explored. The Cultural Safety Agreement should outline what commitments have been agreed to in terms of travel. Provide as much detail as possible and be as specific as possible. Avoid the use of general statements such as "when possible", "when convenient", or "as deemed appropriate". Such statements are open to interpretation, and questions may arise as to who will decide when something is convenient or appropriate. It is pertinent that time frames be provided. For example, "the adoptive parents will take the child to visit his or her community within the first two years of the adoption", or "photos of the child will be sent to the child's grandmother four times per year (beginning of the school year, Christmas, birthday, summer)". It is important to note that every Party who has made a commitment to the child within the Cultural Safety Agreement should be a signatory to the Agreement. This recognizes the commitments made and will support accountability by all Parties. Each Cultural Safety Agreement must be reviewed by all parties to the Agreement, including the child's social worker, at least one time prior to the completion of the Adoption Residency Period. The approximate date for this initial review must be included in the Cultural Safety Agreement. After the first initial review of the Agreement, each Agreement must be reviewed on an ongoing basis, and a regular review date must be identified within the Cultural Safety Agreement. All signatories to the plan should be involved in each review. Identify who will be responsible for initiating the review of the plan. Each Agreement must also include wording for confidentiality provisions. An example of this wording is: "The Parties to this Cultural Safety Agreement agree to follow the provisions for confidentiality and disclosure of information pursuant to Section 62 of the Adoption Act.

"A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots" - Marcus Garvey October 2009 6

From time to time, there may be disagreements amongst the parties about the Agreement. Each Cultural Safety Agreement should include a conflict resolution process that is agreed to by all of the parties involved. Each Agreement must identify a conflict resolution process that will describe how the Parties to the Agreement will diffuse any conflicts that may arise. This process must be agreed to by all Parties, and will be of assistance if any Party feels that commitments are not being honoured. The child should be included in planning for his or her cultural needs. Please ensure that the child is invited to participate in the development of the cultural plan and is included as a signatory to the plan. **Suggested Format of a Cultural Safety Agreement** While there is no one acceptable format for a Cultural Safety Agreement, there are some key components that must be included. Below is a suggested format with recommended headings and content to be included within the Cultural Safety Agreement. **Responsibilities of the**

Adoptive Parent:

- No adoptive parent should commit to any responsibility that he or she is not able/willing to follow through on.
- Describe how the adoptive parent(s) will integrate the child's cultural heritage into their family home and way of life.
- Indicate how the adoptive parents will remain involved with the child's Aboriginal community. Please clearly outline what the adoptive parents will do with respect to fulfilling their responsibilities outlined in the Cultural Safety Agreement, and how often. Timelines should be specific. Using terminology such as "when possible" or "where appropriate" is not acceptable.
- Include whether or not the adoptive parents will travel with the child to the child's Aboriginal community. Outline when this will take place for the first time and how frequently these visits will happen after that.
- Describe how the adoptive parent(s) will endeavour to develop a sense of belonging within the child's Aboriginal community.

Responsibilities of the Aboriginal Community:

- The Aboriginal community should not commit to any responsibility that it is not able/willing to follow through on.
- It is important to identify a community contact person who will be responsible for carrying out tasks on behalf of the Aboriginal community in order to meet the terms of the Cultural Safety Agreement. An alternate person should also be identified.

"Many adoptees are facing identity issues because of being socialized and acculturated into a middle-class white society -

Raven Sinclair, 2007 October 2009 7

- The Aboriginal community may choose to identify an Elder within the child's Aboriginal community with whom the adoptive parent may connect with. If this has been done, identify who this person will be in the Cultural Safety Agreement.
- Describe how the Aboriginal community will remain involved in the child's life. Clearly outline what the Aboriginal community will commit to doing and how often.
- Timelines should be specific. Using terminology such as "when possible" or "where appropriate" is not acceptable.
- Describe how the child's Aboriginal community may welcome the adoptive parent(s) into their community and support a sense of belonging.
- Describe what kind of materials the community can provide about the child's community for the adoptive parent(s) and the timeframe agreed upon to provide this material to the child and adoptive parent(s). This may include websites, books, historical information, language CDs, newsletters, etc.,

Maintaining Relationships with the Child's Siblings:

- This section should allow for siblings to maintain lifelong relationships with one another. There are situations where siblings are unable to reside in the same home; however, every attempt should be made to ensure that siblings develop strong, meaningful relationships with one another.
- Identify who the child's siblings are and their locations.
- Outline how the child will develop and maintain a relationship with his or her siblings on an ongoing basis.
- Emails, phone contact, face to face visits, etc, should be included in this section.
- Please include clear timelines. Do not use wording such as "when possible" or "where appropriate".
- Indicate who will be responsible for arranging any planning between siblings.

Contact with Birth Parents:

- This section will indicate how the child will maintain a relationship with his or her birth parent(s), if this is the plan for the child.
- Outline what relationship the child will have with his or her birth parent(s) once he or she is adopted.
- Include phone contact, email contact, face to face contact, as well as contact through the Post Adoption Exchange Registry.
- Include clear timelines.
- Indicate who will be responsible for arranging any planning between the child and his or her birth parent(s).

"The notion of the child and her best interests, as separate and distinct from her family, community and culture, is one that has its roots in the individualist orientation of European culture" – Kenn Richard, 2004 October 2009 8

Contact with Extended Family:

- This section should indicate how the child will maintain relationships with his or her extended family.
- Identify which family members are interested in maintaining ongoing relationships with the child and their contact information.
- Outline how the child will maintain relationships with the extended family members identified.
- Include clear timelines.
- Indicate who will be responsible for arranging any visitation or contact between the child and his or her extended family members.
- Include phone contact, email contact, face to face contact, as well as contact through the Post Adoption Exchange Registry.

Community Events:

- Describe any programming or community events that the adoptive parents will be involved in with the child. Again, be specific, and include timelines.
- If there are specific community events to be attended, indicate what these events are, and if the community contact will be available to attend with child and his or her adoptive parent(s).
- Ensure that National Aboriginal Day events are participated in on an annual basis.
- If the child is Métis, he or she should be given the opportunity to participate in Louis Riel Day celebrations on an annual basis. Include this within the Cultural Safety Agreement.
- Outline any other events that take place in the child's Aboriginal community that the child and his or her adoptive parent(s) will participate in.
- Outline other events in the Aboriginal community that the child and the adoptive parent(s) will take place in.
- Indicate how the adoptive parent(s) will become informed of events taking place in the Aboriginal community.
- Include clear timelines.
- Identify who will be responsible for arranging participation in any community events.

Aboriginal Organizations:

- Use this section to identify any Aboriginal agencies and/or organizations that the child and his or her adoptive parent(s) will access.

"It is through everyday living that the values, beliefs and culturally prescribed behaviours are learned. The immersion in culture is the vehicle of acculturation" – Kenn Richard, 2004 October 2009 9

Aboriginal Resources:

- Use this section to identify books, videos, websites, newspapers, etc., that the adoptive parent(s) plan to access for the child.
- Identify any specific Aboriginal resource people that the adoptive parent(s) plan to access. Include names and contact information.

Signatories: As the Cultural Safety Agreement is essentially a commitment that the prospective adoptive parent(s) and child's Aboriginal community make to the child, the Agreement only requires the signatures of those who will be responsible for carrying out the commitments described within the Agreement. Therefore, the Cultural Safety Agreement should be signed by the following:

- The child, aged 12 years or older;
- The prospective adoptive parent(s);
- A member of the child's extended family is strongly recommended;
- The appropriate designated representative of the child's Aboriginal community;
- Any party identified in the Cultural Safety Agreement who has made a commitment to assist, preserve and strengthen the child's cultural identity.