

Identity, Community, Resilience: The Transmission of Values Project

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"What did we do when we were Indians?" This question reflected the deep dismay of one agency director over the apparent limited ability of Indian child and family service agencies to stem the rising number of Aboriginal children in care in Saskatchewan. The question served as the key stimulus for a group of First Nations agency representatives interested in a collaborative child welfare research project and kindled a series of conversations that ultimately led to an innovative project involving four Saskatchewan First Nations communities.

The "Transmission of Values Project," initiated in fall 2004 and completed in March 2006, was developed and guided by Elders, community, and agency representatives and researchers from Saskatchewan's two social work faculties, which are situated within the First Nations University of Canada and the University of Regina. This chapter was written by the project's two co-investigators and is intended to detail the project and explain the policy implications drawn from it. The project forms part of the research program of the Prairie Child Welfare Consortium and was funded by the Centre of

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SETTING THE SCENE

Indian child and family service agencies were established in Saskatchewan more than a decade ago in response to the closure of residential schools and the recognition of the need to provide community-based, culturally appropriate programs delivered by First Nations people. This shift in service delivery has had many positive outcomes. However, systemic barriers continue to exist, such as policies that are not culturally aligned and designated funding that does not allow the development of preventive community programs and services reflecting individual community needs. Such barriers are imposed on First Nations communities already fractured by colonization. The residential school system separated children and families from their personal histories, traditional parenting practices, and family and community values. Current socio-economic conditions are also barriers significantly contributing to the rising number of First Nations children in the care of provincial and Indian child and family service agencies (ICFS). There are more First Nations children in care now than at any time during the period that residential schools were operating in Canada (Blackstock, 2001).

In Saskatchewan, as in other provinces, ICFSs have been established (17 to date) but this has not stemmed the tide of Aboriginal children coming into care. Deborah Parker-Loewen, Saskatchewan's first Children's Advocate, expressed her outrage about the growing over-representation of Aboriginal children in care. When she presented her final report to the legislature in March 2005, the statistics indicated that the number of Aboriginal children in care continued to increase over the 10 years she served as Children's Advocate:

The number of First Nations on-reserve children in Canada, who are placed in out-of-home care, increased by 71.5 percent between 1995 and 2001 (McKenzie, 2002). In Saskatchewan the increase in the number of First Nations children on-reserve placed in out-of-home care has been more modest, but equally alarming. The number of Métis, Non-Status, Status, and children

of Aboriginal origin where the status was unknown was 65% in 1999; in 2004 the percentage had risen to 69%... While this increase may seem slight, these figures do not take into account the children in care of the 17 FNCFS agencies which were created over the past 10 years and are now serving children not traditionally served by the provincial government. In 1995, there were 370 children in care of three FNCFS agencies. As of March 31, 2004, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) reported there were a total of 1,133 children in care of an FNCFS agency in Saskatchewan, representing a 206% increase over 10 years. (Parker Loewen, 2005, p. 21)

Several First Nations leaders, child welfare advocates, researchers, and scholars have written on how the alarming over-representation of First Nations children in care has negative repercussions for First Nations children, their families, and communities (Bennett & Blackstock, 2005; Blackstock, 2001; Fournier & Crey, 1997; Timpson, 1993; Timpson, 1994; Timpson, 1995). These and other scholars speak fervently about the urgent need for First Nations control of their own child welfare delivery systems as the way forward.

PROJECT BEGINNINGS

The child welfare concerns of First Nations people underlies much of the work of the Prairie Child Welfare Consortium. Research funding from the Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare led to discussions between the two co-investigators and the directors of the province's Indian child and family service agencies to identify potential partners for relevant collaborative research. Five agencies agreed to work with the co-investigators to design a research project, but one agency had to quit due to time and resource constraints. The remaining four ICFSSs represented north, south, east, and west regions of the province. They were joined by Ranch Ehrlo Society, a non-Aboriginal residential treatment agency, and two Elders who agreed to sit on an advisory committee for the project. The advisory committee met several times during the course of the research augmented by email and teleconference communication. Four research assistants joined the advisory committee discussions once the research had

commenced, two community based and two from the School of Indian Social Work, First Nations University of Canada.

Within the advisory committee, the "What did we do when we were Indians?" question triggered numerous conversations about the situation in the province. ICFSs have been established in Saskatchewan to deliver culturally appropriate services to First Nations communities, but the legislation, methodologies, and approaches are effectively based on the mainstream system, resulting in an incongruence of philosophy for those who delivered the services. From the perspective of the agencies, this created barriers that limited their abilities to effect change in a significant way. The agencies had not stemmed the rising numbers of children in care or prevented an increased number of First Nations youth entering the criminal justice system. Would knowledge of traditional, pre-contact ways and means of child rearing point to a better way to approach today's problems?

Elder Danny Musqua, a member of the advisory committee, presented the view that historical events had led ultimately to a "lost" population, without the benefit of their own language or the values and cultural practices essential to the development of positive identities as individuals, families, and communities. This view resonated with the group. Further discussion led to a strong consensus that all services and programs and all members of the communities must play a stronger role if children and families are to receive necessary support and guidance, and if communities are to thrive. The need for a community-wide approach to child and family well-being appeared paramount. Questions were asked such as:

- How does the community work alongside ICFSs?
- What is done currently that supports children?
- What does a strong and healthy identity look like for Aboriginal children?
- What is the benefit of living by values?
- How does one transmit the right values?
- How do traditional values become transferred in contemporary society?
- What will make a difference?

Dexter Kinequon, steering committee member and Director of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band Child and Family Services, spoke directly to the relationship of traditional values to today's world:

The need to preserve and sustain life is equally as urgent for our people today as it was historically. Historically, cultural practices, traditions, and values were based on the need to preserve and sustain life for a people living on the land. Today, the need is to preserve and sustain families and communities living in contemporary society.

The advisory committee agreed that the goal of the research project would be to identify the values and practices that communities believe necessary to support and strengthen child, youth, and family well-being and prevent child maltreatment, resulting in strengthening collaborative efforts among child welfare stakeholders and First Nations communities.

Three project objectives were developed:

1. Engage communities in examining/rediscovering/articulating First Nations' values and community practices that promote child, youth, and family well-being and prevent child maltreatment.
2. Identify and promote existing programs and services that reflect First Nations' values and community practices.
3. Utilize identified values and practices to envision how gaps in programs and services might be overcome.

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Aboriginal peoples have justifiably raised many concerns about research conducted by non-Aboriginal university or government-based researchers from outside the community which, from the perspective of the population researched, was of no benefit to the communities involved. Heightened sensitivity to these concerns has led to the establishment of guidelines, such as the Tri-Council Policy Statement respecting research involving Aboriginal people (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 1998). Such guidelines are intended to

ensure that research conducted with Aboriginal peoples is respectful, guided by principles developed by Aboriginal peoples, and of benefit to the communities involved.

The Transmission of Values Project endeavoured to respect these guidelines. The co-investigators consulted the directors group and Saskatchewan ICFSs and worked closely with the advisory committee to develop the goals and objectives of the project, determine the methodology to be used and the questions to be asked, and decide on the format and structure of the research. Together, the investigators and the advisory committee completed the required university ethics application. As the project progressed, advisory committee members made themselves available to facilitate access to key community groups, advise on local community protocol, comment on progress made, and support the project in a variety of ways. This involvement enriched the project enormously.

Methodology

Conscious of the negative perceptions about research within many communities, the project adopted inclusiveness, respectful research, and capacity building as guiding principles to engage the community throughout the research project. These principles led the research team to look for and choose Appreciative Inquiry as a methodology that would help focus attention on the many positive aspects of community life that were known to exist. It was believed that concentrating on the positive would reveal the values and practices that the community believed were key to supporting well-being and this approach fundamentally extended an invitation to community people to share positive realities and futures.

Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) define Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as being about the search for the best in people, their community, programs, services, and the relevant world around them. It involves recognition of what gives lifeblood to an ever-changing system when it is most alive, successful, and constructively capable. AI involves asking questions that strengthen a structure's capacity to bring about positive potential. It centrally involves the mobilization of inquiry through the crafting of the "unconditional positive question," often involving many people.

In Appreciative Inquiry the difficult task of intervention gives way to the speed of imagination and innovation. Instead of criticism there is discovery and dreams. AI seeks, basically, to build a helpful union between people and what people talk about as past, present, and future capacities: achievements, assets, unexplored potentials, strengths, opportunities, lived values, traditions, stories, expressions of wisdom, insights into the deeper corporate spirit or soul—and visions of valued and possible futures. AI intentionally seeks to work from accounts of this "positive change core" and it assumes that every living system has many untapped and rich and inspiring accounts of the positive. Link the energy of this core directly to any change agenda and changes never thought possible are suddenly and democratically mobilized. (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 14)

Along with the guiding principles, AI methodology sought to ignite community people to ask the questions that would help shape and influence their future programs, services, policies, and practices.

Partnerships and Protocol

Respectful research with Aboriginal peoples recognizes tribal, band, community, and cultural protocols. Alongside of the responsibility to meet university ethics requirements, it was critical for the research team to carefully consider the customs and expectations of each of the participating First Nations communities. The four communities each had their own traditions and protocols. Each differed in their adherence to cultural traditions and practices, and to First Nations and/or Christian religion and spirituality. Native languages spoken in the communities varied. One community was comprised of four different native language groups. Ensuring a culturally sensitive research approach was critical for the success of the project.

The First Nations co-investigator and First Nations research assistants had experience with, and respect for, the cultural protocols. Through discussions with Elders in each community and with advisory committee representatives known to each of the communities, the research team created a written partnership agreement with each of the four First Nations. This was a pivotal document that encouraged community involvement with the research agenda, protocol, and

dissemination of the results throughout the project. In the context of fostering community capacity building, the partnership agreement is the first step towards discussing the mutual benefits of the research for all concerned. This agreement was signed by the chiefs of the respective bands.

The partnership agreement gave the team initial entry into the local community. However, the agreement was only the first step in gaining consent of the participants, paving the way for speaking with various groups in each community. In the traditions of First Nations communities, a first meeting with local Elders is expected and welcomed. Initial discussions with Elders led ultimately to approval for questions to be asked of other groups in the community. Each group was approached in a separate gathering: Elders, youth, service providers, and interested community members.

Given the past negative experiences of Aboriginal people with research and researchers, the advisory committee recommended that the term "research" be used sparingly. Instead, "sharing information," "gathering information," and "working together" were used to reflect the guiding principles of inclusiveness, respectful research, and capacity building.

Data Collection Process

When the research team prepared to work with the communities, it was evident that several strategies needed to be employed to encourage participants to attend the focus groups. Again, each community was unique and each community advised the research team on the best way to bring people to the meeting. A traditional First Nations meeting usually begins with a prayer and includes a meal. All of the focus group meetings for the Transmission of Values Project included food. With the exception of pizza for the youth groups, local people were hired to prepare the meals served.

The research team was advised that getting people out to focus group meetings would be difficult and would require a lot of ground work in the community. Different media were used to attract participants, given the rural locations of the communities, as well as the range of participants needed for the project. Due to limited time and budgets, it was not always possible for members of the research team

to stimulate broad community participation by putting up posters inviting community people to attend the focus groups and issuing reminders. Local ICFSs assisted greatly in this regard by placing advertisements where they would likely receive the most attention and by spreading information by word of mouth. In one northern community, the local radio station broadcast a public service announcement inviting people to participate. If at all possible, the ICFS agency linked the research team with an existing group within the community. This proved to be successful in gathering participants to join in the meetings and to bring in other people interested in the transmission of values.

The Elders, youth, service providers, and community members groups met separately, primarily to keep the groups small enough to facilitate broad discussion and to accommodate differences in how the transmission of values was discussed. The data gathering process needed to coordinate with other events occurring in the community. Over the course of the research, several meetings were rescheduled due to incidents within the communities, such as funerals, crime, and unanticipated conflict with other meetings. These incidents were characteristic of how communities are supportive of their members. For example, when a funeral occurred, most band agencies would close in respect, so that employees could attend the funeral.

Each community required different protocols based on their local culture and traditions. In all communities, it was important for the research team to understand and perform well for the Elders group, as the Elders' receptivity towards the project and the researchers was important to the project's success. Local people working as community-based researchers or connected with the project through local committees invited Elders to meet with the research team. Tobacco, gifts, honorariums, and meals were provided for the Elders who participated. The Elders provided an opening prayer and spoke one at a time, answering and discussing the questions in a large circle. A facilitator moved the process along and two recorders recorded the information being shared. More importantly, a local interpreter was present to ensure accuracy in interpreting what was being said.

Meeting with Elders in each community was a lengthy and rich process. In one community, the meeting started with a meal of traditional rabbit soup and bannock, whereas in another community the

meeting ended with traditional foods. The diversity of the Elders groups was notable. Honorariums of various amounts were provided to participating Elders in all but one community, where honorariums were not expected except for the Elder giving the opening prayer. Knowing how to ask Elders questions was important for the researchers. Listening skills are necessary in garnering respect and further participation with any group. Knowing when to ask an Elder another question and when to wait quietly for the next response is a skill that also requires cultural sensitivity. This was facilitated by local, community-based researchers' familiarity with the Elders and by reading body language. At some points throughout meetings, Elders would request that a particular teaching or story not be recorded. These wishes were respected by the researchers.

Prior to meeting with the youth groups, the First Nations co-investigator contacted the local schools and connected with principals and teachers to discuss the project. Once school administrators approved the project, the research team connected with youth through the classroom, local youth groups, posters, and word of mouth. This was also a lengthy process requiring consent forms signed by a parent or guardian prior to individual youth participating in the project.

All youth meetings were held after school hours and a variety of data collection methods were used. Large groups required volunteer youth facilitators for small group processes. With groups of fewer than 20 youth, the facilitators conducted one large or two smaller focus groups. In each of the sessions, the youth were given a meal after the discussion was complete, which gave the research team an opportunity to visit with the youth and meet with them on a casual level.

Service providers comprised the third largest group in the communities involved in the project. They were interested as employees and front-line workers who developed and provided programs in the community, and as residents and members of the community. These meetings occurred during the day and were organized by contacting key service providers in the community. Meetings were held in local facilities within the community and lunches were provided to encourage attendance during busy work schedules. This proved to be helpful in bringing people together to discuss the Transmission of Values Project and further program and service development.

The general community meetings were advertised by poster and radio and held during the day. These meetings were the least well attended, due in part to the dual role that many people in First Nations communities play. Many people active in the community had already been reached via the other group meetings.

The circular format of meeting together is traditional with First Nations people, so the research team used focus group format for data collection. In each community, the same questions were asked. The focus group size ranged from 6 to 62 participants. The length of time for the groups ranged from 1.5 hours to 5 hours. The style of responding ranged from a circle of people with each speaking after another, to a more random style. For each focus group the community-based researcher and/or the community contact person chose a location that was available and convenient for the focus group participants. In each gathering, the community-based researchers facilitated the discussion with two note takers: one working on a flip chart and the other on a notepad. The notes were transcribed by a transcriber, following which the research team conducted a thematic analysis. This was reported back to the community in a subsequent meeting to ensure validity of responses and to provide an opportunity for additional remarks if desired. Neither the original sessions nor the feedback sessions were videotaped, as this was not recommended by the advisory committee.

The research team worked with the local community to ensure respectful adherence to protocols and ethics. This was typically an easy task, as most of the research team was comprised of First Nations people familiar with the local cultural needs and preferences.

Participant Communities

Four Saskatchewan First Nations communities agreed to participate in the research: Stanley Mission First Nation, Gordon First Nation, Whitebear First Nation, and Little Pine First Nation. These communities are located in the north, south, east, and west regions of Saskatchewan and are demographically diverse in terms of size, tribal allegiance, language, culture, and religion. Each community was supportive of the project and participated in the focus groups and interviews.

Whitebear First Nation is located in the Treaty Four area in the

southeast corner of Saskatchewan. Currently, there are 750 people living on the reserve, 400 of whom are under 18 years of age. This Nation is made up of four cultural and language groups, including Cree, Nakota, Sioux, and Saulteaux. The Whitebear community was actively involved in the research project, with 62 Elders, 17 youth, 11 service providers, and seven general community members participating.

Stanley Mission First Nation is one of five Cree communities that make up the Lac La Ronge First Nation—the largest First Nation in Saskatchewan. Stanley Mission is located in the Treaty Six area of the province, approximately 500 km north of Saskatoon, 100 km north of Lac La Ronge. Currently, Stanley Mission has 2,300 people living on reserve, with approximately 708 under 18 years of age. Lac La Ronge First Nation is a member of the Prince Albert Grand Council. The Stanley Mission community was enthusiastically involved in the research project, with 18 Elders, 10 youth, 14 service providers, and three general community members participating.

Little Pine First Nation is a Cree community, approximately 80 km northwest of North Battleford in the Treaty Six area. Little Pine First Nation is one of five First Nations within the Battlefords Tribal Council. Little Pine has approximately 717 people living on reserve, the approximate number of residents on reserve under 18 was not available at time of publication. The Little Pine First Nation and surrounding communities were keenly involved in the research project, with 39 Elders, 18 youth, 35 service providers, and five general community members participating.

Gordon First Nation is located 240 km southeast of Saskatoon. This Cree and Saulteaux community has 1,268 people living on reserve, including approximately 451 under 18 years of age. The Gordon First Nation is located in Treaty Four territory and is affiliated with the Touch Wood Tribal Council. The Gordon First Nation was actively involved in the project, with 22 Elders, 44 youth, 19 service providers, and three general community members participating.

Participant Group Questions

Drawing upon the AI philosophy, the co-investigators and the advisory committee spent many hours developing questions that would

ignite positive responses and identify how values are transmitted and practised in the community. A total of six questions were asked in each gathering. A total of 324 individuals participated in the study (141 Elders, 89 youth, 79 service providers, and 15 members of the general community). See Table 1.

Table 1. Participant group questions and expected outcomes

Question	Expected outcome
What positive programs, events, and activities are happening in this community to help children and families in a healthy way?	This question is the first question posed in the focus group, using positive language to elicit positive responses about the community. It is a question everyone can answer. Responses portray the diversity of programs in the community, giving the researchers and participants an opportunity to learn more about the community (reciprocal sharing). Responses provide the beginning of a community profile.
What makes these programs and activities good for children and families?	Participants identify values and behaviours believed to contribute to healthy families.
What additional resources could be tapped to better these events and programs?	Participants identify resources that may be under-utilized in the community.
What teachings (values) are practiced in your community?	Participants identify values practiced in the community. These may be values held in the past, present, or those that they may want to see in the future. Participants are creating a bank of values in the community.
Which do you think are important for all children and families in the community to learn and relearn?	Participants identify the values most important for the community to invest in and continue to practice.
As a community, how do you think these teachings (values) can be strengthened?	Participants identify resources that may contribute to continuing to invest in and practice these values.

Table 1. (cont'd) Participant group questions and expected outcomes

Question	Expected outcome
Name the five top values taught in your community? (youth group question) Who are the teachers? How are these teachings being taught?	Youth identify the most important values emphasized (taught) in the community. Youth indicate how and in what way they are being taught these values.
My community helps me be a good person by _____ (youth group question)	Youth identify how the community assists them to grow. Youth identify actions, people, resources that contribute to their personal growth.

Data Analysis

The First Nations co-investigator and research assistants collectively categorized the substantive information gathered from each community and disseminated this information back to each community for the purpose of inviting participants to comment on it. Team members asked community participants if the information was a fair representation of their responses to the questions asked. Additional comments were recorded and corrections made as needed. With this verification process completed, the two co-investigators conducted a more thorough analysis of the data gathered.

Returning to each of the communities after the data had been collected and developing handouts that summarized the major themes demonstrated the project team’s commitment to the community, and respect for the information they shared. The research team met with the groups separately, as the original data were gathered separately. The research team attempted to contact each person that had attended the first session, using posters and personal contact. Some participants were not available for the second meeting. Handouts identified the major themes, using the same terminology that the participants had used throughout the meetings. Some participants suggested words that were more suitable and representative of their original message. In most follow-up meetings, the participants agreed with the researchers' summary and added to the list. Bringing these people together again also gave them an opportunity to see all the ways in which values were being transmitted throughout the community and

some discussed working with other groups in the community to sustain the services and programs.

Two data analysis methods were used by the co-investigators to provide an in-depth analysis of the data. One method involved manually reviewing the qualitative data looking for themes. The second approach involved software, called Hyperresearch. Themes were derived and compared from both approaches to the analysis. A literature search conducted parallel to the data gathering process added richness to the discussion of the themes that emerged.

The large number of participants contributed an extensive and rich database for analysis. The first question alone ("What positive programs, events, and activities are happening in this community to help children and families in a healthy way?") elicited a lengthy list of programs and activities in each community. For analysis, programs and activities were categorized as cultural, community events, community resources, community programs, adult education, and drug and alcohol prevention programs. The following is a partial list of programs found in the four communities:

- *Cultural programs*: Ceremonies (purification, sweats, sacred pipe, name-giving), community feasts, traditional dances (Round Dance, Sun Dance, Rain Dance), cultural camps, pow-wow singing and dancing, traditional crafts (beading, blanket-making), language training, traditional skills (hunting, trapping, sage-picking, sweet grass picking), celebrations (Aboriginal Day, Treaty Day, Family Day).
- *Community events*: Sports tournaments, winter games, community dances, talent show, annual sobriety run, fishing derbies, trail rides.
- *Community resources*: Fitness centre, youth drop-in centre, recovery and wellness centre, health centre, drop-in centre, schools, churches.
- *Community programs*: Organized sports, child and youth programs such as music and arts programs (band lessons, guitar club, painting classes), baby-sitting classes, cadets, First Nations youth livestock program.
- *Parent support programs*: e.g., Healthy Mother/Healthy Baby; Home Care.

- *Adult education:* Employment programs, life skills training, leadership courses, computer training, and firearms training.
- *Alcohol and drug prevention:* Alcoholics Anonymous, National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse program, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome program, gambling prevention program.

RESPONSES BY PARTICIPANT GROUPS

The data were analyzed in a variety of ways. This section highlights the key findings found by comparing the data gathered in the four participant groups (Elders, service providers, community, and youth). Questions 1, 2, and 4 were asked of all groups so the analysis focussed on these questions.

Question 1: What positive programs, events and activities are happening in this community to help children and families in a healthy way?

The large number of references to cultural activities and practices within each community show these were highly valued and significant for participants in each of the gatherings. All four groups emphasized cultural and community events as significant positive contributions to the community. Elders emphasized programs that had healing attributes. Service providers also emphasized sports and recreation activities and listed a variety of resources, such as youth programs and alcohol and drug prevention programs. Both service providers and community members emphasized employment training for adults and youth. Community members also emphasized adult education. Youth listed sports and recreational opportunities most frequently among the positive programs and activities happening in the community. This was followed by cultural and community events and activities.

Question 2: What makes these programs and activities good for children and families?

Elders emphasized that the positive programs and activities identified

contributed to strengthening personal attributes. Service providers and interested community members emphasized that programs and activities facilitated and strengthened a sense of community togetherness and belonging. Community members also spoke of strengthening personal attributes. Community members linked spirituality and spiritual practices as being part of what made the programs and activities identified as "good" for children and families. Youth listed the following positive features of the activities and programs they had identified: the strengthening of cultural identity, celebration and support of family, opportunities to learn new things, strengthening of personal attributes, and the building of personal relationships.

Question 4: What teachings (values) are practised in your community?

This question evoked a list of values from each group. All groups emphasized the importance of cultural identity. Ceremonies, cultural practices, language, and family and kinship values were interconnected with one another. All groups listed the key value of respect, which was articulated in the following ways:

- respect in ceremonies,
- respect all religions/spiritual beliefs,
- respect for Elders and the community,
- respect nature,
- respect yourself and respect others,
- respect of belongings,
- treat grandparents with respect, and
- learn to listen to Elders, parents, teachers.

Elders spoke specifically of traditional values and teachings, whereas service providers, interested community members, and youth all listed values common to the forging of positive, mutually beneficial, community-building relationships in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities in Canada and elsewhere in the world. These included: caring, sharing with the less fortunate, helping one another, and cooperation. Personal attributes were valued. Among those listed were compassion, honesty, discipline, integrity, taking responsibility,

and self-control. In the words of one participant:

Traditional values and the Christian values have merged together in this community. People who practice these values are working together. An example of this is a funeral. The Clergy and Elder from the community each have a role in the ritual. They walk side by side and respect each other. The rituals of the funeral is holistic. The core belief in the Creator/God/Higher Power is taught in the community. The core values are taught, such as respect, love, caring, sharing, compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, and acceptance. The core belief in the Creator and these core values are threaded through the traditions and fabric of our community.

All groups mentioned knowing and/or learning one's native language as an important value. Language was especially emphasized by Elders and youth. Education was spoken of as a value, such as "stay in school and get educated."

Traditional Values

Conscious of the stimulant question that triggered this research, the data were further analyzed to pull out any mention of traditional values held by Aboriginal peoples over the centuries. As noted, these were mentioned more frequently by the Elders:

- the importance of the gift to bring a child into this world from conception to adulthood
- importance of relationships and kinships
- importance of keeping your Indian-given names
- [the importance of] spiritual well-being/faith
- have faith with the culture, the Creator
- equality between men and women

Elders frequently answered the question about values practiced in the community by advising parents and grandparents about valued child-rearing practices:

- Teach your children about respect of God/Creator.

- Teach your kids language and cultures—learn the proper protocol of behaviour, e.g., giving tobacco.
- Teach children their family history and kinship.
- Parents need to be positive/healthy role models for their kids,
- Be more involved with your children; [spend] quality time with them, (e.g., be at home with them; be involved in their activities). [The] personal relationship with children is very important.
- Take kids all over the place (being and praying with parents, grandparents, and kids).
- Learn to recognize your children's talents—let your children go and be free to explore their talents.
- Talk to your kids quietly and they will listen.
- A grandmother raises her children and grandchildren and does not give up on them—being with grandchildren when they are being born and being there throughout their life.
- Reclaim culture that was once lost and use it to teach children.
- Go back to your native ways—keeping traditional lifestyle and teachings.
- A man should not take a wife until he is ready to raise that family.
- Do not abuse alcohol and drugs.

One of the participants summarized these values by saying:

Things that our parents did were passed on to us and the teachings that we learned were very positive. We learned to sew and clean house. We were taught to love and challenge life and work and we were not dependent on the government. We were taught to be workers and to feel good about life. Life can be good if you seek it.

Concerns

As might be expected, participants in the gatherings occasionally digressed to mention concerns and issues that, from their perspective, needed to be addressed by the community. These remarks were few

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in number, but did serve as a subtle reminder that alongside of the many positive features of community activities, programs, and events, there also existed ongoing and emerging challenges, such as drug and alcohol addictions, teenage pregnancies, lack of discipline/respect on the part of some youth, and parenting problems. The lack of culturally appropriate policies was frequently mentioned as a serious obstacle for the communities. Related to this was the overriding concern that native languages are being lost, further weakening attempts to maintain cultural ceremonies and practices. An emerging issue was gaps within the community due to differences in income and the weakening of the centuries-old tradition of sharing. Some participants expressed their concerns about a perceived lack of energy or commitment in the community to deal with these issues.

Teach kids the result of drugs and alcohol. We can give the children the information about drugs and alcohol but they are still choosing to use. What laws can protect the children against the negative impacts? Children are buying and selling for their parents.

Parents need to be more involved with their children, quality time (e.g., be at home with them, curfew times) and in the activities they are in.

In the community there is an unequal representation of families having their needs met. For example—a large family needs a house but nobody is speaking for them—when people have their needs met it is because they demand it. Some people have a louder voice than others.

We need to have more faith in ourselves and our community. People have wonderful ideas but nobody wants to put them into action.

In the spirit of emphasizing the positive, these few remarks were noted but not dwelled upon. More important were the many ideas that participants put forward as ways and means for strengthening what is good in the community, including new initiatives that would further enhance these directions. These are incorporated in the section on

policy implications of the research.

DISCUSSION

Aboriginal children and youth face extraordinary challenges in making sense of, and understanding familial, community, and tribal history, especially where this history has resulted in negative effects for the child and his or her family and community. Added to this are the negative impacts of systemic barriers, such as the socio-economic conditions in First Nations communities and racism. Poor physical and mental health stemming from these conditions, pressures to join deviant groups such as youth gangs, and the daily distractions of our technologically advanced and global society combine to place many First Nations youth at high risk of being drawn into activities that will limit their future life choices. The situation is equally urgent for First Nations communities. Cultural continuity will not occur if the young do not grow into adulthood with:

- a sense of pride in themselves as First Nations people,
- knowledge of cultural practices and traditions that have stood the test of time,
- a firm grasp of the values and teachings that have guided their people over the centuries, and
- a sense of hope for their future as individuals and as members of a distinctive cultural grouping in Canada and the world.

By focussing on the positive, the Transmission of Values Project reveals an extensive effort by various sectors of the community to:

- support positive child and youth activities,
- educate children and youth about their history and culture,
- include children and youth in cultural practice and ceremonies,
- teach traditional lifestyles, skills, and language, and
- encourage community togetherness through a number of community-wide events.

Alongside of these efforts, communities provide several formal

programs of support, such as Healthy Mother/Healthy Baby, home care, life skills training, National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse program, and gambling prevention.

The co-investigators were struck, as they examined the data, by the sense of community as a fundamental aspect of individual identity—a place of belonging, recognition, and emotional and social ties. Aboriginal members of the advisory committee affirmed that this is what they had experienced and known from early childhood. Non-Aboriginal committee members were intellectually acquainted with the importance of community to Aboriginal people through statements made in various forums, and especially in the literature. But the data evoked a stronger, more profound image of the importance of community: an image of a large extended family united with one another through a powerful sense of a shared social, geographical, and for many, a spiritual location where young and old belong, and where space will be made for members, even if returning from a very long absence. The co-investigators observed that conversations among Aboriginal people almost always begin by individuals seeking to place each another. The conversation might sound something like this: "Oh yes, you are from..., My sister is married to..., the brother-in-law of your uncle..., and my brother's niece is the daughter of your mother's sister's nephew..., " and so on. There is a strong sense of social and geographical relatedness and ancestral heritage. Ironically, the reserve system that historically "quarantined" and marginalized First Nations people has also provided home bases that are truly unmatched by any other group in the country. Ancient teachings assert the responsibility of the present generation in assuring the health and well-being of the seventh generation—the generation that cannot be known (Clarkson, Morrissette, & Regallet, 1992). Although the conditions in some communities are truly deplorable, the existence of a social and geographical home base provides an opportunity for change that can be nurtured and made safe, not only for the current occupants but also for the seventh generation to come.

This powerful sense of community will inevitably influence identity formation and capacity for resilience of the youngest members. For this reason, it is critically important that attention be paid to the cultural and value-based messages that young people experience through their life in the community. In her study of resiliency,

Norman (2000) combines the interaction of two conditions: risk factors, which are stressful life events or adverse environmental conditions that increase the vulnerability of individuals; and personal, familial, and community protective factors that buffer, moderate, and protect against these vulnerabilities. She speaks of individual and interpersonal resilience factors that have been found in the research literature to increase a person's ability to cope with stressful life events and circumstances. Interpersonal resiliency factors include positive, caring relationships, positive family or other intimate environment, and "high enough" expectations (Norman, 2000, p.4). The data from this study suggest that an important resiliency factor for Aboriginal children and youth may be a strong sense of belonging to a vibrant, positive, community that proudly celebrates its own culture and history.

Chandler and Lalonde (1998) assert that, for some young people, community efforts to restore cultural practices and traditions may be a matter of life and death. They speak of personal and cultural continuity as critical factors in the lives of First Nations adolescents whom they believe to be:

...at special risk to suicide for the reason that they lose those future commitments that are necessary to guarantee appropriate care and concern for their own well-being.... This generalized period of increased risk during adolescence can be made even more acute within communities that lack a concomitant sense of cultural continuity that might otherwise support the efforts of young persons to develop more adequate self-continuity warranting practices. (p. 2)

Data show suicide rates vary across Aboriginal communities in British Columbia, ranging from zero to nearly 800 times the national average. The variable rates are "strongly associated with the degree to which BC's 196 bands are engaged in community practices that are interpreted here as markers of a collective effort to rehabilitate and vouchsafe the cultural continuity of these groups" (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998, p. 2).

Referring also to the significant importance of community, Blackstock and Trocmé (2005) speak of the 525 generations of

Aboriginal children who were raised on the lands now known as Canada before the arrival of Europeans. Tracing the acknowledged tumultuous history that Aboriginal children, families, and communities have experienced since that time, they assert that the multi-generational trauma that has occurred can only be addressed by community-based systems of Aboriginal child welfare, supported by culturally responsive structures and adequate levels of funding. "Resilient Aboriginal communities provide the best chance for resilient, safe and well Aboriginal children, young people and families" (Blackstock & Trocmé, 2005, p. 31). Resilient communities are described as those equipped with the governance structure and the resources to address child poverty, inadequate housing, and substance abuse. We would like to add to this description of community resilience, the incorporation of a strong value base, supported by cultural traditions and practices that strengthen community identity and cohesiveness and that serve to facilitate and advance community-based approaches to known issues and concerns affecting child, youth, and family well-being.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Too often, the media, general public, and Aboriginal people themselves accept a negative view of First Nations communities, unaware of all of the work that is being done to support children, youth, and their families and to strengthen the community. Personal, family, and communal experiences with the system of child welfare bring forth a rush of negative memories and experiences about unjust treatment and considerable loss for many Aboriginal people. These negative images and experiences can be conceived as a kind of mental map of the history that Aboriginal people have endured with child welfare throughout Canada. Their experiences often reflect their perspectives about the conditions of a troubled individual, family, and community. Once accepted as the truth about Aboriginal communities, this "needs map" determines how problems are to be addressed, through deficiency-oriented policies and programs. As a result, many people and communities will see themselves with special needs that can only be met by people, services, and programs outside the community.

This deficiency-oriented picture needs to be counter-balanced

with a strengths-based approach. The Transmission of Values research has shown that there are many positive initiatives taking place in Aboriginal communities that have not been reported and that need to be recognized and supported. The premise underlying the research is that people and communities have many of the answers they require to solve their own problems—a message conveyed by Aboriginal leaders for decades (Miller, 1990; Turpel-Lafond, 2004). The power of solution, creation, and authority rests with those in the communities. The Transmission of Values Project sought to provide a methodology to make the potential for change more apparent.

The Appreciative Inquiry method used in the project was designed through carefully developed questions to assist communities, not only to be internally focussed by recognizing and discussing their assets, but also to mobilize them for development purposes. Within the community development process, it is important to place this discussion in its larger context. Two major realizations should be stated:

- First, focussing on the assets of the Aboriginal people and community does not imply that these communities do not need additional resources from the outside.
- Second, the asset-based discussions are intended to affirm and build upon the valuable work already going on in the communities.

These two realizations provide a sense of efficacy based on interdependence. Policy makers, practitioners, and service administrators within and outside the community can be guided by the community's own sense of the programs, events, and activities that make a positive contribution to individual, family, and community well-being. The research affirms the community's assertion that knowledge of traditional values and teachings and participation in cultural practices are fundamental to the development of a positive identity as an Aboriginal child or youth. A critical ingredient to raising healthy children and youth is the participation of family and community in emphasizing, supporting, and reinforcing key values believed essential to the well-being, health, and vitality of the community. Celebrating cultural practices and history informs young people of

the history and experiences of their tribes and communities. Native language instruction strengthens understanding of culture and history. Using these stepping stones, the young person can find stability and grounding as a First Nations individual to move forward to adulthood in a positive way.

Fulcher (2002) introduces the concept of "cultural safety," asserting that the duty of care undertaken by child care authorities needs to include the acknowledgement of and attendance to a child's needs and cultural frames of reference, even if they are not fully understood (as cited in Bennett & Blackstock, 2002). The Transmission of Values Project affirms the strong value placed on family by the youth who participated in the research. The co-investigators were struck by the number of times that young persons mentioned the support of families, grandparents, and kinship ties. Policy makers and service delivery agents are well advised to bear these strong connections in mind, and to do all that they can to support and strengthen these.

Similarly, the high value placed on education by Elders, family members, and the community was affirmed time and again by the young people who participated in this study. School teachers were frequently named as important support persons in the young person's life. Parents, grandparents, Elders, and school teachers were named as the primary transmitters of Aboriginal, family, and communal values. Along with support of families, the research supports extensive investment in schools. Related to education, community-based opportunities for employment training and employment opportunities were valued. These can enhance a young person's sense of competence and efficacy, initially instilled through school-based learning. School and employment-based initiatives need to be encouraged and strongly supported by policy-makers, practitioners, and service delivery agents.

Opportunities to participate in sports and recreation are of great importance to the young. These help to build strong bodies and connect young people with one another in ways that serve to build positive relationships and teamwork, as well as being fun. Investment in fitness centres, sports equipment, individual and team sports, indoor and outdoor games, and recreational opportunities enhances an individual's sense of competence, self-awareness, and self-esteem. Recognizing, supporting, and celebrating these activities helps to

build individual and communal spirit, and contributes to the development of a positive attitude towards life and the community.

Table 2 summarizes policy and practice recommendations made by participants in the study.

Table 2. Policy implications

Outcomes (values)	Community level/practices	Government level/policy
Strengthened sense of cultural identity and continuity as an Aboriginal child/youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Optimize opportunities for community-wide cultural events (e.g., feasts, ceremonies, dances, celebrations) ● Build a cultural/spiritual resource centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recognize/respect the paramount importance of culturally-based practices and beliefs and work with Aboriginal leadership to develop culturally appropriate policies ● Acknowledge and attend to the cultural identity and spiritual needs of children and youth in care as part of the state's duty of care
Strengthened understanding of culture and history as Aboriginal peoples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Hire community historians ● Make greater use of Elders in the schools and band offices ● Speak/teach native languages more frequently in school ● Incorporate tribal/band/community history into education curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide cross-cultural training to non-native policy-makers and service providers ● Work with Elders/community leaders to ensure flexibility and adaptability of school curriculum

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Table 2. (cont'd) Policy implications

Outcomes (values)	Community level/practices	Government level/policy
Strengthened sense of community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optimize opportunities for organizing community-wide events and programs (e.g., sporting events, seasonal camps, recreational events) • Establish a vision with the community and develop and formalize a strategic plan. • Provide programs that encourage and reinforce key values identified by the community • Establish community rules and regulations for children and youth • Acknowledge inequities and teach equality • Establish a central meeting place for the community (e.g., the school) • Ensure transparency and accountability in programs and services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support/resource the training of Aboriginal service providers • Hold inter-agency meetings/ consultations
Heightened sense of the young person's individual competence and efficacy, self-awareness and self-esteem, health and physical well-being.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage, facilitate, and support the development and maintenance of child and youth sport and leisure programming within the community • Facilitate, develop, and implement community-based employment/training opportunities for young people and adults 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge and attend to the physical, recreational, and employment training needs of children and youth in care as part of the state's duty of care

Table 2. (cont'd) Policy implications

Outcomes (values)	Community level/practices	Government level/policy
Prevention of maltreatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen/augment existing programs the community finds helpful in supporting and strengthening family relationships and good parenting practices • Provide programs, events, and services that assist families in caring for children and youth within the community (e.g., home care, respite care) • Include children and youth in planning programs and activities • Endorse and support alcohol and drug prevention programs and services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocate funds and resources essential to ensure successful programs identified by the community continue in the community

CONCLUSION

This research successfully engaged interested members of the four communities that participated in the study in examining and articulating key values and practices that participants believe necessary to support and strengthen child, youth, and family well-being and prevent child maltreatment. Numerous highly valued cultural and community practices and events have been recorded, along with well-regarded programs and services that are believed to be beneficial to children, youth, and families. The research has identified some culturally derived and anchored approaches which could be used to address current gaps in programs and services.

Returning to the stimulus question ("What did we do when we were Indians?"), we cannot say that this research met the objective of

"examining, rediscovering, or articulating First Nations values." This is because the values identified by participants in the study are recognizably shared by most Canadians and indeed by people from around the world as being essential for the support and maintenance of child, family, and community well-being: caring, respect, honesty, responsibility, sharing, and trust. What the study has discovered and articulated is the significant importance of cultural traditions, practices, ceremonies, and language for instilling these universal values into the minds and psyches of Aboriginal children and youth. Through these cultural practices, young people learn of their shared history, including past harms. This knowledge helps to explain personal and family experiences in a more appreciative way. A very important aspect of the shared history is knowledge that Aboriginal people have survived for thousands of years, overcoming environmental and social hardships that can hardly be imagined. Today, this long history of survival—of safeguarding traditional stories, beliefs, ceremonies, language, and skills throughout the centuries—can be acknowledged with pride and faith that the current and next generations will thrive and flourish.

Although limited to the four communities that participated in the study, the findings underscored the diversity existent in most Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal spirituality and Christian beliefs co-exist in a variety of ways in each of the participating communities. Even so, participants spoke of the critical role played by Elders as cultural transmitters of traditional language, history, values, knowledge, and skills. Many of the suggestions for strengthening the positive values and practices that communities believe all children and families should learn involve supporting and enhancing opportunities for Elders to become involved in school and community programs.

The study has also learned of the great importance of community social and sports events to the social and physical development of the young. Time and again, the data pointed to organized sports and recreation (e.g., hockey, baseball, track and field, golf) and informal recreational opportunities (e.g., swimming, fishing, hunting) as extremely important to the young. More formal community programs, especially drug and alcohol prevention programs and parenting programs, were highly valued.

The study stimulated one of the four communities to organize a

round-dance in honour of the community's children. Over 1,000 people gathered for this event, which was an overwhelming success from the organizers' perspective. The co-investigators plan to return to the communities to discuss how the results might be used to further community goals and objectives in relation to their children, youth, and families.

AUTHORS' NOTES

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