

**STRENGTHENING CONNECTIONS TO CULTURE AND CULTURAL IDENTITY OF
INDIGENOUS CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN CARE**

by

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Bachelor of Social Work, UFV 1999

MAJOR PAPER SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

In the

School of Social Work and Human Services

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UNIVERSITY OF THE FRASER VALLEY

April 2018

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Abstract

The number of Indigenous children and youth that continue to be removed from family and community and placed in the Canadian foster care system continues to surpass the number of Caucasian children and youth in foster care. The high number of Indigenous children and youth currently placed in care continues to surpass even that of the 60's scoop. Indigenous children placed in our foster care systems continue to experience a high number of placement moves and disruptions during their time in care. There continues to be minimal Canadian or British Columbian (BC) research to determine what is required for the stabilization of our Indigenous children and youth placed within [foster] care (CIC). This study was conducted in response to this knowledge gap and is based on qualitative interviews with two long-term foster parents, one who was Indigenous and one who was not, and two Indigenous adults who were raised in foster care. The long-term foster parents have twenty-eight years of combined experience caring for Indigenous children and youth placed in BC's foster care system.

Of the four participants interviewed for this research study, all indicated the importance of collaborative, working relationships between the foster parent, CIC, social worker, and the child welfare agency as critical factors for creating placement stability, belonging, cultural identity and connections to home community for Indigenous children and youth in foster care. The foster parents' willingness to engage with the CIC's family, and home community, while also promoting and encouraging the CIC's ongoing involvement in daily cultural practices and traditions emerged as factors for the development of trusting, strength-based, caring, long-term relationships between CIC and foster parent. Additionally, collaborative, and inclusive, cooperative relationships and practices between child welfare agencies and foster parents was

found to be an intrinsic factor contributing to the development of resiliency in our CIC's for the development and strengthening of cultural identity and belonging.

Keywords: Indigenous, Aboriginal foster care, Aboriginal culture, Indigenous foster care

Acknowledgements

This research study was made possible through the help, support, and understanding of many people, including University of the Fraser Valley faculty, foster parents, child welfare service providers, family, friends, and my own experiences as a former foster parent caring for Aboriginal children and youth in foster care.

I'd like to thank my Senior Supervisor, Melanie Scott, for your unending support, encouragement, and guidance on this long and arduous journey. Your knowledge, experience, wisdom, passion, caring and commitment to this research study and belief in me kept me moving towards the finish line.

I am grateful for PLEA Community Services Society of Vancouver, for their belief in this research study and dedication to assisting in the recruitment of participants for this research. I am grateful for all the participants that allowed me into their personal lives and willingness to share their very private and deeply moving personal stories.

I am so very grateful for my own family and close friends that have supported me on this journey. I love you all so very, very much. To my children, thank you. If it were not for your ongoing encouragement, love and understanding during this incredibly crazy, busy journey, I am not certain that I could have stayed this educational course. For my granddaughter, who has endured many quick snuggles and short visits with grandma. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. You are such a shining brilliance of joy and delight in my world. I love you.

I am so grateful for everything my life has taught me, even for the darkest of times, for they are the fuel that continues to propel me forward on my journey. I gratefully recognize and acknowledge all my life lessons in their entirety as they continue to be the catalyst to my todays

and all my tomorrows. Everything is possible, if only we believe. Through this journey, I have discovered my own voice again. I am a warrior. Silence is no longer an option. My voice makes a difference in our world. Although my mother, father, and ancestors have long since passed into the spirit world, I know that they have all been right here, walking alongside me on this journey; my own personal cheering squad. This Master of Social Work degree also belongs to them all. Most especially, this master's is dedicated to my father who lost his connection to his own Aboriginal heritage as a young boy, and never secured a sense of safety and belonging that would allow him to acknowledge his Aboriginal heritage while he was alive.

To my dear friend Cindy, thank you. You calmed and strengthened me whenever I felt I had nothing left to give. Thank you for your enduring friendship, love, knowledge, wisdom, and sheer belief in my ability to accomplish this. Thank you.

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Acronyms and Symbols

Acronym	Definition of Acronym
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BC	British Columbia
CIC	Child or youth in care
CFCSA	Child Family and Community Services Act
FP	Foster parent
MCFD	Government of British Columbia, Ministry of Children and Family Development
PLEA	Pacific Community Services Society
RSC	Residential Services Coordinator
RCY	Representative for Children and Youth
RSW	Resource Social Worker
DTES	Downtown East Side

Note to Reader: The words Aboriginal and Indigenous are used interchangeably throughout this document; however, the intention is always the same...reference is to all the generations of the First Peoples of Canadian Indigenous heritage while he/she was alive.

I. Introduction

Purpose

This study is intended to identify ways of strengthening, and implementing practices for cultural connections and cultural identity within the lives of Indigenous children and youth in the foster care systems. It examines the connection to culture, and identity within foster care, while also identifying ways Aboriginal agencies and foster parents can strengthen these connections for Indigenous children and youth in foster care. Additionally, it identifies how a lack of connection to culture and cultural identity continues to negatively impact the lives of Indigenous children living in foster care. This study identifies experiences of Indigenous children and youth in foster care through examining the foster parents' individual relationships and cultural practices underlying and impacting these relationships and the children in care's (CICs) connection to culture and identity.

This study explores the parenting practices of two long term BC foster parents, with a combined twenty-eight years' experience, caring for Indigenous children and youth. It explores the supports and services utilized by these foster parents to enhance and strengthen the CIC's understanding of and connection to their family, community, culture, and cultural identity. This study also explores the lived experiences of two Indigenous social workers with lived experiences as children raised in the BC foster care system. Aboriginal children and youth in care and the child welfare agencies may benefit from the findings of this study as it identifies services, supports and cultural practices that contribute to the health and stability of Indigenous children and youth in care.

Data was analyzed with a "best practices" framework and results were

disseminated by way of this document and through a final report submitted to PLEA Services. The completed MSW major paper will be available in the UFV library. The literature also identifies the relationships of Aboriginal agencies, pertaining to children in care, and service delivery for promoting healthy and consistent relationships and connections to culture, community, and cultural identity for Indigenous CIC's (MCFD, AOPSI, 2005). This research examines how a disconnection and separation from culture, family and community can be observed in the loss of so many of our children to the streets, addiction, and suicide.

Research continues to identify a high overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth in our child welfare system. Our Canadian welfare system has a disproportionate number of First Nations children in care. Barker, B., Taiaiake, G., and Kerr, T., (2014), refer to Aboriginal youth accounting for nearly 50 percent of the total number of children in care.

The desire of this author was to conduct research that explored options for strengthening and developing resiliency, and a sense of belonging and cultural identity in our Aboriginal children and youth in foster care.

Primary Research Question

The central research question was: What is your experience of Indigenous foster care as it relates to culture, service delivery, ceremony, language, and home community? A question was: How do you perceive required changes to ensure that our children maintain contact with others (immediate family, extended family, significant family, etc.)?

Who can Use this Study?

This study may improve and strengthen the relationships between foster parents, CIC's, social workers, Aboriginal agencies, and the CIC's home communities. The foster parent, social worker and agencies increased knowledge, education, and understanding of the importance of ongoing and consistent connection to culture for Indigenous CIC's, may lead to increased cultural connections, and a strengthened cultural identity and sense of belonging for CIC's. Increased education and understanding of the importance of these connections for CIC's can lead to a reduction in the likelihood of CIC's running away, ending up homeless and on the streets, disconnected from family community and culture, drug addicted and/or death by overdose. This study may assist in informing Canadian literature pertaining to foster parenting practices and relationships that support and reinforce CIC connections to culture and cultural identity, thus strengthening the CIC's sense of belonging in both the foster family, birth family and community. This study may be a starting point for child welfare agencies to revise their current foster parent educational training to incorporate increased cultural components leading to a greater understanding of the CIC's needs for connection and an ongoing sense of belonging to their culture, family, and communities.

Locating the Researcher

This author's own experience growing up in a chaotic, impoverished household, with a controlling, abusive, alcoholic father and a submissive, depressed, beaten and emotionally disconnected mother, led to a childhood filled with pain, loneliness, panic attacks and suicidal ideation. Had this author had any knowledge of her own culture and the opportunity to learn and explore cultural practices, her childhood may not have been so heavily laden with fear, panic attacks and suicidal ideation. This author's father never acknowledged his own Aboriginal heritage while he was alive. His own childhood was riddled with abuse, emotional pain, rejection, and loss. This author often wonders who her father would have turned out to be if he had received the love, acceptance, and sense of belonging that a connection to his own culture may have provided for him.

This author firmly believes that a connection to her father's roots and heritage could have saved her father from an abusive path of self-destruction. Lived experiences as a foster parent for twelve years for Indigenous children and youth further fueled this author's desire to positively contribute to the lives of children and youth in care, ensuring and strengthening their connection to culture, identity, family, and community. Most recently, as a resource social worker, this author has observed a lack of consistent connection to culture, cultural identity, family, community and caring for so many children and youth in our foster care system.

Through personal experiences as a foster parent for Aboriginal children and more recently, experiences as a resource social worker for delegated Aboriginal agencies, this author recognizes the importance of consistent connections to culture, identity, family, and community as the lifelines and building blocks to child's sense of belonging and identity within their families, communities and within self.

In this author's experience, if there is not already a strong and consistent connection to family, community, culture, and cultural practices when a child enters care, the likelihood of these connections being put in place in a timely manner is low. In my experience, children brought into care are already traumatized by the very nature of removal from their families and communities. This author and former foster parent has witnessed firsthand, the impact in the lives of children removed from family and community. In such instances, these children and youth end up being removed from the only lives they've ever known, and then further traumatized through extended separation, loss, and disconnections to family and community. It's critical that visits, telephone calls, and any daily practices, cultural or otherwise are put into place at the time of removal, when it is 'in the best interest of the child's overall well-being', to help minimize any trauma the child may experience (MCFD, AOPSI, 2005). Child protection social workers conducting the removals generally, have no prior relationship with the family. At the time of removal, it is important that the child protection social workers develop a reasonable plan for continued connection to family, community, and cultural practices where deemed safe and "in the best interest of the child" (MCFD, AOPSI, 2005). This author's experience as a resource social worker includes the reality that all too often, when a child comes in to care, they end up being placed into a short term, emergency foster home placement until a longer-term foster home placement or family can be identified. In this author's experience, as a former foster parent and in my current role as a resource social worker, a shortage of available foster care homes continues to contribute to increasing placement disruptions and increasing sense of loss and disconnection for these children, their families, and communities. Every foster home move increases the likelihood of an interruption in family visit schedules. Due to the very nature of most foster homes already operating at capacity, the reality is that an already traumatized child

may be further traumatized through multiple placement disruptions, in addition to a lack of consistent family visits and schedules.

This author's own experience of childhood trauma and separation reinforced her desire as a foster parent to keep CIC's connected to family and community while providing an overall sense of belonging within the foster family home and environment. At times this author believes that she overcompensated for the losses these CIC's had already endured in their young lives and as a result, this author's own children tended to receive less of her attention. In this author's experience, it is critical for resource workers to ensure that foster parents receive adequate and ongoing supports to prevent undue stress and breakdowns of not just the CIC placements, but also within the foster parent's own nuclear family. In this author's experience, once a child is removed and a suitable emergency, or long-term placement is secured, foster parents where the child is placed do not always receive adequate supports and services to ensure the child's connection to family and community. This author's personal observations as a resource social worker within delegated Aboriginal child welfare agencies is that these agencies are understaffed, and social workers within these agencies tend to be in crisis management mode, doing their best to put out fires while simultaneously carrying high caseloads. In this author's experience, there is a dire shortage of foster homes and more particularly, a shortage of Aboriginal foster homes, further reducing the opportunities for resource social workers to select the home that most appropriately meets the unique needs of each child placed.

II. Literature Review

This literature review identifies factors required for the successful placement of Indigenous children and youth in foster care. Literature reveals the important role of foster parents and Aboriginal agencies for ensuring the CIC's connection to community, culture, and family is maintained to ensure the CIC's cultural identity and sense of belonging (MCFD, AOPSI, 2005). We continue to lose our CIC's to the streets, drugs, and overdose and suicide (Representative for Children and Youth, 2015). Child and family programs and services within Canada have been a contentious issue since the beginning of the 20th century.

Armitage (1995), Fournier & Crey (1997) refer to the time of European contact, as the period when Indigenous culture and cultural traditions were forcibly replaced with the nuclear family model (as cited in Bennett, Blackstock & De La Ronde 2005, p.24). Young reminds us of First Nations peoples' belief in the sacredness and well-being of the child and knowledge that their well-being is a critical component for the future (as cited in Bennett, et., al., 2005). Reading & Wein (2009), state that Indigenous ideologies embrace a holistic concept of health that reflects physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental dimensions. However, it is the interrelatedness of these dimensions that is perhaps most noteworthy. It has been acknowledged in mainstream health literature and, to some extent practice that a 'silo' approach to the prevention and treatment of ill-health fails to address the complexity of most health issues. Reading & Wein (2009) state that this is particularly true for Canada's Indigenous peoples. Historically, Canada has been state controlled, in our social institutions and processes, most notably in the ways in which health is perceived and addressed. One must be aware that there are two differing worldviews at play here; even with colonialism most indigenous populations

have maintained and sustained their cultural beliefs that unfortunately are not fully recognized within most mainstream systems. Bennett, Blackstock & De La Ronde (2005) found the following:

“Culture is the whole set of complex and interdependent, relationships, knowledge languages, social, political, and economic institutions, beliefs, values, and ethical rules which bind a people together and give the collective and its individual members a sense of where they belong. It is usually rooted in a place—a past or present homeland. It is introduced to the newly born within the family and subsequently reinforced and developed in the community. In a society that enjoys normal continuity of culture from one generation to another, its children absorb their culture with every breath they take. They learn what is expected of them and they develop a confidence that their words and actions will have meaning and predictable effects in the world around them. When individuals stray from the path of culturally accepted behavior, their own inner voice, and expectations of those around them supply the pressure necessary to bring them back within the frame of what is acceptable.” (p.41-42)

Greenwood & Leeuw (2012) state that child welfare systems continue to intervene in the lives of Indigenous families in Canada at a rate greater than any other population in the country. Currently more Indigenous children live as governmental wards than were ever in residential schools (Greenwood & Leeuw, p.33). According to Greenwood & Leeuw (2012), the dominant society is a linear thinking world looking at results as being the end. “Today, most social work theories and workplace approaches across North America are based on Western paradigms that are not relevant to indigenous values, beliefs, culture and teachings.

Decolonizing our workplace means going beyond tokenism or the mantra of ‘treating everyone the same’, to one where we actively acknowledge and support the self-determination of indigenous people, including cultural, spiritual and land connections” (VACFSS, 2016, p.2).

Indigenous populations maintain a holistic worldview whereby everything is interconnected and interrelated, and nothing really has an end. Yet, there is an expectation of results based on teachings and lessons learned; the concept that everything happens for a reason. However, in

stating this one must be aware that we are not including the interference of colonialism and the situations that have been created by the differing worldviews. As previously mentioned, the role of a resource social worker involves ensuring that foster parents receive the support services required to meet the needs of both the foster family and the children placed in their care. What these children require while in foster care is an immersion into their own unique Indigenous culture, not the lifestyles and customs of the foster home family. As Carriere (2010), reminds us that the cultural identity of Indigenous children and youth in care cannot be ignored because their well-being depends on cultural healing. The reality is that these children require ongoing encouragement and connection to their own families, traditional customs, culture, land, and community. Caregivers need to provide a foster home environment that is inclusive of everything representative of the child's culture. Oosterman et al. (2007) noted that studies have shown stability is associated with the positive relationships between the birth parents, CIC, social workers, and foster parents.

As stated in MCFD's, AOPSI (2005), foster care is meant to be inclusive and provide care that is in the best interest of the child. When a child is removed from their community and family, it is critical that the child maintain their connection to their family, community, and culture. In the best interest of the child, it is critical that the child's cultural identity and connection to their family of origin be preserved. Fournier & Crey (1997) reiterate this position in their statement that,

"All across Canada, homeless shelters, courtrooms, youth detentions centers and prisons are full of aboriginal people who grew up in non-native substitute care. A 1990 survey of aboriginal prisoners in Prince Albert penitentiary found that over 95 percent came from either a group home or a foster home. Jerry Adams, a Nisga' social worker for Vancouver Urban Native Youth Association, estimates that half to three-quarters of all habituated native street kids that he works with "are graduates of the B.C. foster care system or runaways from adoptions that didn't work out. They're looking for the sense of

identity and belonging with other aboriginal street kids down here that they never got in their non-native home. Maybe 80 percent of the girls and more than half of the boys have been sexually abused in care, but even the ones from good homes are on the run.”

Concludes Adam, a former government social worker: “Foster kids tend to have children very young, and those children, too wind up in foster care”. After four continuous decades of child abductions, there are enough lost and missing First Nations children, their fate a mystery to their own communities, to populate a small Canadian city.” (p.90)

Provincial legislation has made it mandatory for children under the age of 19, believed to be unsafe and in need of protection to be removed from their parents and placed into provincial residential care by a delegated child protection social worker (Child, Family, and Community Service Act, 1996). In BC these homes are referred to as resources.

According to the Ministry of Child and Family Development’s (MCFD), Aboriginal Operational Practice Standards and Indicators (AOPSI), (2001), agencies delivering services to children of Indigenous ancestry are required to, “preserve and promote the cultural identity of the child in care and provide services sensitive to the child’s views, cultural heritage, and spiritual beliefs” (p.24). However, we can clearly see that this is often not the case. Our Indigenous children are often, placed in non-Indigenous homes due to the lack of Indigenous resources. As stated Richardson and Nelson (2007), Aboriginal families are frequently judged from outside their cultural frame and in the end are deemed to be deficient” (p.75-82). Many Indigenous families do not meet the criteria that would allow them to provide care for these children. Systemic and cultural barriers continue to prevent Indigenous families from applying to become caregivers. The application process to become a caregiver can be systemically oppressive, demeaning, and intrusive by the very nature of the questions that it asks potential caregivers (Ansari, M, 2015). Due to the lack of available Indigenous resources, many Indigenous children are placed in other homes, with the expectation that these homes will involve children in cultural activities specific to their heritage. One might look at this as unrealistic because many of these

foster parents have no knowledge of Indigenous culture and unfortunately the resources provided are not always adequate. Kiraly & Humphrey (2013) state that kinship care is a method of family preservation and is longer lasting in comparison to foster care placements. Earlier kinship care works recommend that grandparents and other family members may be safer than other placements (Connolly, 2003; Green & Berrick, 2002; Lorkovich, Piccola, Groza, Brindo, & Marks, 2004 as cited in Kiraly & Humphrey's, 2013, p. 358-359). However, we have a system that does not easily allow kinship placements to be utilized due to stringent standards and requirements. A shortage of foster parent (FP) homes and an inability to retain new foster homes in BC contributes to placement disruptions and placement breakdowns for CIC's who are remaining in care longer as compared to previous years. Increasing child welfare caseloads in Canada contributes to increasing lack of available foster homes to place CIC's (Ferris-Manning & Zandstra, as cited in Brown, 2008, p.538).

As stated by VACFSS (2005) in a report entitled, *Raising Our Children*, restorative child welfare practices of connecting to the child's Aboriginal community and culture is inherently regenerative.

“Restorative permanency planning honors the child's Indigenous identity, strengthens the child's relational, cultural, physical, and legal connections, and is done hand in hand with the child, their immediate circle, and their Indigenous community. It involves honoring the child's original relationships, their community, their history, their culture and their traditions.” (p.5)

Kiraly & Humphrey's (2013) research reminds us that by its very nature, kinship care is essentially different from foster care. This form of care is a method of family preservation. Kiraly & Humphrey's further state that kinship care arrangements are more enduring than foster care placements. Connolly suggests (as cited in Kiraly & Humphrey's, 2013, p. 358-359), that

recent research reflects that grandparents and other family members may be safer than other placements.

One can cite examples where the lack of connection to culture for Indigenous children experiencing trauma can affect their development. Carriere (2010) states that many Indigenous children and youth in care experience separation and loss daily because of a lack of meaningful connections in their lives. Carrier further states that evidence suggests that the loss of identity for children and youth who have been removed from their families and communities creates spiritual dissonance, which impairs their physical spiritual, mental, and emotional health (as cited in Bennett, 2015, p. 103). Consequently, a lack of culture in the lives of Indigenous children in care further traumatizes them through the lack of personal identity and sense of belonging, which can further stagnate their ability to adapt and develop necessary coping skills for daily living (Brokenleg, 1998).

Hill (2005) refers to a child's cultural background as a critical component for determining the appropriate placement of the child once removed from his/her parental home. Consequently, as stated by Mitchell & MacLeod (2014), high levels of depression, addiction, and suicide rates, which have been linked to oppression and social and cultural discontinuity continue to be demonstrated (p. 110). Cultural discontinuity and oppression for Indigenous children aging out of care has been linked to high rates of depression, alcoholism, suicide, and violence in many communities (as cited in Bennett, et., al., 2005, p.51). One can clearly determine that the lack of cultural identity negatively impacts their well-being.

Moreover, a disconnection between federal and provincial responsibilities continues to hamper the equal allocation of funding and delivery of service to on reserve peoples as is

allocated and received off reserve. As stated in the Parliament of Canada (2001), Canada as a federated state, gives each province constitutional authority for social services provision.

However, Indigenous peoples on reserve are a federal responsibility. Their child welfare services, often operated by local bands and tribal councils, deliver services under provincial legislation yet receive federal government funding to do so. They also obtain their delegation via the province with the expectation that service delivery will follow provincial policies, with little or no room to incorporate their own cultural norms. For decades, there continues to be jurisdictional issues regarding children in care. Off reserve individuals are mostly supported by provincial government funding. In the case of children in care, there is no federally legislated policy to address the social requirements of on reserve people; therefore, they are mandated to follow provincial policies when delivering services that for the most part do not allow the cultural norms to be incorporated into service delivery (Sinha & Kozlowski, 2013).

In the past two decades there have been attempts to make service delivery more culturally relevant, however, there continues to be a need for increased federal funding for cultural ceremonies, Elders, and support staff within agencies that are providing services to indigenous peoples. Bernard, (2016), reminds us that delegated Aboriginal agencies are contracted on behalf of the ministry to deliver the same mandated, legislated services that the ministry delivers, however, they are provided with less money, less resources, and less training to accomplish this. Cultural ceremonies are an integral part of indigenous people's spiritually as well as way of life. In delegated Aboriginal agencies, it is mandated that social workers follow and integrate the AOPSI into their daily social work practice with clients and communities. The Aboriginal Operational and Practice Standards and Indicators (2005) were developed to ensure that social workers and the agency they are employed by continue to promote and encourage indigenous

culture within the lives of indigenous clients and communities. These standards state that social workers must practice in culturally appropriate ways. The research of Kozlowski et al., (2010) as stated by Grzybowski states there is an expectation for social workers who are employed by indigenous agencies to be able to in provide cultural ceremonies for children. Grzybowski (2012) also states that it is necessary to ensure a continuity of the CICs culture as outlined in MCFD policy. A child's cultural plan should be inclusive of the child's heritage, genealogy, and language, spiritual practices, and traditional foods. Additionally, the CICs cultural plan must also incorporate connections to extended family, and access to their traditional teachings (MCFD 2001, p 366).

The costs incurred for providing culturally relevant services, is largely the result of colonialism. For years' policies were dedicated to acculturation and assimilation of Indigenous populations in Canada (Hanson, 2009). The Truth and Reconciliation process, as well as many other works instituted by the Assembly of First Nations, have clearly demonstrated the ineffectiveness and harms created by these endeavours. Governments have admitted that policies have historically not been adequate and most recently admitted the injustice that was done to the First Peoples of this country), yet they are still not willing to provide the funding required to right the wrong that has been perpetrated upon our people. Blackstock (2015), states that instead of making investments into First Nations communities to correct financial disparities, the federal government has a habit of re-allocating funds already within the budget as a band-aid type solution to the problem. One might argue that monies are still being administered in areas where acculturation and assimilation are the focus; which contradicts the policy of provincial agencies mandated to provide culturally relevant programming to the clients they serve (Bennett, Blackstock & De La Ronde, 2005).

Sinha and Kozlowski (2013) state:

“ Indigenous children are currently overrepresented in out-of-home care in Canada; this extends a historical pattern of child removal that began with the residential school system. The overrepresentation of Indigenous children persists despite legislative and structural changes intended to reduce the number of Indigenous children in care. Several recent developments suggest potential for improvement in services for Indigenous children and families in the near future, however, greater information about the structure of Indigenous Child welfare in Canada is needed to support program and policy development.” (The International Indigenous Policy Journal, 2013, Abstract).

Indigenous and mainstream worldviews have many differences which exacerbate the issues of the “problem”. There is inclusiveness in Indigenous families and communities that doesn’t seem to occur in the linear worldview. Identity Lost and Found: Lessons from the Sixties Scoop (2007), refers to the two key concepts underlying the Indigenous worldview as being the concept of “All my Relations” and the concept of the sacred. The western paradigm doesn’t allow for these concepts to be incorporated into the policies pertaining to service delivery under any capacity (Blaeser (1996) as cited in Baskin, (2006).

The governments’ two-tiered system of care as it applies to First Nations continues to result in inequitable funding (Barker, Taiaiake & Kerr, 2014). In 2007, Cindy Blackstock, Executive Director of the First Nations and Family Caring Society, along with the Assembly of First Nations, filed a complaint against Ottawa with the Canadian Human Rights Commission, arguing the support, the federal government provides for child welfare on reserves is much lower than the support provincial governments give to children off reserves – even though on-reserve needs are greater. Less funding for family support means more children end up in the child welfare system. Fontaine (2016), reported the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruling that the federal government discriminates against First Nation children on reserves by failing to provide the same level of child welfare services that exist elsewhere. Blackstock (2007), stated to the

Canadian Human Rights Commission, “This is not an indigenous problem; it is a Canadian problem” (as cited by CBC News, 2015). Canadians need to understand that Indigenous children continue to be removed from family and community due to inequality of funding, perpetuating intergenerational trauma and colonization practices.

According to Bennett, Blackstock & De La Ronde, (2005), funding continues to be problematic:

“The majority of Indigenous child welfare agencies in Canada, outside of the province of Ontario, receive their funding through a federal policy. “PD-20-1” is essentially a formula for funding of Indigenous child welfare services and development of Indigenous child welfare agencies. It is a population-based formula—a community or group of communities must have an on-reserve child population (aged 0-18) of at least 1000 to be considered for funding. This policy also states that any agencies funded through PD-20-1 must function within the guidelines and limits set out by their respective provincial child welfare legislation funding is coming from the federal government, the agencies must remain accountable to provincial standards”. (p.51)

The provincial government of British Columbia has incorporated this policy. It appears that every province follows roughly the same type of policy, yet there is no federal legislation regarding child welfare and service delivery. According to Sinha & Kozlowski (2013), legislation in Alberta and BC requires that when an Indigenous child is placed out of home, the guardian must present a plan to describe ways that the child’s Indigenous culture, heritage, spirituality and traditions will be fostered”. Even though this presents a solution, often the funding doesn’t allow for this to occur on a level that one would deem culturally appropriate. Levesque, A (2011), refers to the government funding as providing little or no preventative measures/services to support Indigenous families and help to prevent at-risk children from coming into care (p.14).

The nurturing of relationships between birth parents and CICs contribute to a stronger sense of identity and belonging for CICs. Nasuti, et al., (2004) remind us that relationships with birth parents are a critical component for foster children. Nasuti further states that despite the challenges involved for foster parents in developing and maintaining these connections with birth parents, these continue to be critical components to the well-being and sense of belonging and identity for CIC's. Ecological factors, such as characteristic of individuals within relationships and an individual's connection to others and to their physical surrounding are contributing factors underlying CIC's positive connections to culture and cultural identity.

Bronfenbrenner (as cited in O'Neill et al., 2012, P. 1252) states that ecological theory must examine the microsystems within relationships. Bronfenbrenner (1979) refers to 'second order effects' (p.15), stating that examination of the processes within these microsystem relationships, such as the CIC and FP must be examined, as they relate to and are influenced by other relationships such as family, school, and cultural values. Bronfenbrenner (1979) identifies the bi-directional influences at the microsystem level, as having the strongest impact on the CIC.

Gap Analysis of the Research Literature

While there is research on the child welfare system and its effects on Indigenous children and youth in care, there is a lack of Canadian literature available on positive foster parenting practices to support and strengthen the placements of Indigenous children and youth in foster care. Statistics show that the number of Indigenous children and youth currently placed in foster care is a comparably greater number than the even the highest numbers of children and youth removed and placed in residential school during the 60's scoop (Blackstock, 2003). In 2011, there were about 14,200 Aboriginal children in foster care. Of those, fewer than half – about 44 per cent – lived with at least one foster parent who identified as Aboriginal. A recent Statistics

Canada report (2017) states, that Aboriginal children make up a disproportionate number of kids in foster care. There is currently little literature to support Canadian foster parents in developing and sustaining positive relationships with Indigenous children and youth placed in their care. Increased research literature addressing ways foster parents can develop and maintain cultural practices and connections to family, land and community may serve to strengthen these relationships. This could ultimately increase the CIC's sense of belonging, thus reducing the sense of disconnection, separation, loss, and isolation for CIC's. One need only recall the Representative for Children and Youth (RCY) 2015 report titled, 'Paige's Story. Abuse, indifference, and a young life discarded', which is the tragic account of a young Aboriginal girl's life in and out of foster care from the age of five months and ending in her death on the downtown east side (DTES). This report highlights the devastation that can occur when children experience multiple foster placements and loss and disconnection from culture and community. Oosterman et al. (2007) noted that studies have shown stability is associated with the positive relationships between the birth parents, CIC, social workers, and foster parents.

III. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework utilized in this research is a strength-based, holistic approach rooted in Indigenous worldview. Indigenous culture and traditions are rooted in the importance of maintaining one's connection to land and community to develop and maintain a strong cultural identity and sense of belonging in this world. Elements of the framework comprise the practice model adopted by the Vancouver Aboriginal Children and Family Services Society.

“The VACFSS research framework has a strong commitment to an applied research process that is: 1) grounded in ancestral Indigenous knowledge; 2) embedded in community consultation and engagements; 3) relevant within the current literature and standards of culturally relevant strength-based practice; and 4) that contributes to “improve the lives and well-being of urban Indigenous families; positively affect the social and cultural environment where people live; and provide data that can enhance everyday living for urban Indigenous families” (Castellano, 2004: quoted in VACFSS Research Framework 2008: 5).

Attachment Theory

A theoretical framework utilized in this research is Bowlby's (1988) attachment theory as it pertains to the Indigenous holistic worldview identifying the importance of secure attachment for children in maintaining their connections and sense of identity. This theory identifies loss and interruption of a primary caregiver in a child's life as a main cause of emotional damage. Bowlby (1969) refers to attachment theory as it relates to an individual's need to sustain a level of maternal security (i.e. attachment) and internal homeostasis. In this author's experience as a previous foster parent, the attachment environment and homeostasis for children is nurtured and sustained with consistent connection and relationship to their caregiver.

This author's personal experience as a foster parent supports the theory and importance of Bowlby's secure attachment for a child's successful progression through the ages and stages of

childhood development. This author has observed that when children and youth have experienced multiple broken attachments in their lives, the implications result in a lack of trust, and openness with others and a lack of belief in self. Broken attachment then becomes the invisible, underlying themes guiding the daily decisions, choices, beliefs, and actions of CICs.

Bio-ecological Theory

Bio-ecological theory incorporates a focus on dyadic relationships, such as the relationship between the foster parent and the CIC. Bronfenbrenner (as cited in O'Neill et al., p.1252) identifies the importance of exploring the microsystem relationships of the CIC, and the need to incorporate the foster home and the foster parent in this microsystem. This author utilizes Bio-Ecological Theory in this study to identify the macrosystem of the child welfare agency, underpinning the microsystems of foster parent, CIC, and social worker relationships.

Cultural Attachment Theory

This study also includes Cultural Attachment Theory, which identifies the importance of maintaining a child's connection to culture, family, and community. Simard (2011) refers to Cultural attachment theory as seeking to secure knowledge of family, extended family, community and Nation and their relationship to each other and the world. Simard further adds that Cultural attachment theory is the natural resiliencies, which exist within the Aboriginal cultural structures, which are supported by the roles inherent in raising a child of the Creator. Cultural attachment theory provides an Aboriginal child with the ability to have a secure base in which he or she can explore the world. Pulkingham & Ternowetsky (1997) refer to 4.2 of the Gove report, which states "Displacement from home, family, and community strips Aboriginal children of their cultural identity" (S.4.2). According to MCFD, AOPSI, (2005), "If the child is

an Aboriginal child, the importance of preserving the child's cultural identity must be considered in determining the child's best interests" (p. A-21). Simard (2009), states, First Nation people of Canada continue to be challenged and faced with their children being culturally displaced, losing their identity, and natural cultural resiliencies that exist within the first nations continuum of care. Simard further states that an epidemic of Native children being placed in foster care systems throughout Canada is a growing concern for First Nation people (p.46). Articulating the underlying problems associated with the placement of Indigenous children in care, Carrier (2010) shares that:

"The challenge in determining the best interest of the child occurs when interests are defined and determined via the Anglo European lens. Many difficulties arise as a result. The most obvious challenge is the mainstream strategy of separating the child's best interest from their family and community. The argument made...is that the two are interdependent in such a way that the relationship cannot be severed. In the event these best interests are separated, disservice is done to the child and community...argu[ing] that the best interest of the child cannot be properly or fairly assessed unless it is culturally defined." (p.5)

Strength-based Approaches

This research also discusses a strength-based approach as it asserts the individual's self-determination and strengths. This approach is a philosophy and a way of viewing individuals as resourceful and resilient in the face of adversity. Hammond and Zimmerman (2012), refer to the belief that individuals and their families have strengths, resources, and the ability to recover from adversity. This author truly believes that utilizing a strength-based approach establishes the resiliency of Indigenous peoples throughout history thus demonstrating if our children are given the right tools they can become extremely successful and major contributors within their own lives, communities, and society in general (Saleebey, 1994).

In this author's own childhood home, there was no acknowledgement or connection to any

Indigenous culture. A lack of acknowledgement and connection to culture affected this author at the very core of her being. This author believes that being raised in an impoverished and chaotic, abusive home life without any sense of belonging contributed greatly to childhood fears, depression, panic attacks and suicidal ideation that followed and permeated into adulthood. This author believes that her own experiences as a long-term foster parent for Indigenous children and youth in care offers a more comprehensive representation and understanding of the experiences of our Indigenous CIC's. Repeated episodes of violence in the childhood home followed by subsequent police removals created a sense of hopelessness, fear, and uncertainty in this author's childhood. If for no other reason, a sense of connection, stability and sense of belonging is maintained for children when sibling pairs and groups are not separated after removal (Shlonsky et al., 2003, 51 as cited in Cohn, 2008). The only consistency this author had in her life was the abuse within the home, followed by removal and placement with her mother and siblings at her maternal grandparent's farm. This author's own personal experiences support her belief that keeping siblings together after removal, plays a significant role in alleviating further trauma. Bowlby (1969) identifies that the interruption and loss of a primary caregiver causes emotional damage to a child. Bowlby further states that children need to be able to develop a healthy relationship with one primary caregiver in order to have healthy relationships later on in life.

The Government of Canada (2013), states that sense of identity equals a sense of belonging, and that we are constantly developing our identity, from birth to the end of our lives. In this same article, identity and sense of belonging is outlined as built and based on relationships to relatives, friends, community, geography, language, and other social factors. The Government of Canada (2013) states that when a child feels a sense of belonging to family,

community, and peers he or she is better able to deal with adversity.

IV. Design and Methodology

Design

This research utilized a qualitative, exploratory, descriptive design, consisting of one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. Descriptive research is observational. It is defined as a brief interview or discussion with an individual about a specific topic, which includes a method of viewing and recording the participants (Hale, 2018). These one-time, explorative, interviews used a strength-based approach within an Indigenous theoretical framework. Most Indigenous cultures in Canada are of the oral tradition, passing teachings and lessons via stories through the generations. This research utilized an Indigenous methodology, which is based on oral traditions, such as the sharing of people's personal stories, combined with participatory action research methodologies. This descriptive research design privileged Indigenous voices and experiences by permitting this author to describe the participants' experiences of Indigenous foster parents and children in care. Since time immemorial, oral tradition is how information has been passed along in Indigenous communities. Therefore, in conducting this research study it was imperative that I examined ways in which foster parents of Indigenous children in care incorporate culture into their caregiving.

Sampling and Participants

Participants recruited for this study were two current BC foster parents that had been selected via an email invite through the PLEA Organization and who had provided informed consent to be participants in this study. The foster parents who participated in this study were over the age of 18 years and have been fostering longer than a period of one year. The PLEA

foster parents collectively had 27 years of experience as foster parents. This study consists of one-on-one interviews with those two participants.

PLEA is a non-profit, charitable community services organization in Vancouver that has been in operation throughout BC for more than 30 years. Its original roots were within youth justice, providing youth a community-based program as opposed to going into custody. PLEA provides residential and non-residential services to children, youth, adults, and families encountering challenging circumstances in their lives. Today, PLEA offers a broad range of services and programs within child welfare, addictions, health, justice, and community living systems, focusing on preventative to intensive for both youth and adults (PLEA Community Services, 2018) In my early years as a foster parent, I had the opportunity to be a foster parent with PLEA (2018). Although I was only with the agency as a foster parent for a total of 3 years, memories of my experiences will remain with me forever. So many young men and women experiencing such difficult life circumstances that were able to find a sense of belonging and safety within our home. Therefore, I have chosen to complete my research study through this agency.

Additional participants recruited for this study included two Indigenous Elders with lived experiences as children raised in the BC foster care system. These Elders reside in the Surrey and Vancouver areas and are long term social workers with delegated Aboriginal agencies. These Elders have the collective experience of 34 years as CIC's in the BC Foster care system and the collective experience of 36 years as social workers.

Ethics

This author applied for research ethics approval from the University of the Fraser Valley's Human Research Ethics Board and a certificate was granted on May 5, 2017 (see Appendix C and Appendix D).

Recruitment Procedures

Potential participants were forwarded an email script (see Appendix F) through PLEA. Participants were able to choose the time and location of the interviews that best suited their needs. As outlined in the consent form, participants were reminded of their ability to withdraw from the research study at any time. Three participants provided written consent to the researcher at the interview, and one participant provided oral consent. Each participant was provided with a copy of the consent letter.

Data Collection

Each interview took approximately one hour to complete and hand-written notes were taken throughout the interviews. All hand-written interview data was kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's private home office. All computer research data was stored on the researcher's private password protected laptop computer. All hand-written data will be shredded at the completion of this MSW program in May 2018.

Limitations

A few limitations were identified in this research study, with one being the sample size. In the beginning of this research study, this author was hopeful that a larger sample would have resulted from the 29 invites sent. Unfortunately, this research study was comprised of only 4

participants. A second limitation was that interviews did not also include social workers and current CIC's. However, the two Elders who participated had grown up in care. A third limitation was the time constraints for interviewing participants. The author was only able to allocate times that participants stated they were available for. These interviews could have easily been expanded to two hours in length, as this author believes that participants had considerable information to share.

Findings

The following is a summary of the findings of this research study. The author chose to conduct interviews as it best revealed the personal connections of the foster care placements. There were 4 themes that emerged from my research study interviews:

Theme 1: The Importance of Foster Parents, CIC, and Birth Family Relationships.

I asked the foster parent participants six questions related to their personal experiences as foster care parents. I asked the Elders only one question in which I asked them to share their story of the changes they have witnessed or dealt with in the foster care system since they were children in care. The foster parent and Elder participants interviewed in this research study acknowledged the importance of developing and maintaining consistent and open relationships between foster parents, CIC's, and birth family.

Elders interviewed reported a lack of connection between foster parents, children in care and birth family while in foster care. Elders also reported experiencing a total disconnection from their birth families with no opportunity to have any open dialogue regarding their birth family with their foster parents. The Elders also stated that things changed since they were once in care. Elders reported that there is now more monitoring and accountability in place to ensure

that child welfare agencies and social workers establish and ensure that these relationships and connections are maintained for CICs.

Theme 2: The Importance of CIC and Foster Parent Relationships.

An emerging theme identified in this study was the importance of a loving and open, respectful, caring relationship between the CIC and foster parents. A foster parent interviewed for this research study spoke of how much she and her husband loved the CICs and referred to them feeling like they were their own children. This foster parent proudly shared stories and family photos that included the CICs placed in their care. Although the CICs in the foster homes discussed were encouraged to refer to the caregivers as auntie and uncle, interviews identified that the CICs preferred to refer to their foster parents as mom and dad. In this situation, this foster parent stated that she and the CICs talked openly about the difference between a birth mom and foster mom. The foster parent explained to the children that even though their birth mom still loved her children very much, she just was unable to care for them.

Another foster parent stated that she really enjoyed her relationships with the CICs in her care. This foster parent stated that she enjoyed being a part of the CICs daily lives and witnessing the positive changes and growth they experienced during their time in her care. This foster parent stated that it was often difficult for the CICs to say goodbye at the end of their placement as they had developed such caring and trusting relationships. This foster parent stated that many of the youth she cared for keep in touch.

Both Elders interviewed identified the importance of a loving and open, caring, and respectful relationship between foster parent and CIC. These Elders own lived experiences as children raised in care described childhoods wrought with isolation, punitive discipline, and an

overall sense of not belonging. Elder (1) described her foster home life as being wrought with ongoing fighting between the foster parents. This Elder further shared that her foster mom would frequently be home alone with the three children, while her foster dad would frequently be away fishing. She further shared that her foster mom would go away every September. She never knew where her foster mom would go. During the time that foster mom was away, all three children would have to do all the chores and cooking each day. During this time, the foster dad would get mad and stop talking to all three children. The children never knew why foster dad would be mad. Elder (2) described a punitive, emotionally, and physically disconnected relationship with her foster mom, and a loving and caring relationship with her foster dad. This Elder continues to have a nurturing, caring relationship with her foster dad.

Theme 3: The Importance of Supports

Another emerging theme in the interviews identified the importance of supports from the child welfare agencies and social workers to maintain connections to culture, family, and community for the CICs. Foster parent (1) stated that financial assistance for trips back to the CIC's home community contributed to strengthened relationships and connections between CIC's, biological parents, and extended family members. This foster parent reported that financial assistance provided by the agency to foster parents for these trips ensured that the foster parents could accompany the CIC back to their home community. This foster parent further stated that it could be a scary and overwhelming experience for the CIC to return to the home community, and her ability to accompany the CIC would reduce anxiety and provide a sense of security and safety for the CIC. This foster parent also reported that agency support in the form of transportation provided for CICs to attend local programs, cultural events and activities strengthened and maintained the CICs connection to culture. An example of cultural programs

and activities shared by this foster parent consisted of pow wow nights at the local Aboriginal Friendship Center, drum making classes, traditional storytelling, and dance classes. This foster parent reported that attendance at these weekly activities and programs contributed greatly to the CICs sense of self as they learned about culture and began to develop their own cultural identity.

Foster parent (2) also referred to the importance of CIC being provided the opportunity and supports for returning to their home community. This foster parent identified how the support of the social worker and 1-1 workers for transportation and support of CIC to home communities for visits enabled these connections to occur. Both foster parents interviewed reported an abundance of available supports when the children were young, however they worry about what level of supports will be available as the children get older.

Theme 4: The Importance of Social worker and Foster Parent Relationships

Foster parent participants stated that they felt they had a good relationship with the guardianship and resource social workers. Foster parents referred to phone calls and emails they placed to social workers as being answered quickly. Both foster parents research participants stated that the social workers keep them informed of any upcoming workshops, training, and community activities. Both foster parents reported feeling taken care of by social workers ensuring that any additional costs incurred such as exceptional transportation costs for specialized appointments and or family, community visits were covered. Foster parent (2) reported that when a CIC travels to their home community for a visit, it is the 1-1 worker that provides the transportation. (1-1 workers are outreach workers provided by the agency responsible for the child and who provide transportation and supervision.) As this foster parent was responsible for a group home, the CIC would not have been able to visit their home community without someone delegated by the agency to transport and supervise the trip.

Both foster parents interviewed, reported that they enjoyed collaborative working relationships with the CIC's social worker. As outlined in policy, regular, monthly visits must occur between the Guardianship social worker and the CIC (MCFD, CFSA, 1996). Both foster parents reported that the CICs' social workers maintained regular contact by calling regularly to arrange monthly visits with the CIC or more frequently if required, as per legislated policy.

Both Elders reported a lack of relationship between the social workers and foster parents during their time in care. Both Elders reported never seeing these social workers attend the foster home after the initial placement. These Elders referred to the changes that have occurred since they were in foster care, stating that there is monitoring and accountability in place now on the part of the agencies and social workers to ensure more transparent, consistent and collaborative working relationships between social workers and foster parents.

Theme 5: The Importance of CIC Connection to Family, Community, and Culture.

Both foster parents reported a strong connection to family, community, and culture for the CIC's in their care, adding that it is important for CIC's to remain connected to their family, communities, and culture. Foster parents identified telephone calls, emails, and annual visits to home communities as a way these connections have been maintained. These foster parents added that the CICs culture is a part of who the CIC is, and it is important for the CIC to be provided the opportunities to connect, explore and learn about their traditions and teachings.

Elders reported a lack of connection and sense of belonging, within foster home placements. These Elders reported absolutely no opportunities to learn their own language or connect with their own culture, family, communities, and homeland. Elders further reported a deep sadness, sense of loss and disconnection during childhood due to the separation and lack of family, culture, community, and language. One Elder participant recalled that she found safety

and healing when she would play in the forest or go to the water as there was no opportunity for healing in the foster home.

Both foster parents interviewed reported CIC's missing connection to extended family, home community, and culture. Foster parent (1) reported that they invite friends over and connect with their own extended family to alleviate the lack of family connections encountered by the children in their care. This foster parent stated that this helped the CICs to feel like they were a part of a larger family, adding that it was also very important that the CIC continued to have ongoing contact with their own birth families, and extended family through telephone calls and visits to the CICs' own home community. Sinclair (2007) reminds us that when foster parents have positive parental attitudes towards the CICs' ethnic group, inclusive of social involvement of the CICs' ethnic group within the foster family life, this contributes to a positive sense of identity for the CICs. This foster parent further shared that the very first trip to the CICs home community was planned for the summer of 2017.

The Elder participants also stated that Indigenous peoples have an innate connection to land, community, and ancestors and that there is an innate part of all indigenous peoples that need to feel and experience that. Both Elder participants reported the importance of touching the land of home. These Elders stated that touching and connecting to home land is different than touching land elsewhere. These Elders believe that all people have that innate connection to the land at home and there are no real words to describe that feeling of connection. The words of the Elders identify the need for children in care to maintain a connection to their home community.

The importance of language was also identified by research participants as an important means of connecting CICs to their culture. Foster parent (1) shared during this interview, that there was a component of language at school while CICs were attending a specific program,

otherwise, there was no formal access to language. This same foster parent shared that there is an app that can be downloaded for the children to have access to their language, however, that is the extent of their current access to their language. Foster parent (2) stated the lack of access to the CICs' language. Elder participants interviewed reported a lack of access to language while growing up in foster care. These participants further stated that there is a great deal of opportunity now for CICs to access and begin to learn their language.

One example that further explicates this phenomenon pertains to a separate example of a young male in care that had no connection or contact to his family of origin. He displayed levels of anxiety and other behaviors that led to issues with his education. The caregiver recognized that this young man was experiencing what many of our Indigenous children do, a lack of connection to family as well as culture. Therefore, the caregiver took the appropriate steps to make sure this young man was able to visit in his home community, meet family of origin and make all the cultural connections required for his healthy development. Over time with the new cultural connections, in addition to ceremony, this young man has prospered and is developing into a confident young man. (R. Whitford, personal communication, September 15, 2016).

Analysis

Utilizing a thematic analysis, I interpreted the interviews collected from all participant interviews. Thematic analysis is defined by Braun and Clarke (2006) as "a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p.6). After I completed all my participant interviews, I read through the interview data from my handwritten notes to refresh myself with the interviews. I took notes from each interview and began coding each of the interviews through identifying how many key terms had been recorded. The key terms were culture, community, language, family, connection, and supports. These key terms identified the

recurring themes. As stated by Braun and Clarke, (2006), “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 copied each of the questions from the Question Study (Appendix D & E) on to one document and then copied each of the participant’s answers under each of the questions they had answered. I was able to identify and code themes from each of the questions asked during the interviews. Five main themes emerged from the interviews.

Discussion

In an ideal world, all foster parents caring for Indigenous children would have the knowledge, and educational training base required to effectively support the children placed in their care. Generational effects of trauma, and loss continues to impact CIC’s through the ongoing disconnection and separation from family, community, and cultural traditions (Centre for Social Justice, 2014). The damaging effects of these disconnections and separations can be observed through our displaced and street entrenched youth and adults in the downtown east side (DTES), struggling with mental health issues, homelessness, addictions, and high rates of suicide (RYC, 2015). The generational traumas of residential school survivors continue to be intricately woven throughout the lives of our CICs, detrimentally affecting, and impacting their lives and the lives of their family, extended family members and entire communities (Kistabish, 2001). Foster parents need to understand these effects more fully so that they are better able to meet the emotional, psychological, and physical needs of CICs and the CICs relationships with family and community. There is an ongoing need for specialized foster parent training, to increase the foster parents’ understanding of how current, historical, and intergenerational unresolved issues of trauma, continue to impact CIC’s lives through mental health, abuse, addiction, and suicide

(Bigfoot, 2007). As a previous foster parent, this author is aware of the importance of skills-based training using positive reinforcement to enhance and support the relationship between foster parent and CIC. Redding (as cited in Whenan, Oxlad, & Lushington, 2009) states that this training increases the foster parent's ability to utilize positive parenting techniques and coping skills to work with and support children and youth with mental, emotional, and behavioral issues, including Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and autism (p.759). Hudson & Levasseur, 2002, (as cited in Patton), identify the complex needs of children in foster care further complicates the already difficult work of parenting. Further to this Hudson & Levasseur, added that parents desire to be treated like professionals.

In discussions with other social workers, the consensus was that many foster parents complete the mandatory 53 hours of foster parent educational training and may attend the annual agency Christmas party or the annual caregiver cultural camp, however, decline additional training offered. This author was one of those foster parents that felt absolutely done, emotionally and physically, by the day's end. The thought of making the time to attend, such additional training was not welcomed. Coming from the perspective as both a resource social worker and previous foster parent, my experience of not attending additional training fluctuated between just being generally tired at the end of the day, to the lack of adequate and available relief providers, to time constraints based on extracurricular activities, in addition to feeling generally undervalued in my foster parenting role by the agency itself. Patton, (2014) states that although her study does not examine foster parents' lack of attendance to training, it reveals parental barriers to attending training, such as structural barriers with training being held at inconvenient times (Cunningham et al., 2000; Heinrichs, Bertram, Kuschel, & Hahlweg, 2005;

Spoth, Redmond, Hockaday, & Chung, 1996, as cited in Patton, 2014, p. 16). Parents referred to being unable to arrange transportation and childcare, (Coatsworth, Duncan, Pantin, & Szapocznik, 2006, as cited in Patton, 2014, p.16). Parents who declined to participate in supportive services such as training, reported having schedules that were already too busy (Heinrichs, Bertram, Kuschel, & Hahlweg, 2005, as cited in Patton, 2014, p. 16).

Implications for Policy and Practice

Participants interviewed described the importance of having consistent, and supportive, collaborative, working relationships between the foster parent, the guardianship social worker, and the CIC to continue to strengthen and build lasting, trusting relationships between the foster parent and CIC. Foster parents reported that having a consistent and transparent, collaborative working relationship between the foster parent and social worker contributed to the foster parent's ability to create increased stability and trusting relationships with CICs. Foster parent (1) described how the lack of a supportive and collaborative working relationships with previous social workers, left her feeling vulnerable and questioning her skills and abilities in her role as caregiver, affecting her ability to build a secure and stable relationship with CICs in her care. Findings from my study suggest that training that incorporates both the foster parent and the social worker involved with the same CICs could serve to strengthen foster parent-social worker relationships and contribute to ensuring more long-term stability of CIC placements. Similarly, more training could be offered by agencies that includes the guardianship social worker and the foster parent to strengthen these relationships and increase the understanding and importance of the foster parent's role as both a professional and paramount role model in the lives of the CICs they care for.

As stated in MCFD's Aboriginal Operational Practice and Standards Indicators (AOPSI, 2005), "The social worker will preserve and promote the cultural identity of the child in care and provide services sensitive to the child's views, cultural heritage and spiritual beliefs" (p. 79). This is also written into policy. Although so much has changed over the years, there continues to be undeniable challenges and discrepancies between what is written and mandated within our child welfare legislation and policies and what is being implemented in the delivery of services to aboriginal children, families, and communities. As cited by Wright (2012) when examining differences between the provision and delivery of services to non-Aboriginal children, and services for Aboriginal children, discrepancies are identified based on increased costs due to geographical distances and the time required to meet with others, such as bands, family and community members (Trocmé, Knoke, Shangreaux, Fallon, & MacLaurin, 2005). The Representative for Children and Youth (RCY) speaks to the point that:

Aboriginal children are disproportionately represented in the B.C. child welfare system, comprising more than 50 per cent of children in care despite making up only about eight per cent of the child population. Aboriginal children are seven times more likely to come into care than non-Aboriginals. As such, B.C. has strong legislation and policy in place to offer special protection to Aboriginal children. But this was not enough to help Paige. Indeed, the Representative believes that despite this strong legislation and policy, there is too often a distinct lack of strong follow-through by professionals when it comes to Aboriginal girls such as Paige. This has been evident in other recent RCY reports detailing the plight of Aboriginal children, including *Lost in the Shadows* (2014), *Out of Sight* (2013) and *Who Protected Him?* (2013), all stark examples of Aboriginal children receiving far less than the standard of care called for by law and common decency. "(p.8)

Theoretical frameworks used for this research were based on Bronfenbrenner's, Bio-ecological Theory, Bowlby's Attachment Theory and Simards, Cultural Attachment Theory. The literature review identified influences underlying CIC placement stability as strongly influenced by the quality of one-on-one, individual dyadic relationships, between CIC and foster parent, and CIC and his/her surrounding microsystems. Bowlby's Attachment Theory identified

the secure attachment to primary parent as paramount to a child's ability to establish and develop trusting relationships throughout childhood and into later adulthood (insert source). Namely, when CICs experience multiple placements, they lose the ability to form these healthy, secure attachments with adults and significant others in their lives. Cultural Attachment Theory identifies the principle of cultural memory in an Indigenous person's DNA. This theory identifies the importance of connection and relationships between a child, their nuclear family, extended family, home community, and Nation as inherent relationships for the healthy development of children. It identifies the natural resiliencies within cultural structures aligning with findings that kinship care provides children with strong family connections, networks and supportive relationships with parents, siblings, extended family, culture, and identity (Kiraly & Humphries, 2013).

VI. Conclusion

A key finding in this study was the importance of CICs' connection to family and community. Foster parents and Elders interviewed referred to the need for family, traditions and community connections for children and youth in care.

“In Indigenous culture, family is critical. Family is community. There is always going to be an auntie or kokum in our children's communities. We are losing our children because they experience disconnection to family and roots. When there are no connections to family and so many of our children and youth continue to be raised in care without consistent connection to family, siblings, and community, then the system itself is creating some of this brokenness” (Elder participant 2).

“Kinship ties are key to keeping children and youth connected to family, culture, and community when a child comes into care. Kinship ties will ensure connections to extended family, home community and culture. We all have some yearning. We may not know it. I believe that's why some of our youth get messed up because this piece is missing” (C. Halcrow, personal communication, November 2017).

Education is key for foster parents. When foster parents and social workers alike don't fully understand and comprehend the historical impact of residential school and colonization, they fail to recognize its far-reaching impact and implications within our present-day child welfare systems. Foster parents require increased education and training to truly begin to understand how the impact of residential schools and colonization continues to play out in our present-day child welfare systems through the ongoing apprehension of Aboriginal children from our communities. Results from this study clearly indicate a need for foster parents caring for our

Aboriginal children needing to understand the criticalness of keeping CICs connected to family, culture, and community. When children experience broken relationships and disconnection from community, culture and family, the children end up broken and lost (Elder participants 1 & 2).

A lack of consistent connection to community, family, extended family, and traditional culture in the lives of Aboriginal children and youth in care undermines the CICs' ability to develop a strong sense of self. Having a strong sense of self assists our CIC's in the development of resiliency, secure attachment, cultural identity, a sense of belonging and healthy connection to family, cultural traditions, and community (Brokenleg, 1998). A sense of identity equals belonging.

The aim of this study was to identify ways BC foster parents are strengthening connections to culture and cultural identity for Indigenous children and youth in care. This study identified ways foster parents are strengthening and maintaining connections of CICs in their care with the CIC's home community, family, and traditional ways of life. A lack of daily cultural practices within these foster homes also emerged from this study. Although foster parents acknowledged the importance of cultural practices for the children, the foster parents did not go out of their way to encourage daily practices such as smudging. Although foster parents acknowledged having open conversations with the CIC regarding cultural practices such as smudging, there was no daily guidance to ensure this practice occurred consistently. Foster parents referred to the importance of consistent connections between the CIC to family through telephone conversations, annual trips to home communities and the financial support for this to occur. Foster parents identified the importance of ongoing weekly programs such as dancing and drumming at the local friendship center as a valuable way to strengthen and encourage culture and develop a sense of cultural identity for the Indigenous children in their home. One of the

caregivers also voiced the desire to have language training available for them. There was a component of language at the children's school, but only in a specific program. Once the program ended, there was no further language classes offered.

Foster parents and Elders identified the importance of supportive relationships between the social workers and foster parents. Foster parents identified the importance of this support as paramount to strengthening and advancing their own skills and capacities in their foster parent role. Trusting, open and supportive relationships between the social worker and foster parents was identified as an important factor for ensuring trusting and strengthened relationships between the foster parent and CIC.

Moving forward, more training opportunities for foster parents would be beneficial in strengthening their skill base for understanding, working with, and supporting the children in their care with behavioral and emotional issues that develop. More in depth training opportunities for foster parents, related to the historical and ongoing impact and trauma of colonization that continues to impact and affect families and entire communities would serve to strengthen the foster parents understanding of the ongoing impact affecting children in care.

In conclusion, this was a very small study, so the findings must be taken cautiously. It speaks to the need for further research to be undertaken to increase the understanding that Indigenous children in care remain connected to family, community, and culture.

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VIII. Appendices


Appendix A: Definitions

<i>Children in care (CIC)</i>	those children 12 years of age or less.
<i>Youth in care</i>	those children between the ages of 13 to 19.
<i>Foster care</i>	those children and youth who are 19 years of age or less placed in provincially (state) funded residential care legally separated from their birth parents and or family. This includes, but is not limited to, placements in foster family homes, foster homes of relatives, group homes, emergency shelters, residential facilities, child care institutions, and preadoptive homes.
<i>Foster parent or caregiver</i>	a state contracted adult who is providing for the day to day care of a CIC.
<i>Resource</i>	a state contracted residential family home as a <i>resource</i> or commonly known as a <i>foster home</i> where the foster parents provide for a CIC.
<i>Disruptions or placement disruptions</i>	when a CIC who must exit or leave the foster parents residential home with little or no notice, usually due to a negative reason.
<i>Placement stability</i>	the level of homeostasis that the CIC has within the residential resource or foster home.
<i>Indigenous</i>	First Nations, Metis, and Inuit, collectively (NCCAH, 2017).

Appendix B: Certificate of Human Research Ethics Board Approval - Amendment
Foster Parents




Certificate of Human Research Ethics Board Approval

Contact Person Melody Manuel	Department Social Work	Protocol # 9625-17
Co-investigator(s) Melanie Scott		
Title of Project Strengthening Connections to Culture and Cultural Identity of indigenous Children and Youth in Care - Foster Parent Interviews		
Sponsoring/Funding Agency N/A		
Institution(s) where research will be carried out University of the Fraser Valley; Plea Community Services Organization		
Review Date: 23-Mar-17	Approval Date: 05-May-17	Approval Term: 05-May-17 - 04-May-18
<p>Certification:</p> <p><i>The protocol describing the above-named project has been reviewed by the UFV Human Research Ethics Board, and the procedures were found to be in compliance with accepted guidelines for ethical research.</i></p> <div style="text-align: center;">  <hr style="width: 20%; margin: 0 auto;"/> <p>Michael Gaetz, Chair, Human Research Ethics Board</p> </div> <p><i>NOTE: This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above noted term provided there is no change in the procedures or criteria given.</i></p> <p><i>If the project will go beyond the approval term noted above, an extension of approval must be requested.</i></p>		

**Appendix C: Certificate of Human Research Ethics Board Approval - Amendment
Elders**



Certificate of Human Research Ethics Board Approval

Contact Person Melody Manuel	Department Social Work	Protocol # 9625-17
Co-investigator(s) Melanie Scott		
Title of Project Strengthening Connections to Culture and Cultural Identity of indigenous Children and Youth in Care - Elder Interviews		
Sponsoring/Funding Agency N/A		
Institution(s) where research will be carried out University of the Fraser Valley; Plea Community Services Organization		
Review Date: 23-Mar-17	Approval Date: 11-Apr-17	Approval Term: 11-Apr-17 - 10-Apr-18
<p>Certification:</p> <p><i>The protocol describing the above-named project has been reviewed by the UFV Human Research Ethics Board, and the procedures were found to be in compliance with accepted guidelines for ethical research.</i></p> <div style="text-align: center;">  _____ Michelle Riedlinger, Chair, Human Research Ethics Board </div> <p><i>NOTE: This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above noted term provided there is no change in the procedures or criteria given.</i></p> <p><i>If the project will go beyond the approval term noted above, an extension of approval must be requested.</i></p>		

Appendix D: Qualitative Questions for Study

1. What is your personal experience “as a foster care parent: as it relates to Indigenous foster care?
2. What cultural significance do you believe children in care are missing?
3. Have you witnessed changes regarding the delivery of service over the last 5 years and if so what are they and where could they be expanded on?
4. Did you have opportunity to attend ceremony and do you believe that it is a benefit for children to participate even if it means travelling to their home communities? Can you please share your experience or perception of what this might look like?
5. How do you feel about the current status of kinship care or the lack of and how do you perceive extended family, significant family, etc.?
6. How significant do you feel that indigenous language is for our children and how do you see it being incorporated in their lives?

**Appendix E: Qualitative Questions for Study
Elders Interview Question.**

1. Can you please share your story of the changes you've witnessed or dealt with in the foster care system as it pertains to culture?

Appendix F: Participant Email Script

April 7th, 2017

Dear Valued Caregiver

We are sending you and 29 other caregivers this email as we recognize that you have demonstrated noteworthy skills, “tools”, experiences and training that has had a positive influence on your care-giving of our children in care. In an effort to improve our practices and future training, we would like you to consider, confidentially sharing your positive skills, tools, communication methods, and attachment practices that you have found to be the most useful in your caregiving.

A Master of Social Work Research Student from University of the Fraser Valley and a former foster parent would like to conduct a short 45-60-minute confidential interview to collect what positive practices and skills you use. Due to time constraints, the first 6 people to respond to be participants in this study will be chosen. All identifiable information being collected will be kept confidential.

The purpose is to understand what attachment methods, training, positive reinforcement, and skills that successful caregivers use with children in care to support their well-being and prevent a placement disruption. This interview process will provide the researcher with an understanding of your experiences in caring for Aboriginal foster children.

If you would like more information, or would like to participate, please contact the primary researcher (Melody Manuel) either by confidential phone at [REDACTED] or her student email at [REDACTED].

Thank you,

Appendix G: Research Study Consent Form

Ms. Melody Manuel
 Department of Social Work
 University of the Fraser Valley
 33844 King Road
 Abbotsford, BC V2S 7M8
 604-504-7441

April 7th, 2017

Strengthening Connections to Culture and Cultural Identity of indigenous Children and Youth in Care

Letter of Informed Consent for Interview Participants

My name is Melody Manuel. I am a Resource Social Worker with Vancouver Aboriginal Children and Family Services Society. Prior to beginning in this role in 2014, I was a full time foster parent for 12 years, caring for Aboriginal children and youth in care. I am currently enrolled in the Master of Social Work Degree Program at UFV. As a former foster parent, I recognize the importance of maintaining and encouraging cultural connections and practices for the children we care for. It is imperative to strengthen, encourage and maintain their cultural identities, well-being, and sense of belonging within their families, communities, and culture. My supervisors name is Melanie Scott.

Purpose/Objectives of the Study

This study will explore your understanding and knowledge of the importance of relationships and connections to culture and identity for Aboriginal children in care, through a one-time, one-on-one interview. The purpose of this interview is to gather information from you as it relates to children in care and connections to culture and identity. This study will explore your understanding and knowledge of the importance of relationships and connections to culture and identity for Aboriginal children in care, through a one-time, one-on-one interview. The purpose of this interview is to gather information from you as it relates to children in care and connections to culture and identity.

Procedures involved in the Research

For this study, this research is conducting a one-on-one interview with elders/knowledge keepers that have been selected have consented to be participants. These interviews will take place at the locations mutually selected between you and the primary researcher. This interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes in which general questions relating to your perspectives regarding cultural program delivery and the incorporation of care will be asked. The researcher will hand write your interview answers. You will receive a \$10.00 gas card for participating.

Potential Harms, Risks, or Discomforts to Participants

Should you begin to show signs of emotional distress or discomfort during any part of the interview process, I will ask if you would like me to end the interview or move on to another question. I will provide you with 3 separate contacts for counselling supports available in the Vancouver area. I will use my Critical Incident Stress Management training to assist you in debriefing from the interview process if required.

Potential Benefits

The benefit of these interviews may result in identifying the gaps in culture and cultural identity for children in care and improvement of program delivery.

Confidentiality

All responses will be kept confidential by the primary researcher. Names and responses will be kept confidential. Only primary researcher, Melody Manuel and supervisor, Melanie Scott will have access to participant data. All data will be secured in a password protected computer and all written notes will be kept in a locked file cabinet in researcher's locked home office. All notes will be shredded, and all computer data will be deleted once the study is completed by May 2018.

Participation

Participation in the study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without consequences. You can refuse to answer any questions but stay in the study. If you do decide to withdraw, your responses will not be used in the analysis. All data will be destroyed if you choose to withdraw. You can withdraw from the study by contacting the primary researcher.

Study Results

This researcher may present findings of this study at future conferences. The study results will be available at the UFV library as a master's thesis.

Questions

If you have any questions about the study you may contact primary researcher, Melody Manuel at [REDACTED] or her supervisor, Melanie Scott at Melanie.Scott@ufv.ca

Support Resources

While the questions are not meant to elicit anything in your own experiences, if something is triggered from the questions here are some resources.

- ☐ Hollyburn Family Services

267 Esplanade @ #104, North Vancouver, BC V7M 1A5 Tel: (604)987-8211

- ☐ BC Federation of Foster Parent Associations
131 8th Street, 3rd Floor, New Westminster V3M 3P6 Tel: (800)663-9999
- ☐ Vancouver Counselling
1810 Alberni Street #204, Vancouver, BC Tel:(604) 803-2600

By signing below, I agree to participate in this study, titled **Strengthening Connections to Culture and Cultural Identity of indigenous Children and Youth in Care**

I have read the information presented in the letter of informed consent being conducted by Melody Manuel, student at the University of the Fraser Valley. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive any additional details.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and that confidentiality of all results will be preserved. If I have any questions about the study, I should contact [REDACTED]

If you have any concerns regarding your rights or welfare as a participant in this research study, please contact the Ethics Officer at 604-557-4011 or Research.Ethics@ufv.ca.

Name (please print) _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Once signed, you will receive a copy of this consent form.

Appendix H: Participant Recruitment Letter

Melody Manuel

Department of Social Work

University of the Fraser Valley
33844 King Road
Abbotsford, BC V2S 7M8
604-504-7441

April 7th, 2017

Strengthening Connections to Culture and Cultural Identity of indigenous Children and Youth in Care

Recruitment:

My name is Melody Manuel. I am a Resource Social Worker with Vancouver Aboriginal Children and Family Service Society. Prior to beginning in this role in 2014, I was a full time foster parent for 12 years, caring for Aboriginal children and youth in care. I am currently enrolled in the Master of Social Work Degree Program at UFV. As a former foster parent, I recognize the importance of maintaining and encouraging cultural connections and practices for the children we care for to strengthen, encourage and maintain their cultural identities, wellbeing, and sense of belonging within their families, communities, and culture.

Purpose/Objectives of the Study

This study will explore the participants understanding and knowledge of the importance of relationships and connections to culture and identity for aboriginal children in care. The purpose of this interview is to gather information from participants as it relates to children in care and their connections to culture and identity. relates to children in care and their connections to culture and identity. This study will explore the participants understanding and knowledge of the importance of relationships and connections to culture and identity for aboriginal children in care. The purpose of this interview is to gather information from participants as it relates to children in care and their connections to culture and identity. relates to children in care and their connections to culture and identity. This study will explore the participants understanding and knowledge of the importance of relationships and connections to culture and identity for aboriginal children in care. The purpose of this interview is to gather information from participants as it This study will explore the participants understanding and knowledge of the importance of relationships and connections to culture and identity for aboriginal children in care. The purpose of this interview is to gather information from participants as it relates to children in care and their connections to culture and identity. relates to children in care and their connections to culture and identity. This study will explore the participants understanding and knowledge of the importance of

relationships and connections to culture and identity for aboriginal children in care. The purpose of this interview is to gather information from participants as it This study will explore the participants understanding and knowledge of the importance of relationships and connections to culture and identity for aboriginal children in care. The purpose of this interview is to gather information from participants as it

Procedures involved in the Research

This study will consist of one-on-one interviews with former BC foster parents that have been selected and consented to be participants in this study. Due to time constraints, the first 6 foster parents that respond to be in this study will be selected as participants. The researcher is interviewing foster parents to gain knowledge of their experiences in caring for Aboriginal foster children. This study will also consist of one-on-one interviews with indigenous elders that have lived experiences as children in care and have consented to be participants in this study. The purpose of this interview is to gather information from these participants with respect to experiences relating to culture and cultural identity for the Indigenous children in care. These interviews will take place at the locations mutually selected between the participants and the researcher. This interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes in which general questions about the training and delivery of Aboriginal culture relating to the care of Aboriginal children in their care will be asked. This researcher is aware that interviews with respected elders may take longer than the anticipated time frames allotted. The researcher will write hand write the answers given by the participants. Each participant will receive a \$10.00 gas card for participating.

If you would like more information or would like to participate, please respond to this letter indicating your name and contact information. [melody.manuel@student.ufv.ca]

Sincerely,

Ms. Melody Manuel
Department of Social Work
University of the Fraser Valley