Aboriginal child welfare in British Columbia and unequal power relations: A Critical Discourse Analysis

Dr. Travis Holyk
First Nations Studies Program, University of Northern British Columbia &
Executive Director, Research, Primary Care and Strategic Services
Carrier Sekani Family Services

Dr. Henry G. Harder
School of Health Sciences &
Dr. Donald B. Rix B.C. Leadership Chair in Aboriginal Environmental Health
University of Northern British Columbia

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Travis Holyk (Corresponding author), Carrier Sekani Family Services, 987 4th Avenue, Prince George, B.C., V2L 3H7.

Contact: travis@csfs.org

Citation

Abstract

This is a paper about unequal power relations in Aboriginal child welfare in British Columbia. We analyze a number of rhetorical devices used by the Representative for Children and Youth in her report When Talk Trumped Service: A Decade of Lost Opportunity for Aboriginal Children and Youth in B.C. *We include language, financial numbers, charts and graphs that reinforce domination of Aboriginal peoples and potentially undermine the efforts of Aboriginal people's toward self-determination in child welfare. The paper provides examples of how power manifests itself through language, reinforcing historically negative stereotypes that are then supported in the media. We conclude that such reports reflect a colonial legacy that continues to inform relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, and if not critically assessed will significantly impact Aboriginal Child Welfare policy, funding and practice decisions.*

Keywords*: First Nations; Aboriginal; discourse; child welfare policy; power*

La protection des enfants autochtones en Colombie-Britannique et les rapports de force inégaux : une analyse du discours critique.

Résumé

Cet article examine les rapports de force inégaux qui sont manifestés à travers la politique de la protection des enfants autochtones, en Colombie-Britannique. Nous faisons analyse de nombres de divers procédés de rhétorique utilisés par la représentante des enfants et des adolescents de la Colombie-Britannique dans son rapport, WhenTalk Trumped Service: A Decade of Lost Opportunity for Aboriginal Children and Youth in B.C. *Nous incluons dans cette analyse le langage, les données financières, les tableaux et les graphiques, qui renforcent la domination des peuples autochtones, et qui, potentiellement, sapent les efforts des peuples autochtones à*

s'autodéterminer en matière de protection de l'enfance. Cet article fournit des exemples des

manifestations du pouvoir à travers le langage, réifiant des stéréotypes négatives historiquement

associés aux autochtones, et qui se retrouvent répétés de nouveau et promus à travers les

médias. Nous concluons que des rapports tel celui-ci reflète un héritage colonial qui continue

d'influencer les relations entre autochtones et non-autochtones. S'ils ne sont pas évalués de

manière critique, ceux-ci continueront d'influencer négativement les politiques, les practices et

les décisions des politiques de protection de l'enfance autochtone.

Mots Clefs : Premières Nations; autochtones; discours; politique de protection à l'enfance;

pouvoir

Introduction

In November 2013, the Representative for Children and Youth, Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, released a Special Report entitled *When Talk Trumped Service: A Decade of Lost Opportunity for Aboriginal Children and Youth in B.C.* The purpose of the Report is noted as the Representative's review of Aboriginal child welfare services in B.C. and the Report has major implications for the development of policy and practice. The Ministry of Children and Family Development accepted the Report as presented, resulting in potential reactionary shifts in Aboriginal child welfare policy in the province of British Columbia. Reactions included pulling specific contracts such as the Indigenous Approaches, which were geared toward First Nations developing community-based approaches to child welfare, and shifting policy without a critical assessment of the Report.

The Report is seemingly about challenging Aboriginal child welfare policy and practice in order to improve the lives of Aboriginal children. While many of the recommendations may be useful and are in fact supported by First Nations organizations (Ktunaxa Nation, 2013), by looking at the Report through the lens of dominant discourses and unequal power relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, the Report becomes a "corrosive means for the exertion of power" (Liasidou, 2011, p.890). By excluding Aboriginal peoples, more specifically Delegated Aboriginal Agencies and First Nations responsible for child welfare in community, from the dialogue, the Report privileges those who hold institutional power, thus replicating the arrangement of domination and subordination that has marked Aboriginal non-Aboriginal relations throughout the colonization process. The Representative's judgements on Aboriginal leadership through a pseudo-scientific lens support this historical view of Aboriginal people as deviant and unable to make decisions or care for themselves.

This article analyses a number of rhetorical devices used by the Representative in her report, including language, financial data, charts and graphs that reinforce domination of Aboriginal peoples and potentially undermine their efforts toward self-determination in child welfare. As Said indicates, "the power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism" (Said 1993, p.xiii).

This article also addresses a larger socio-political issue and the competing values that arise when attempts are made to share power, specifically the right of First Nations to be self-determining around the welfare of their children, while still being delegated by the federal and provincial government. The province of British Columbia, through provincial child welfare legislation (MCFD, 2016), maintains the responsibility for ensuring the safety of all children. As noted in the Delegation Conformation Agreement (MCFD, 2011) between Delegated Aboriginal Agencies and the B.C. Ministry of Children and Family Development, the Director, by virtue of the *Child Family and Community Service Act* (MCFD, 2016), has legislative authority with respect to the protection of children and the provision of Services to children and families in British Columbia. While First Nations that have entered into agreements to become Delegated Aboriginal Agencies, in the same Delegation Confirmation Agreement, First Nations assert that they "have never relinquished their inherent right and responsibility to care for and protect their children and families in a manner that respects and preserves their culture and heritage" (MCFD, 2011, p.6). The B.C. Ministry of Children and Family Development, through provincial legislation and the delegation process, establishes a contractor relationship with Delegated Aboriginal Agencies to implement programs, and there appears to be dissonance between how each party views the relationship.

Socio-Political and Historical Context

Understanding the socio-political and historical context of Aboriginal/Non Aboriginal relations is critical to any discussion of Aboriginal peoples' right to be self-determining. Moreover, understanding such a context is particularly important when attempting to situate public policy and practices that guide services to Aboriginal children, youth and their families. In Canada, Aboriginal people's right to self-determination has been eroded in part by provisions of the *Indian Act* (1876) and related policies that attempted to govern the lives of Aboriginal peoples. In 1876, all laws affecting *Indian* people were combined under one piece of legislation known as the *Indian Act,* which stated as its mandate the protection, civilization and assimilation of *Indians*. The consolidated *Indian Act* is a comprehensive piece of legislation providing legislated direction toward almost all activities and aspects of First Nation communities. The underlying intent of this legislation was the elimination of Aboriginal worldviews and any jurisdiction over their peoples and territories (Joseph, 1991). This legislation also solidified the lack of recognition, present from the arrival of Europeans, of the social and political organization of Aboriginal communities including the organization of nations, family and property. The three areas in particular that were addressed under the *Act* include band membership, local government construction, and land ownership (Moore, 1978).

The Canadian government, aided by the church, enhanced its programs of political and cultural destruction by attacking the family structure, which is the core mechanism for the transmission of traditional knowledge. This was largely completed through the removal of children from their homes, and placing them in residential schools in order to prevent them from practicing their culture or passing on knowledge through separation from parents and other teachers (Kelm, 1998). As noted by Ball (2004):

One of the main avenues for subjugating Indigenous peoples to colonial culture and governance has been through the imposition of education, most powerfully through the "Indian Residential Schools" program, that denies the legitimacy of thought, lifestyles, religions and languages of First Nations people (p.457).

In the 1960s provincial child protection authorities assumed responsibility for those children considered to be "at risk". In each case Aboriginal social and legal structures were substituted for western "civilized" systems, which carried with them Eurocentric values that both dismissed and undermined the social and legal order in Aboriginal societies. Razack (2009) argues that we cannot dissociate social work from its historical role in imperialism. While most Canadians now understand the terrible legacy of residential schools, which was acknowledge in 2008 through the Prime Minister of Canada's apology to Aboriginal peoples, more children have been removed from their families through the child welfare system since the 1960s than as a result of residential schools. As acknowledged in the Representative's Report (2013), since 2006/2007 the proportion of Aboriginal children in care has remained more than 50 percent of the total population of children in care (p.17).

Juxtaposed with attempts to deny Aboriginal forms of governance, Aboriginal peoples maintain that they have an inherent Aboriginal right to be self- determining, which includes the ability to use their own institutions in maintaining social order in their communities. Aboriginal peoples maintain that the right to self-determination is now protected under Section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* and the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (United Nations, 2008). Non-Aboriginal systems fail to understand the essence of the First Nations institutions. Therefore, any attempts to remedy the situation, when intermixed with European values, have not produced results that demonstrate good health or healing for peoples subjugated by the dominant group. Turner states "history has shown us that Aboriginal People have had little say in determining the perspective from which their rights and sovereignty are

understood and recognized" (2004, p.58). Assuming responsibility for the care and protection of children, as well as the maintenance of family structures is one expression of self- determination.

The implicit belief in the discussion around the right to be self-determining is that the society asserting such a right has well-established internal legal systems that preserve the integrity of family and community structures. These systems and structures preserve the well-being of the society by determining membership and how business is conducted or conflict resolved in that society. In recognizing the importance of self-determination to the health and well-being of Aboriginal population, a Transformative Change Accord (TCA) (Province of British Columbia, 2005) was signed in November 2005 by the Government of B.C., the Government of Canada, and the political executives of the First Nations Summit, the B.C. Assembly of First Nations, and the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs. The TCA established commitments for a 10-year plan to bridge the socio-economic gaps affecting First Nations in B.C.

Following negotiations that began in 2006, the Government of B.C., the Government of Canada, and the First Nations Health Society, signed the British Columbia Tripartite Framework Agreement on First Nation Health Governance (in October 2011), which empowered B.C. First Nations to take-over Health Canada programs and services. The governance work completed on the Tripartite Health Agreement resulted in First Nations taking control of First Nations Inuit Health services in the province of British Columbia on October 1, 2013. The health governance work, as well as work on governance in child welfare, is recognized by the parties as foundations to build upon in the area of child welfare governance. The Transformative Change Accord and health initiatives (Health Canada, 2011) provide a rationale for recognizing the important role

self-determination plays in fostering social change, addressing inequality and promoting intercultural dialogue.

Premised on this rationale, in regards to child welfare, many First Nations have worked hard at obtaining delegated authority from the Province of British Columbia as an interim measure to protect Aboriginal children residing in their territory. The legal right to protect children and ensure their safety and well-being in Canada is vested in the Provincial government's law-making authority under section 92 (13) of the *Constitution Act, 1867*. Pursuant to this authority the Province of British Columbia has passed the *Child, Family and Community Services Act, 1996* which permits the Director of Children and Families to delegate his/her responsibilities to individuals and community agencies. In effect, delegated individuals or community agencies are acting on behalf of the Province of British Columbia when they purport to exercise the responsibility delegated to them.

While attempts to regain decision-making power are viewed as a socio-political strategy, research and literature support the benefits of meaningful inclusion of marginalized populations, including Aboriginal peoples, in decision-making processes. Community engagement and decision-making has been positively associated with reducing barriers to service, violence prevention, professional development, as well as improved outcomes in areas of health, mental health, education, and child welfare (Bowen, Gwiasda and Brown, 2004; Chaskin, 2003; Dawson & Berry, 2002; Demaio, 2011; Khodyakov et al. 2011; Lawson and Alameda-Lawson, 2012; Zufferey, 2012).

Methods

Critical discourse analysis (Harding, 2006; Liasidou, 2011; van Dijk, 1988) is used in this paper to critically and systematically examine the Representative for Children and Youth's

Special Report (2013). Methods of discourse analysis are particularly useful in the First Nations

context because they aim to unveil the unequal power-knowledge relationships contained in

language (van Dijk, 1988) and representations of marginalized peoples presented through

methods including government reports and the media (Francis, 1992). Critical discourse analysis

views language to be culturally and socially constructed and considers the context of language to

be imperative. As noted by Fairclough and Wodak (1997) language is:

> Constitutive both in the sense that is helps to sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it… Discursive practices may have major ideological effects - that is, they can help to produce and reproduce unequal power relations between social classes, women and men, and ethnic/cultural majorities and minorities through the way in which they represent things and position people (p. 258).

The focus of this work is on the rhetorical devices used in the Representative for Children

and Youth's Report *When Talk Trumped Service: A Decade of Lost Opportunity for Aboriginal*

Children and Youth in B.C. (2013) and its implications for relations between Aboriginal and non-

Aboriginal peoples. The work identifies the influence of power on knowledge-production and

how certain forms of discourse reinforce and legitimize certain regimes of truth, meaning and

knowledge (Foucault, 1980). While the use of power has become more sophisticated, the

influence of power can also be defined by what it represses or silences, such as subjugated

knowledge and the power imbalances it promotes (Nicholls, Giles & Sethna, 2011). Thus, the

making of the current discourse of the Representatives Report is an important subject of analysis.

This textual analysis focuses on rhetorical devices used including form, language, financial

information, charts and graphs, and exclusion of certain voices, to perpetuate historical

representations of Aboriginal peoples.

Analysis

The title of the Report *When Talk Trumped Service: A Decade of Lost Opportunity for Aboriginal Children and Youth in B.C.* sets an immediate tone that is grounded in a system of 'othering' (Johnson et al., 2004). The 'other' is a group within a society that is excluded from participation in the society because they have been classified as having a particular fault that makes them worthy of exclusion. The ruling class or group seeks to control who is seen as the 'other' in order to gain power over them. The creation of the 'other' enables that group to be blamed for their current position in society and enables those in power to divest themselves of their social, political and financial responsibilities (Wetherell and Potter, 1992). The title of the Representative's Report panders to a majority, non-Aboriginal audience by connecting to subtle societal assumptions that Aboriginal peoples mismanage and waste money at their own peril, and thus, are deserving of exclusion by the non-Aboriginal majority. Reminiscent of most work completed regarding Aboriginal peoples, the report takes a pan-Indian approach, placing all nations together devoid of context, including geography, culture, health and well-being, all of which are important factors in funding streams and approaches to well-being. Financial implications have been contained in language since the beginning of Aboriginal non-Aboriginal relations in Canada as noted in the Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs in 1895 when it was suggested:

> If it were possible to gather in all the Indian children and retain them for a certain period, there would be produced a generation of English-speaking Indians, accustomed to the ways of civilized life, which might then be the dominant body among themselves, capable of holding its own with its white neighbours; and thus would be brought about *rapidly decreasing expenditure* until the same should forever cease, and the Indian problem would be solved (Quoted in Furniss, 1992, p174. Emphasis added).

The Report's emphasis on the amount of money spent "$66 million- and maybe more… over a 12 year period" (Representative for Children and Youth, 2013, p.4) suggests to readers

that Aboriginal people have wasted taxpayer money. Form and structure of the text is also very important. Within the first four pages of the Executive Summary of the Representative's Report (2013) figures of $640million, $90 million, $66 million, $57 million and $35 million are used seven times.

> The total spent by MCFD on Aboriginal governance endeavours over the past dozen years has been roughly $66 million. That is a conservative estimate, as the provincial government cannot provide a clear record of expenditures (p.4).
>
> The expenditure of $66 million – and maybe more – during a time when the most vulnerable Aboriginal children could find few appropriate residential services and supports, and few therapeutic child and family services to address their significant and known needs, is a colossal failure of public policy to do the right thing for citizens (p.4).
>
> For example, nearly $35 million was spent discussing Regional Aboriginal Authorities, including large expenditures on paying people to meet, hiring consultants to facilitate those meetings, and producing materials of questionable practical value following such meetings that almost never addressed the actual difficulties children and youth were experiencing in their lives – issues such as parental addiction, domestic violence, poverty, neglect and the need for mental health services or special needs supports (p.4-5).

Such a strategy invokes a deep-rooted stereotype that Aboriginal people "receive immense amounts of government funding of which they are undeserving and unappreciative" (Harding, 2006, p.219) while taxpayers, or non-Aboriginal people, are the victims of Aboriginal immorality. As indicated by van Dijk (2001) "vital for all discourse and communication is who controls the *topics* (semantic macrostructures) and topic change, as when editors decide what news topics will be covered" (p.356). As a Vancouver Sun article suggests:

> First Nations leaders convinced the government that their communities were better able to provide that care. While they were at it, they persuaded the government to give them control over education and health care as well…. The public millions being spent to fund aboriginal child welfare authorities appear to have mostly ended up in people's pockets (Palmer, 2013).

The financial emphasis of the Report, including the Report's title and statements made in the executive summary, invite stereotypes of mismanagement to be picked up and portrayed in the media. Titles of news stories responding to the report include:

> Another disaster for B.C.'s aboriginal youth (Gary Mason) Globe and Mail November 15, 2013
> B.C. wasting millions on failed aboriginal programs: report (CBC News)
> B.C. children's watchdog says $66 million wasted on aboriginal welfare reform (The Province)
> Vaughn Palmer: Aboriginal child welfare system is a gravy train with no destination (The Vancouver Sun)

The imagery presented by Turpel-Lafond and her representation by the media parallels the colonial beliefs that provided the impetus for the removal of First Nations children from their family and their placement in Residential Schools in order to save them. The Report (2013) connects immorality with Aboriginality by grammatically linking through sentence structure "Aboriginal child and family services" with terms such as "perverse" (p.4). Pejorative language used by the Representative in the Report (2013) to describe the Aboriginal child and family services include "confused, unstable, and bizarre" (p. 8) and "perverse" (p. 8, 11), and are coupled with discussion of cost in order to establish the Representative as riding in and saving Aboriginal children from their own leaders (p.4).

The language used by the media to describe the Representative for Children and Youth, on the other hand, includes terms such as "fearless children's advocate." When combined with Turpel-Lafond's own statements of "standing up to nasty and vicious attacks," it conjures up images of the heroic figure saving Aboriginal people from their own inferior and savage lives. Turpel-Lafond has affectionately been titled "The children's watchdog" by the media and escapes scrutiny of her own work.

The *fearless children's advocate* (emphasis added) decided to look into the government's decision of almost a decade ago to hand over child welfare authority to First Nations…. (Mason, 2013)

"A whole industry has been built up around this," says the *watchdog* (emphasis added). "After my report came out, I received some really nasty, vicious e-mails from some of the people who stand to lose the most from any change in the status quo." (Mason, 2013)

Despite the fact that the report speaks about Aboriginal child welfare, Aboriginal voices,

in terms of discussions with Delegated Aboriginal Agencies or community consultation, are

completely removed from the conversation. Only "MCFD was given the opportunity to review

and provide comments on the facts in the report for the purpose of administrative fairness"

(2013, p.14). The sources of information on which the report is based are entirely derived from

MCFD sources including "publicly available data, statistics, material and reports, and

information requested from MCFD" as well as "a number of meetings held with MCFD staff"

(p.14). As noted in the report, "government cannot speak with confidence about what services

they [Aboriginal children] receive, how these children's basic needs are being met or whether

services provided translate into improved life experiences" (p.3). The question that immediately

comes to mind is: If the focus is on Aboriginal Child Welfare and Delegated Aboriginal

Agencies, why were they excluded from the discussion?

While the report is focused on Aboriginal peoples, the focus of attention for deriving the

information is the provincial government and Ministry of Children and Family Development

files. Such a strategy is in contrast to both provincial policies which "ensure[s] that First Nations

engage in consultation and accommodation, and provide consent when required, freely and with

full information" (Transformative Change Accord, 2005, p.2). The approach to exclude

Aboriginal agencies from the discussions also conflicts with federal policy for appropriate

research methods that emphasizes the importance of engaging the populations impacted by a

study. As Nicholls et al., (2011) suggest, those in power must become aware of this privilege and

replace exclusionary practices to ensure that the quest for evidence includes the knowledge subjugated, which, by its very nature, is located within the margins. This is possible, in part, because the Representative's Office's position as outside of government means that it is not held accountable to the federal and provincial best practices standards that direct other organizations.

While the Report purports to be systematic and objective, it does not meet common scholarly standards. In her *2011/2012 Annual Report and 2012/2013-2013/2014 Annual Service Plan* (2012), Turpel-Lafon referred to use of scientific methods, indicating that objectivity was maintained by her office when evaluating programs for children and youth when she noted "we will also maintain our strong program of evidence-based, objective monitoring, research and assessment of the child- and youth-serving system" (p.3). While the intent of the report is to appear scientific, as a quality assurance report the authors are not bound by the *Tri Council Policy Statement on the Ethical Conduct for Research involving Humans* (*TCPS2*) that guides all human subject research in Canada. In an attempt to mitigate the power imbalances noted throughout this paper, and in research practice in general, Chapter 9 – Research Involving First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples of Canada of the *TCPS2* (2010) explicitly states "Where the research is likely to affect the welfare of an Aboriginal community, or communities, to which prospective participants belong, researchers shall seek engagement with the relevant community" (p.110). It is important to note that the lack of community engagement in this report would mean that it would not receive ethics approval from any university research ethics review board. The independence of the Representative for Children and Youth thus affords this Office additional abusive power because it has the exclusive right to prohibit certain populations from publishing, controlling, and influencing public discourse, while not, itself, bound by common scholarly practice that was instituted to temper social power (Nicholls et al., 2011).

Pseudo-scientific discourse can be used as a rhetorical device in reports in an attempt by the author to discredit other forms of knowledge and to establish the author as possessing the only legitimate source of knowledge. The use of pseudo-scientific rhetoric is particularly important in discussion of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations because of the historical use of such rhetoric in the subjugation of Aboriginal knowledge. As an example, Turpel-Lafond uses the scientific method as a source of power to support the impression that her position is independent and objective. The role of the Representative was established in a manner that evokes the image of the impartial scientist, doing their research objectively and autonomously because they work away from the rest of society, in a sterile enclosed environment, much like laboratory scientist (Nader, 1996, p.17).

Scientific discourse, like any other form of knowledge, is the product of language and metaphor; it is just another form of storytelling (Ward, 1996, p.39). According to Ward, the "language of science, like all other languages, is fraught with problems of interpretation, translation, reception, and referentiality" (p.37). Referentiality is the ability to exclude certain groups from a particular narrative (Ward, 1996). There is a tendency to see only knowledge produced through a connection to scientific method as legitimate. This serves to undervalue the subjugated knowledges that exist within local communities (Diawara, 2000).

Furthermore, members of the Representative's Office are influenced by their own socio-political positions, which impact what they study and how they interpret and present the results. The Report's citing of a forthcoming Report on the Development of Aboriginal Services (Appendix 1, p.84), that is scheduled to be presented May 18, suggests that the Representative's Office is moving towards an agenda regarding Aboriginal services and the role of Delegated Aboriginal Agencies.

The presentation and use of financial numbers, charts and graphs in both the Representative's Report and subsequent news articles is a powerful rhetorical device used to suggest that the work was completed in a systematic manner and in a way that examined all available evidence. The imagery of the Representative's office engaging in scientific methods to ascertain the truth is reinforced by Turpel-Lafond through such statements as,"This story may read more like fiction than truth, but the numbers speak for themselves. More than $66 million has been spent…" (p.5).

The authors of the Report also use numbers in other ways to establish the Report's methodological objectivity. For example, in a media interview, Turpel-Lafond described the Report as derived from "almost 100 detailed and fully researched pages (46 boxes of documents, 76,000 pages reviewed), [while] the result was a decade-long public policy catastrophe" (Palmer, 2013). Such statements, which are also provided in the methods section of the Report, are meant to underline the rigour of the methods used, even though no explanation is provided as to how the numbers were derived. The Report's title, executive summary and the charts presented provide narrative for the Report's central argument: that money is being spent on meetings rather than direct service delivery.

Table 1: Delegated Aboriginal Agencies and Communities Served[43]

Name of Agency	Affiliated Communities		2012/13 MCFD	# Open Files (March 2013)			
Voluntary Service Delivery							
DENISIQI SERVICES SOCIETY	- Alexandria - Alexis Creek (Tsi Del Del) - Anaham (Tl'etinqox) - Nemiah (Xeni Gwet'in)	- Stone (Yunesit'i) - Toosey (Tl'esqoti) - Ulkatcho					
HAIDA CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES SOCIETY	- Old Masset Village Council	- Skidegate Band	$615,610	0	0	0	0
HEILTSUK KAXLA CHILD & FAMILY SERVICE PROGRAM	- Heiltsuk		0	0	0	1	1
K'WAK'WALAT'SI ('Namgis) CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES	- 'Namgis	- Tlowitsis-Mumtagalia	$400,224	0	0	1	1
Voluntary Service Delivery and Guardianship Services for Children in Continuing Care							
AYAS MEN MEN CHILD & FAMILY SERVICES (SQUAMISH NATION)	- Squamish		$1,677,052	70	1	63	134
CARRIER SEKANI FAMILY SERVICES	- Burns Lake - Cheslatta - Lake Babine - Nadleh Whut'en - Nee Tahi Buhn - Skin Tyee	- Stella'ten - Saik'uz - Takla Lake - Wet'suwet'en - Yekooche	$6,594,113	79	0	0	79
GITXSAN CHILD & FAMILY SERVICES SOCIETY	- Kispiox - Glen Vowell - Gitsegukla	- Gitwangak - Gitanyow	$486,038	10	0	3	13
KW'UMUT LELUM CHILD & FAMILY SERVICES	- Halalt - Lake Cowichan - Lyackson - Malahat - Stz'uminus First Nation	- Nanoose - Penelakut - Qualicum - Snuneymuxw	$1,655,440	67	0	4	71

Callout (magnified):

CARRIER SEKANI FAMILY SERVICES	- Burns Lake - Cheslatta - Lake Babine - Nadleh Whut'en - Nee Tahi Buhn - Skin Tyee	- Stella'ten - Saik'uz - Takla Lake - Wet'suwet'en - Yekooche	$6,594,113	79	0	0	79

[43] MCFD, Delegated Aboriginal Agencies Status, June 2013 and DAA File Counts, March 2013.

(Representative for Children and Youth, 2013, p.34)

Omission within the report is an important structural device used to support the contention that funds are being wasted. For example, Table 1 of the Report, "Delegated Aboriginal Agencies and Communities Served," (2013) omits very important detail that contradicts the Representative's argument. When critically examining the funds provided, the argument that funding is focused on "talk" rather than actual service delivery, is not supported by the facts. While we often work from the premise that numbers do not lie, they often do not tell the whole truth either. With respect to Carrier Sekani Family Services (CSFS), for example, the

Report shows it to have only 79 open files, and, yet, it received approximately $ 6.6 million. The

story this data portrays is one of wastefulness, but also inequities in funding between Aboriginal

agencies. This information served to produce division among Aboriginal leaders, which was seen

in the news coverage

> Kw'umut Lelum executive director Bill Yoachim said he was shocked to read about the funding inequities among the agencies in the report.
>
> Carrier Sekani Family Services, for example, had a similar number of open child welfare files (79) at the end of the 2012/13 fiscal year, but received four times more funding, a total of $6.6 million.
>
> "I'm very disturbed by the inequities. Kw'umut Lelum does some really good solid work and we are one of the lower-funded agencies," said Yoachim.
>
> "Some of our children in government care are worth $1,000 a year and some are worth $30,000 a year, and that's not fair. It has been really troubling me in the last day or so since I've read about this." (Culbert, 2013)

A key issue, however, is that despite the purported meticulous methods used, the very

populations and Aboriginal agencies discussed in the Report were not interviewed or included in

the narrative. Inviting Delegated Aboriginal Agencies to the conversation would have clarified

some of the inaccuracies contained in the report. In fact, the Representative's Report failed to

include the information regarding the CSFS' delivery of direct services to children and families

in 3 of the 15 program areas. To be accurate, roughly 90 percent of all money received by CSFS

(i.e. $5,871,843) went to direct service delivery (CSFS document, 2013). Table 2 (below)

clearly explains the services provided by the funding.

Table 2: Carrier Sekani Family Services

MCFD Funding for the fiscal year ending March 2013	
Direct Service Delivery	
$75,000.00	Parent Teen Mediation
$186,188.00	Family Group Conferences
$132,600.00	Early Childhood Development
$661,752.00	Child and Youth Mental Health
$37,500.00	Out of Care Options
$1,314,915.28	MCFD Children in CSFS Foster Homes
$ 40,620.00	Foster Parent Support
$260,580.00	On Reserve Family Preservation
$77,180.00	Special Service – Home Support Burns Lake
$2,136,608.62	Guardianship
$33,480.00	Youth Services, Babine & Tachet
$915,420.00	Urban Family Preservation
SUBTOTAL $5,871,843.90	
Planning Dollars	
$12,000.00	Northern Governance Council (CSFS Host Agency)
$115,000.00	Burns Lake Building Design
$514,360.00	CW Governance Model
SUBTOTAL $614,360.00	
TOTAL $6,513,203.90	

(CSFS, 2013)

As an organization located in Prince George, the largest city in the North, and that also serves the surrounding area, funding is used to provide services to on- and off-reserve populations, and both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children and families. The sum, $514,360, provided to CSFS by the Ministry of Children and Family Development was used to develop a

child welfare model that was based on principles of community engagement, as the most effective process for successful program implementation. Over 300 people were involved in the development of the model, which is now complete. The $514,360 in funds was shifted to direct service delivery for intensive family preservation services, which means that 98 percent of CSFS funding was targeted for direct service delivery in 2014-post report. The fact that the Representative's Office did a pseudo-research report criticizing CSFS for completing systematic research that will increase efficacy of service delivery is truly ironic, and directly reflects the systemic power imbalance in place in the child welfare system in British Columbia. The money received specifically for Guardianship (i.e. $2,136,608) was in fact similar to other agencies of a similar size.

Nowhere in the Representative's Report is it mentioned that a number of the direct services listed by the authors (Family Group Conferencing, Parent Teen Mediation, Foster homes, home support) are provided to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal clients. Such information would surely help debunk the image of Aboriginal peoples as the 'other' who are draining money from the public without direct benefit to the population at large. If people were to recognize that Aboriginal organizations not only work for their own children but provide services that are beneficial to everyone, that line of thinking would be questioned and funding for Aboriginal organizations would be better supported. Unfortunately, this is not where the Representative's Report has put its political weight.

Final Remarks

The marginalization of Aboriginal experiences and knowledge appears to be intentional within the Report. The Report devalues the importance of local knowledge, self-determination, and community engagement in developing successful and sustaining programming. As a result,

the Report reflects a colonial legacy that continues to inform relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. That legacy will significantly impact policy, funding, and practice decisions relating to child welfare without directly involving the people most impacted. This is a step backward for Aboriginal peoples. Those who have control over discourse are by definition also more powerful, and we must critically examine how powerful voices can abuse their power in such situations.

While it is equally problematic to accept uncritically the work of Aboriginal organizations, recent contributions to knowledge and practice should not be ignored. The Representative notes the complexity of Aboriginal child welfare policy that is magnified by the historical impacts of colonial relationships. While there have been challenges in improving Aboriginal child welfare, the shifts being made in the Provincial government and the Ministry of Children and Family Development to more collaborative approaches with First Nations are in line with international best evidence of effective strategies for working with marginalized people. The Report is positioned to change Aboriginal child welfare policy without involving those impacted in the decision making process. Additional discussion is needed regarding the policy implications of offices that propose to be neutral and as a result are not sufficiently subjected to critical inquiry by other public bodies.

References

Ball, J. (2004). As if Indigenous knowledge and communities mattered: Transformative education in First Nations communities in Canada. *American Indian Quarterly, 28* (3 & 4), 454-479.

Bowen, L.K., Gwiasda, V. & Brown, M.M. (2004). Engaging community residence to prevent violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence 19*(3), 356-367.

British Columbia Government. (2005). *Transformative Change Accord.* Retrieved from the British Columbia government website http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/aboriginal-people/new-relationship/transformative-change-accord

Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. (2010). *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans.* Ottawa: Interagency Secretariat on Research Ethics.

CBC News. (2013-11-06). B.C. wasting millions on failed aboriginal programs: Report. *CBC News website*. Retrieved from http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/b-c-wasting-millions-on-failed-aboriginal-programs-report-1.2417112

Chaskin, R.J. (2003). Fostering neighborhood democracy: Legitimacy and accountability within loosely coupled systems. *Non Profit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly 32*(2), 161, 189.

Culbert, l. (2013-11-06). Report slams oversight of B.C. Aboriginal agency funding. *The Vancouver Sun*. Retrieved from http://www.vancouversun.com/mobile/news/top-stories/Report+slams+oversight+aboriginal+agency+funding/9140416/story.html

Dawson, K. & Berry, M. (2002). Engaging families in child welfare services: An evidence-based approach to best practice. *Child Welfare 81*(2), 293-317.

Diawara, M (2000). Globalization, development politics and local knowledge. *International Sociology 15*(2), 361–371.

Demaio, A. (2011). Local wisdom and health promotion: Barrier or catalyst? *Asia-Pacific Journal of Public Health 23*(2), 127-132.

Fairclough, N. (1992). Discourse and text: Linguistic and intertexual analysis within discourse analysis. *Discourse and Society 3*(2),193-217.

Fairclough, N. & Wodak, R. (1997). Critical discourse analysis. In T.A van Dijk (Ed.), *Introduction to discourse analysis* (pp. 258-284). London: Sage.

Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Francis, D. (1992). *The imaginary Indian: The image of the Indian in Canadian culture*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press.

Furniss, E. (1992). *Victims of benevolence: The dark legacy of Williams Lake Residential School*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press.

Health Canada. (2011). *British Columbia tripartite framework Agreement on First Nations health governance*. Retrieved from http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/pubs/services/tripartite/framework-accord-cadre-eng.php

Harding, R. (2006). Historical representations of Aboriginal people in the Canadian news media. *Discourse and Society 17*(2), 205-235.

Johnson, J.L., Bottorff, J. L., Browne, A.J., Grewal, S., Hilton, B.A. and Clarke, H. (2004). Othering and being Othered in the context of Health Care Services. *Health Communication, 16*(2), 253-271.

Joseph, S. (1991). Assimilation tools: Then and now. *BC Studies 89,* 65-79.

Kelm, M.E. (1998). *Colonizing Bodies: Aboriginal Healing in British Columbia 1900-1950*. Vancouver: UBC Press.

Khodyakov, D., Stockdale, S., Jones, F.,Ohito, E., Jones, A., Lizaola, E. & Mango, J. (2011). An exploration of the effect of community engagement in research on perceived outcomes of partnered mental health services projects. *Society and Mental Health 1*(3), 185-199.

Kines, L. (2013). B.C. children's watchdog says $66 million wasted on aboriginal welfare reform. *The Province*. Retrieved from http://www.theprovince.com/life/children+watchdog+says+million+wasted+aboriginal+welfare+reform/9136154/story.html

Ktunaxa Nation (2013). Correspondence letter to Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond. November 13th.

Lawson, M.A., Alameda-Lawson, T. (2012). A Case Study for school-linked, collective parent engagement. *American Education Research Journal 49*(4), 651-684.

Leonardo, Z. (2004). The Color of supremacy: Beyond the discourse of ''White privilege'', *Educational Philosophy and Theory 36*(2), 137–52.

Liasidou, A. (2011). Unequal power relations and inclusive education policy-making: A discursive analytic approach. *Educational Policy 25*(6), 887-907.

Luk, V. (2013-11-07). B.C. Aboriginal Agency defends spending against scathing Report. *Huffington Post.* Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2013/11/07/bc-aboriginal-agency-report_n_4236304.html

Mason, G. (2013-11-15)). Another disaster for BC's Aboriginal youth. *The Globe and Mail* November 15. Retrieved from http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/another-disaster-for-bc-aboriginal-youths/article15439866

Child, Family and Community Service Act, Revised Statutes of British Columbia. (2016, c. C-46) Retrieved from Ministry of Children and Family Development website http://www.bclaws.ca/Recon/document/ID/freeside/00_96046_01

Ministry of Chidren and Family Development. (2011). Child and Family Services. Standardized Language for Delegation Agreements: Master Annotated Template. Unpublished Document.

Moore, R. (1978). *The historical development of the Indian Act.* Ottawa: Treaties and Historical Research Centre, P.R.E. Group, Indian and Northern Affairs.

Nader, L. (1996). Anthropological inquiry into boundaries, power and knowledge. In L. Nader (Ed.), *Naked science: Anthropological inquiry into boundaries, power and knowledge* (pp. 1-28). New York: Routledge.

Nicholls, S., Giles, A.R. & Sethna, C. (2011). Perpetuating the 'lack of evidence' discourse in sport for development: Privileged voices, unheard stories and subjugated knowledge. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport 46*(3), 249-264.

Palmer, V. (2013-11-5). Aboriginal child welfare system is a gravy train with no destination. *Vancouver Sun*. Retrieved from http://www.vancouversun.com/opinion/columnists/Vaughn+Palmer+Aboriginal+child+welfare+system+gravy/9134902/story.html

Razack, N. (2009). Decolonising the pedagogy and practice of international social work. *International Social Work 52*(1), 9–21.

Representative for Children and Youth. (2013). *When Talk Trumped Service: A Decade of Lost Opportunity for Aboriginal Children and Youth in B.C.* [Victoria]: M.E. Turpel-Lafond.

Representative for Children and Youth. (2012). *2011/2012 Annual Report and 2012/2013-2013/2014 Annual Service Plan*. [Victoria]: M.E. Turpel-Lafond.

Said, E. (1993). *Culture and imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books.

Transformative Change Accord between Government of British Columbia and Government of Canada and Leadership Council Representing the First Nations of British Columbia. (2005). Signed November 25. Retrieved from http://www.ubcic.bc.ca/issues/newrelationship/transformativechange.htm#axzz45XKaaeFW.

Turner, D. (2004). Perceiving the world differently. In C. Bell & D. Kahane (Eds.), *Intercultural dispute resolution in Aboriginal contexts* (pp. 57-69). Vancouver: UBC Press.

United Nations. (2008). *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. Retrieved from http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf

Van Dijk, T. A. (2001). Critical discourse analysis. In D. Schiffrin, D. Tannen & H.E. Hamilton (Eds.), *The handbook of discourse analysis* (pp. 352-371). Blackwell Publishing: Malden.

Van Dijk, T.A. (1988). *News as discourse*. Hillsdale:Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Ward, S. (1996). *Reconfiguring truth: Postmodernism, science studies, and the search for a model of knowledge*. New York: Rowman and Littelfield Publishers Inc.

Wetherell, M. and Potter, J.(1993). *Mapping the language of Racism: Discourse and the Legitimation of Exploitation*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Zufferey, C. (2012). Not knowing that I do not know and not wanting to know: Reflections of a White Australian social worker. *International Social Work 56*(5), 659-673.