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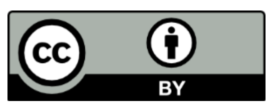

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TAKING OWNERSHIP: the IMPLEMENTATION of a NON-ABORIGINAL EARLY EDUCATION PROGRAMME for ON-RESERVE CHILDREN

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Abstract

In this qualitative study, over the period of one year, we assessed the appropriateness of a mainstream early childhood education intervention, the Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) programme, in five on-reserve First Nations communities, by focusing on the experiences of the Aboriginal women who delivered the programme. Findings revealed a process of "taking ownership" of HIPPY. "Taking ownership" included three subprocesses: changes in the women's views regarding (1) the strengths of the programme; (2) self-identity; and (3) the identification of the programme as Aboriginal. Through taking ownership, the women were no longer content to deliver HIPPY strictly as it was described in the programme manuals. Although the women continued to maintain that HIPPY was valuable for their communities, their actions and words clearly demonstrated that sharing cultural knowledge in the context of the programme was important to them and, they believed, important for the children and families they worked with. The process documented here points to the importance of Aboriginal culture reflected in educational provisions for Aboriginal children – whether this can be appropriately achieved through supplementing and/or adapting mainstream programmes remains a point of debate.

Introduction

In Aboriginal communities, children are seen as gifts from the Creator. This traditional view is reflected in the importance placed upon early childhood education in Aboriginal communities across Canada (e.g., Ball, 2004; Goulet et al., 2001; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP], 1996). Despite this emphasis, Aboriginal students consistently have poorer educational outcomes than any other group (Perley, 1993).

Considerable scholarly and practical effort has been devoted to understanding and improving this situation and, as part of this effort, questions have been raised concerning appropriate models of early education for Aboriginal children. Amidst a range of views on this issue, a common conviction is that those to whom the children matter most – their families and communities – must make decisions about the education of Aboriginal children.

In this study, we sought to examine one mainstream early childhood education programme, Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY), as it was implemented in five on-reserve communities, by focusing on the experiences of the community members who work in the programme. Although we began this study with the purpose of "evaluating" the appropriateness of HIPPY from the perspective of community members, as the project unfolded we realised we were witnessing an unanticipated process. Here we report on how five First Nations Home Visitors have "taken ownership" of the HIPPY programme, a process that we believe captures and reflects the larger movement within First Nations to take control of the education of their young.

The implementation of non-Aboriginal programmes in Aboriginal settings

Views regarding the modification, adaptation and implementation of mainstream (non-Aboriginal) education programmes in Aboriginal communities range from cautiously supportive to adamantly opposed. For example, Goulet et al. (2001) do

not dismiss the implementation of non-Aboriginal programmes, but argue that the needs of Aboriginal peoples must be reflected in the programming being offered by promoting such things as Aboriginal cultural content, heritage language learning and parental control of programming. According to Charters-Voght (1999), the critical issue in programming for Aboriginal children is who decides on the programme. He asserts that First Nations people must have the freedom to make decisions about how to educate their children, and that programme choice must not be imposed from outside of communities.

A more radical position is that it is inappropriate to adapt a non-Aboriginal education programme and implement it in Aboriginal communities. Arguing that Eurocentric educational programmes, whether chosen by mainstream or First Nations authorities, have not well served Aboriginal people, Kirkness (1998, p. 11) asserts that,

> We must take a strong stance in shaping our education. To do this we need radical change ... we must cut the shackles and make a new start. It is time for us to forget Band-Aiding; it is time for us to forget adapting; it is time for us to forget supplementing; it is time for us to forget the so-called standards, all of which have restricted our creativity in determining our own master plan.

Historical context

In order to understand current concerns regarding the education of Canadian Aboriginal children it is necessary to consider the historical context in which they arose. The colonisation of Native people in Canada has been discussed in detail by several authors (e.g., see Fournier & Crey, 1997; Furniss, 1992; Haig-Brown, 1988) and only events directly related to the care and education of children are briefly highlighted here.

In the 1600s European missionaries were sent to North America to develop a school system for Native children. Over the next two centuries various attempts were made through educational institutions to "civilise" Aboriginal people. From these initial attempts came the establishment of day schools, which by the 1800s were, for the most part, abandoned in favour of residential schools. This more aggressive era of forced assimilation began in 1846 when the government and a number of church denominations joined forces to remove Aboriginal children from their families and confine them to residential schools where any form of traditional cultural, language, or spiritual practices were forbidden.

Although conditions in residential schools varied, emotional, spiritual, physical and sexual abuses were common. Those who survived the residential schools suffered lasting consequences, often returning to their communities with symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, such as insomnia, uncontrollable anger, alcohol and drug abuse and panic attacks. The residential school era continued into the 1970s leaving a legacy of multigenerational trauma and dysfunction.

Continued efforts to assimilate Aboriginal children were carried out on the part of the Canadian government through the social welfare system. In 1961 the "sixties scoop" began with a stated mandate of "child protection". Large numbers of Aboriginal children were removed from their homes, causing further individual and family trauma. The majority of these children were "placed until they were adults in non-Aboriginal homes where their cultural identity, their legal Indian status, their knowledge of their own First Nation and even their birth names were erased, often forever" (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p. 81).

In response to these government policies concerning Aboriginal education and child welfare, and reflecting the hope that they placed in education, in 1972 the National Indian Brotherhood produced the *Indian Control of Indian Education* policy paper. This policy paper was guided by the principles of local control and parental responsibility and stressed that all decisions regarding Indian education must be made by or in consultation with Indian people. In 1973 the federal government conceded that, "Indian control of Indian education" would be reflected in national policy (Battiste & Barman, 1995). According to Kirkness (1998), although education for Canadian Aboriginal people improved somewhat after the publication of that policy paper, First Nations "are still faced with the monumental challenge of creating meaningful education that will not only give hope, but a promise of a better life for ... future generations" (p.10).

Aboriginal HIPPY

Because of the historical and contemporary issues associated with colonialism, many First Nations families are reluctant to participate in centre-based early childhood education programmes. Consequently, in 2002, First Nations community leaders and educators at the Chief Dan George Centre for Advanced Education in Vancouver, British Columbia gave consideration to Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) as a programme that might be beneficial in Aboriginal communities (Chung, 2004). Shortly thereafter, five First Nations communities in and around the Lower Mainland of British Columbia adopted the programme and together formed the Vancouver Aboriginal HIPPY Consortium, marking the first time that HIPPY has been implemented in an Aboriginal setting in Canada.

HIPPY is a 30-week, home-based, early-intervention programme that was developed in Israel in the late

1960s (Westheimer, 2003) to improve the school readiness of low-income, immigrant preschoolers and support parents as their children's first and most important teachers. HIPPY is provided in the home by local community members and is intended to reach families who may otherwise not have sought or have had access to services for their children. Within Aboriginal HIPPY, as in all HIPPY programmes, parents are trained and supported by Home Visitors from their communities, to work with and improve their children's linguistic, cognitive and social skills. Each Home Visitor meets with each enrolled family once every two weeks in their homes to introduce the standardised curriculum and role model the lessons that the parents then teach their children. Home Visitors also run two group meetings per month with all the families they work with, providing further support and additional enriching activities for them. Finally, the Aboriginal Home Visitors together attend biweekly meetings that are run by the Aboriginal HIPPY Coordinator.

Research on the impact of HIPPY, although not conclusive, has generally indicated positive educational outcomes for children as well as a positive impact on parents, the parent-child relationship, and the communities in which it is implemented (BarHava-Monteith et al., 2003; Le Mare & Audet, 2003; Younger, 2003). Because HIPPY has heretofore not been implemented in Canadian Aboriginal communities, it is not clear whether these findings are generalisable to those cultural settings. The originator of HIPPY, Avima Lombard (1981), who was primarily concerned with supporting immigrant families, claims that the programme is suitable for all cultures, but the colonial history of Canada's Indigenous people, particularly as concerns the use of educational institutions to eradicate culture, raises some very specific concerns that likely do not apply to most immigrant groups. As was outlined in the National Indian Brotherhood (1972) policy paper *Indian Control of Indian Education*, issues such as having control over the education of their children and the mandate to implement culturally appropriate materials and heritage language learning are of central concern in Aboriginal communities. Hence, the appropriateness of implementing a "mainstream" programme such as HIPPY in First Nations settings is called into question.

A central question addressed by this research was, "Is HIPPY an appropriate early childhood education programme for Aboriginal preschoolers and their families?". From the outset, we recognised that the answer to this question would likely depend on who we asked. In light of views regarding the implementation of mainstream programmes in Aboriginal communities, we felt the most meaningful starting place would be to speak to those members of communities who were knowledgeable of the programme and were aware of the needs of families with young children. Hence, we began by examining the views of the Aboriginal community members who worked in the programme.

Method

Participants

The participants in the current study are five Aboriginal women who live on five different reserves in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, Canada (see Table 1). Four of the participants in the current study are Home Visitors. Within the HIPPY model, Home Visitors are usually parents who reside in the community that the programme serves, and who themselves have children who have graduated from the HIPPY programme (Le Mare & Audet, 2003). Within the Aboriginal HIPPY Consortium, all of the Home Visitors live in the communities they are serving, but not all of them have children. The fifth participant was the Coordinator who organises the biweekly training meetings and oversees the administration of the Aboriginal HIPPY programme.

All of the participants selected a time, date and location that worked best for them for completing

Table 1. Participants.

Participants	Janita	Ann	Hope	Marie	Lisa
Age	29	24	23	30	38
Years as HIPPY employee	1.5	3	3	4	4
Current position	Home Visitor	Home Visitor	Home Visitor	Home Visitor	Coordinator
Years in her community	29	6	8	29	36
Number of own children	2	0	0	2	2
Own children in programme	Yes	No	No	No	No
Education	High School Graduate	High School Graduate	High School Graduate	Completed Grade 11	MEd Candidate

the individual interviews. The focus group was held in a boardroom at Simon Fraser University, Harbour Centre. All of the participants selected a pseudonym to ensure their anonymity. In addition, to further ensure confidentiality, the participants' reserves are not identified in the current study. Below, we provide a brief characterisation of each participant, which is summarised in Table 1.

Janita

Janita was interviewed on her reserve, in the space where, at the time, she was holding her Aboriginal HIPPY group meetings. At the time of her interview, Janita had been a Home Visitor for a total of six months. Janita is 29 years old and has lived in her community since she was born. She has two children, aged four and nine. Her oldest child was enrolled in Aboriginal HIPPY for approximately two years. Janita is currently doing the Aboriginal HIPPY programme with her youngest child and is grateful to have had it in her own home. Janita feels Aboriginal HIPPY has strengthened her and her husband's ability to support their children academically. Janita finished high school and is currently completing her Early Childhood Education Certification.

Ann

Ann was interviewed in the Aboriginal HIPPY Documentation Project office at Simon Fraser University. Ann has been a Home Visitor for the past three years. Ann is 24 years old, and spent most of her childhood living off-reserve, in another part of the province. Although Ann finds it difficult to discuss this, she acknowledged that her parents did not want her living on-reserve until she was older because of the problems with drugs and alcohol on-reserve. Once Ann completed high school, she moved with her family to the reserve her mother was from where she has resided since 1999. In addition to completing high school, Ann has also attended college studying Applied Business Technology. Ann would like to continue her work in early childhood education and return to school to become a kindergarten teacher.

Hope

Hope was interviewed on her reserve, in the Band Office boardroom. Hope has been a Home Visitor for the past three years. Hope is 23 years old and has lived in her community for nine years. Hope grew up primarily in an off-reserve community in which she was not seen as a minority. Education and academic success were very important in Hope's family. Hope finished high school and has taken several college courses. Hope is very outspoken and aspires, to one day, be Chief of her community. "I'm going to be the Chief. I'm kind of ... I'm somebody here, maybe not to everybody, but to a lot of people. So, I want to build on that".

Marie

Marie was interviewed on her reserve, in the space where, at the time, she was holding her Aboriginal HIPPY group meetings. Marie is 30 years old. She has been a Home Visitor for four years and has lived in her community almost all of her life. Prior to her involvement in the Aboriginal HIPPY Consortium, Marie had never before travelled beyond her community. Marie dropped out of school in Grade 9, but returned to school to complete Grade 11 when her two children were in preschool. Marie hopes to one day return to school and complete her Grade 12 and to pursue additional postsecondary education. In terms of future aspirations, Marie does not know specifically what she would like to do, but she does see herself continuing to work in the field of early childhood education.

Lisa

Lisa is the Aboriginal HIPPY Coordinator and was interviewed in her office. Lisa is 38 years old, has two teenaged children and has lived in her community for over 36 years. Lisa's grandmother was the last fluent speaker of her community's native language. In addition to her work as Coordinator, Lisa is also a MEd candidate in First Nations Curriculum, and is the community partner in the Aboriginal HIPPY Documentation Project.

Documentation process: Data sources

Data sources included a semi-structured interview with each participant, a follow-up group interview, and researcher observations made during the participants' biweekly training meetings, and while attending two events with the participants, a HIPPY Canada Conference and a retreat. The individual interviews focused on the women's views of the strengths of the HIPPY programme, whether HIPPY met a need in their community, and the cultural relevance of the programme for their communities. Researcher observations focused on these same issues with particular attention to change in the women's views. The final group interview involved sharing the researchers' impressions with the women and having them confirmed, disconfirmed and/or elaborated on. The individual and group interviews were audio recorded. Each participant received a transcript from her individual interview as well as a summary to confirm accuracy prior to the analysis stage. Between the individual interviews and the follow-up group interview, researcher observations were recorded in the form of detailed field notes following participation in the meetings and events mentioned above.

Analysis

Each interview transcript was analysed separately and then comparatively to identify common themes and unique experiences. The analysis of the individual and focus group interviews were guided by a "soft" version of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), which is an inductive process that allows a theory to be developed from the ground up. Specifically, the data analysis was based on the open coding system developed and defined by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Open coding allows the researcher to identify and categorise a phenomenon through a comprehensive analysis of the data. Throughout the open coding process, "data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, compared for similarities and differences, and questions are asked about the phenomenon as reflected in the data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 62). The codes or themes that have been identified in the current study are a result of a line-by-line analysis, with each sentence being given careful consideration. If several categories had been identified, then a more overarching code or theme could be labelled to capture the previously identified subcategories.

Once drafts of the analysis of the interviews were completed, the participants were given the opportunity to read the analysis of their individual interviews and the follow-up focus group interview, which allowed them to respond, add or make changes to their interview and comment on the subsequent interpretation. This process allowed the participants to indicate whether our interpretations were inaccurate, incomplete, or representative of their experiences (Kvale, 1996). Finally, the participants were given a copy of the current manuscript, thus enabling them to provide feedback and/or raise concerns they may have had regarding the final presentation of their experiences.

Results and discussion

Individual interviews

In the initial individual interviews, it was clear that the most important aspect of the Aboriginal HIPPY programme for the Home Visitors was that it would equip the children in their communities with school readiness skills as well as strengthen parents' abilities to be their children's first teachers. Although there were indicators in these early interviews that the Home Visitors and Coordinator wanted the curriculum to be more reflective of the culture in their communities, for many of them, the first few years of implementing HIPPY was about learning the curriculum and gaining families' trust.

Meeting the needs of Aboriginal children

School readiness support

School readiness was seen by all of the Home Visitors as one of the most important needs fulfilled by Aboriginal HIPPY. This shared perspective is captured in the following comment from Ann:

> I think especially being on the reserve and going to a public school, a new school is a really big struggle for kids and that's why I think HIPPY is good ... imagine ... how scared you would be when the teacher is talking about stuff, but you don't understand what the teacher is saying and the kids are noticing that you're feeling uncomfortable ... they start making fun of you then you wouldn't want to go to school. I can't guarantee that HIPPY will make that difference for everybody, but I think it's a good start and a good way to get confidence for a child.

Their focus on the need for school readiness support for the children in their communities was related to the challenges the Home Visitors saw older children experiencing in school as well as to their own academic experiences. Commenting on how schools were not meeting the needs of Aboriginal students, Hope said:

> The blame isn't only on the effects of residential schools; it's on the schools even today. You can even see it in the elementary schools. We have some children ... who are in grade four, five, six and they're failing, but they're going to be pushed through to the next year anyways.

Why HIPPY is a good addition to existing programmes

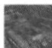
When asked about the appropriateness of the HIPPY programme for their communities, another emphasis was on the method of programme delivery, which enabled the participants to work with both parent and child in their own homes. In addition, the Home Visitors believed that HIPPY was supporting parents in taking an active role in their children's education and strengthening the parent-child relationship.

Although there were other early childhood programmes available on almost all the reserves (e.g., preschool and/or Aboriginal Head Start), the Home Visitors argued that Aboriginal HIPPY was the only programme that came to the parents. Ann remarked that, "for some parents, they just don't feel comfortable leaving the safety of their own home". Hope also argued that some children might not attend the on-reserve day care or preschool, but are involved in Aboriginal HIPPY. Thus, one way or another, the children in her

community were being reached. The belief was that all the available programmes were important for on-reserve families.

All the Home Visitors asserted that HIPPY also enhanced the parent-child relationship by encouraging families to dedicate time each day to spend with their child. Hope stressed that the needs in her community went beyond education, extending into parent-child relationships, the bonds between family members and the connection families have to their community. According to Hope, the impact of this home-based programme on families was evident during the second annual year-end celebration where

> Entire families were coming to watch these children get their graduation presents. So, it wasn't just mom and child who is doing the work, it was brothers, sisters, cousins, uncles, grandmas and grandpas ... it was a huge thing. It gives them ... our history ... we would always come together ... potlatches and special dinners ... And we got that sense, and that feeling at the year-end.



Cultural disconnectedness: Traditional practices and curriculum

Knowledge of traditional practices

All Home Visitors indicated that revitalisation of their Aboriginal heritage was important, but when they completed the initial interviews, most claimed to have little knowledge of Aboriginal traditions concerning childhood, childrearing and education. For example, when asked about these matters, Marie reported that she could not comment because, "I don't follow the traditional ways, so I don't really know. I can't really answer that question". Similarly, Hope reported not having a sense of traditional beliefs, because she did not grow up amidst her family's community, and because her culture

> Slowly but surely has been diminishing everywhere and it's hard to get it back. And I think that my peers in my age group we're all the same. It's mostly ... specific families that still, are really into the culture ... So, I can't speak to that.

Ann was aware of some traditional beliefs and said that families in her community were trying to revive traditional practices. When asked about whether the format of HIPPY conflicted with traditional views, Ann suggested that while HIPPY did not conflict with her culture, she would like to, "bring more of our culture into it ... like maybe having a prayer before we start group meetings". Ann also believed there were other opportunities to bring in her culture, like at group meetings where they could make traditional arts and crafts. Ann felt that once the programme was established, she would be able to focus more on implementing culturally relevant materials and activities.

Culturally relevant curriculum

When asked about the cultural relevance of the HIPPY curriculum, all Home Visitors commented that they would like it to be more reflective of their culture, but the importance they attached to this varied. Marie said, "I know some people are ... concerned about it being more culturally relevant ... to the cultures being served" but when asked whether it concerned her, Marie responded that it did not. Janita thought the HIPPY curriculum should be culturally relevant "to a certain extent", so that the children could see themselves in the materials. When asked if she thought this was important, Hope said:

> I do, because I'm Aboriginal ... (children) need to know that, when a teacher says "... you're Native, you're Aboriginal". They can say 'yeah I am' and they can be proud of it.

Hope wanted the children in her community to identify with and be proud of their Native heritage, and therefore believed that it was important for the materials being offered to her families to be relevant to their lives.

Not only were some of the Home Visitors interested in the curriculum being culturally relevant, but Ann also reported that parents in her community had been asking, "Is the curriculum ever going to become more focused on Aboriginal?"

Frustration and lack of understanding

During the individual interviews, the Home Visitors were asked about those families who were eligible to enrol in Aboriginal HIPPY, but did not. The most striking response to this question came from Ann, who expressed feelings of frustration and a lack of understanding as to why some families were not taking advantage of the programme. In speculating why one mother was not participating Ann commented,

> I think that's just due slightly to the laziness or not wanting to participate ... she knows it's a good programme. Finding time ... finding time is hard for a lot of parents so ... they have a daughter that's able to be in the programme and I talked to her several times but she didn't enrol her and I don't even know why. So it's probably due to ... she doesn't participate in any community events and she's really shy so ... I don't know if it's just because she doesn't want to put herself out there or it could also be just that parents are

> afraid to have people come into their home ... I don't know exactly why it was just not right for them or they just couldn't handle anything else in their life.

What was so striking about Ann's comment was that it seemed judgemental of families not participating in HIPPY. In fact, Ann would later remark that the most difficult piece for her to review in her individual interview was her comment implying that a family was lazy. Although only one participant made an explicitly negative comment about a family who chose not to join HIPPY, we raise this issue here because it became a reoccurring theme. We would later learn in the Coordinator's interview and the follow-up focus group interview that many Home Visitors and the Coordinator herself were feeling frustrated with and judgemental of families who were not enrolled in or able to complete Aboriginal HIPPY.

Summary of individual interviews

In the individual interviews, beliefs about the strength of HIPPY related primarily to beliefs about school readiness skills children gained in the programme. Another important theme concerned the Home Visitors' connections, or lack thereof, to their culture. While cultural relevancy of the HIPPY curriculum was of interest to most participants, what seemed more important was that they implemented the HIPPY programme as they had learned it.

HIPPY Canada conference: A turning point

During meetings we attended with the participants in the year between the individual interviews and the focus group interview we began to perceive and record a shift in the participants' view of HIPPY. The first significant event occurred at the HIPPY Canada Annual Coordinators' and Home Visitors' Conference. The Vancouver Aboriginal HIPPY Consortium presented on the effects of the *Indian Act* on Aboriginal peoples and the training they had been receiving on such topics as the "sixties scoop", the residential school era and Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). During this presentation, one Home Visitor commented that much of the history they were presenting was information that they had not previously known. Learning this history seemed to be very important to all the Home Visitors, as they indicated that it now informed their work and made their role as Home Visitors all the more meaningful. Their recognition of the shared histories of their communities appeared to have contributed to strengthening their bond with one another and creating a profound sense of community among them. It seemed that these women were beginning to build a stronger connection to their cultures and that they were bringing this connection into the work that they were doing with the families enrolled in Aboriginal HIPPY. The views expressed by the women during this presentation contrasted with those they had expressed during the individual interviews, several months earlier, about their disconnectedness from their cultures. This new focus on culture was exemplified when Ann said, "Aboriginal people have enjoyed little control over many issues which affect us. Our five nations coming together at training and learning more about these issues helps us to help the families ... We not only discuss our struggles, but the positives about the future and traditions in our communities. We grow stronger at each training".

Individual interview: Coordinator

Lisa's interview followed the conference discussed above. As Coordinator, Lisa oversaw the work and training of the Home Visitors. She commented that Aboriginal HIPPY had a profound effect on how she viewed families living in her community. Lisa said,

> I was already, through my experience in university, aware on a surface level, about circumstances of people ... parents, grandparents. I was already aware of that, but never really looked deeper ... But, as a result of working with different families on reserves, I was kind of curious about why are our families like this?

In addition, Lisa found that the Home Visitors were coming to their biweekly training sessions questioning why families would find it difficult to work with their children for 15 minutes every day, and were asking, "are our parents really lazy or ... incapable?" Once Lisa began to engage with the Home Visitors in cultural awareness training, it allowed her to,

> Remove my judgment of the people that I live in the community with, and began to understand their circumstances ... I became much more empathic of their situation as a result of what I've learned ... it changed the way I can look at my mother because now I can look at her and see that she really did do the best that she could given what she had experienced in the residential school system.

Lisa felt that after having examined such issues as the residential school system and the "sixties scoop", she could now see why several generations of parents in her community have had such difficulty bonding with their children and supporting their development.

This interview with Lisa reinforced our view of the transformation that the women in the Consortium appeared to be experiencing. Like the Home Visitors, Lisa was also changing, and as she said, becoming less judgmental of the families living in her community.

University/Community Partnership Retreat

In recognition that we were all engaging in a learning process, not only about the history of Aboriginal peoples, but also about how to do "research" in this context, the researchers and members of the Aboriginal HIPPY Consortium organised a retreat. We all attended a two-day cultural awareness programme in a local First Nations community. Responses to the retreat are captured in the following field note entry:

> A number of the participants expressed that they were extremely inspired by (our host) and that this only solidified for them their desire to offer the families enrolled in the Aboriginal HIPPY program more culturally relevant materials and incorporate more traditional practices into their work. This shift from focusing on the thirty cognitive skills gained from participating in the Aboriginal HIPPY program to wanting to support the development of Aboriginal pride was best captured by Hope when she said, "up until now we've really been focusing on HIPPY, and now we'd like to focus on the Aboriginal part" ... many of the participants expressed feeling a greater sense of cultural pride as a result of their training and being involved in the Aboriginal HIPPY Consortium, and that this pride was only deepened by the stories shared by (our host). At one point during (our host's) presentation, he talked about how so many Aboriginal people have or continue to feel ashamed about being Aboriginal. Marie expressed that she thought she was alone in her shame and took comfort in how others have felt as she has.

Observing change: Bringing it all together

The findings we have articulated from the individual interviews and our subsequent observations at Aboriginal HIPPY meetings, the HIPPY Canada Annual Coordinators' and Home Visitors' Conference and the University/Community Partnership Retreat indicated a process that we have identified as "taking ownership". This process of taking ownership of HIPPY seemed to be associated with the Home Visitors forming and strengthening their identities as Aboriginal women. The more connected they felt to their culture, the more important it was for them that HIPPY "belong" to their communities and that it be culturally relevant to them. While the programme seemed to provide an impetus for these women to learn more about their backgrounds, learning more about their culture resulted in their attempting to integrate that cultural knowledge into Aboriginal HIPPY. These observations and interpretations led us to further explore the growth and change in the Aboriginal HIPPY employees.

Focus group: Taking ownership

Almost one year after we started the individual interviews, we reconvened with the Aboriginal HIPPY employees and ran a focus group interview. Our aims were to (1) share our observations and interpretations about this process of "taking ownership", (2) ask the participants to reflect on and discuss our interpretations, and (3) explore what had inspired them to make these shifts. The women agreed unanimously that the observations and interpretations described in the previous section "rang true" for them.

Historical context: Understanding families, understanding the self

When asked what inspired the changes described above, several of the women talked about the training they had received in their biweekly meetings over the previous two years through the Aboriginal HIPPY Consortium. As previously noted, the group had learned about the residential school era, the "sixties scoop", FASD and other related issues that have affected or may affect Aboriginal communities. Hope said that,

> When we started having those training [sessions] ... we started to realize what we could do in our community, so it made us stronger that way. Like we weren't just bringing HIPPY, now we're bringing history and we're bringing knowledge and ... that helped us to grow, to teach that.

The participants were asked to share what inspired them to pursue this historical training. Lisa commented that:

> I think from ... a coordinator's perspective, I myself, somewhat maybe sat in judgment of families and I really felt that ... we were judging families, in that, can they do this curriculum this week ... can't they just spend 15 minutes a day with their kids? And to me it was important to understand why? Why would our families struggle with this connection? Why would they struggle with the fear of schools? And so, that's when I thought, well ok ... It's simple; we need to look back at maybe where our families were coming from and where they'd been. And of course that meant visiting the residential school.

Lisa felt that it was important for the Home Visitors and herself to understand why families were struggling with the programme, thus they embarked on a process through which the women began to grasp the issues faced by HIPPY families, their communities and themselves.

University/Community Partnership Retreat

The experiences these women had at the retreat also fuelled some of the changes we observed. Hope said that while at the retreat, she learned that, "being Aboriginal isn't going to the Longhouse. It isn't doing the dances and the songs, it's just a feeling that you have ... we're connected to everything, and I think I feel that a lot more now". Thus, Hope learned that she could connect to her Aboriginal identity and make the programme Aboriginal without having to engage in specific cultural events or embrace particular cultural symbols. This is not to say that Hope does not want to continue to share cultural symbols and practices, and the knowledge she has gained about the history of her people with her families, but that her willingness and ability to share is not limited to these things. Ultimately, Hope would like her families to grow and be proud of being Aboriginal, as she has.

Applying this knowledge and understanding to Aboriginal HIPPY

In the focus group interview, the women discussed how their cultural training had affected their work in HIPPY. Marie commented:

> It actually makes me feel knowledgeable, like I'm sharing something with (my families) that I'm sharing and bringing back into their life. Because there is a lot of families that don't involve themselves in the culture and they just separate themselves. And having the Aboriginal books for them, it gives them the opportunity to read what the books are about and what used to happen years ago. And for myself too, I love reading, reading those books it just brings back something that was just lost ... for far too long.

As this quote demonstrates, the knowledge that these women were gaining as a result of their training seemed to result in a reciprocal process. While learning more about the history of their people, the women were learning about who they were as Aboriginal women. The result appeared to be a greater sense of pride not only in their families and communities, but also in their own identities. In turn, they were not only less judgmental of the families they worked with, but also of themselves.

Self-identity: Aboriginal pride

All the women acknowledged that they had changed considerably as a result of being involved in the Aboriginal HIPPY Consortium. Lisa spoke about how focusing their training on the history and issues faced by Aboriginal peoples had inspired them all to look at themselves as Aboriginal women and ask such questions as:

> What were our experiences at school? It was then that we started to talk about whether or not we were proud to be Aboriginal when we were growing up. What did it feel like to be embarrassed to be Aboriginal, and to be afraid to say it in a classroom?

Based on such experiences, Lisa reiterated that she felt it was important that the Consortium not just be identified as HIPPY, but as Aboriginal HIPPY. She expressed her hope that the programme would promote cultural pride and thus the title of the programme should reflect that.

Cultural relevancy: HIPPY is Aboriginal

Although we had already discussed with the women their beliefs as to what makes their HIPPY programme Aboriginal, we were interested to see if this had changed over time or if they would add anything to that list. Ann responded, "What makes us Aboriginal HIPPY is us ... The curriculum isn't Aboriginal, but we are". This brief and seemingly simple statement was very powerful. All the women immediately agreed with Ann's words and felt there was little need to add anything more. This statement from Ann not only captured "what is Aboriginal about Aboriginal HIPPY", but in doing so, also spoke to the strength of the women's identities as Aboriginal women.

Strength of HIPPY: Supporting families' and communities' cultural pride and awareness

During the focus group, the women were asked whether their understanding of the importance of HIPPY for their communities had changed over time. Hope said that when she was first involved with HIPPY her focus was the curriculum and ensuring that the children in her community were going to be ready for school. Hope had since realised that, "We're not just going to give them thirty cognitive skills to help them in school. We're going to give them a piece of identity". In addition, Hope indicated that she now saw the importance of the children in her community embracing both their Aboriginal culture and the ability to function and benefit from what is available in the dominant culture. Ann suggested an increased awareness of the importance of the group meetings and year-end celebrations where the five nations came together as she felt that both addressed the loss of connectedness both within her reserve and among First Nations communities. Similarly, Lisa felt that Aboriginal HIPPY was strengthening the five First Nations, empowering the children, their immediate and extended families, the community and even neighbouring communities.

Summary

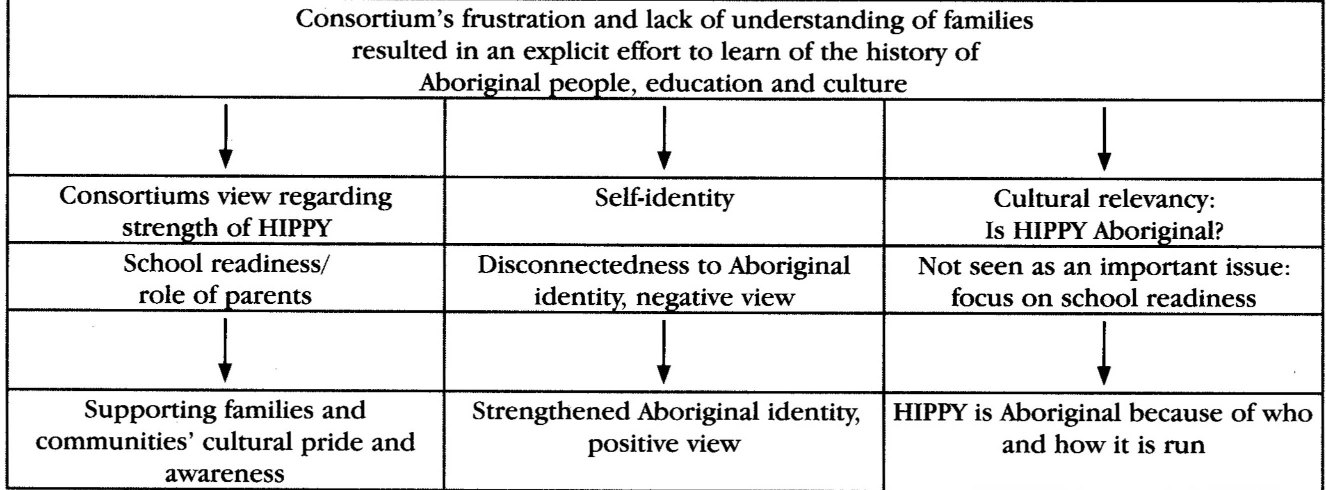
When the Aboriginal HIPPY Consortium first began to implement HIPPY, several participants felt frustrated with families in their communities not taking a more active role in their children's education. As a result, the participants took it upon themselves to learn more about the history of Aboriginal peoples, education and culture. This learning process seems to have fuelled three parallel processes (see Table 2). First, the women's views regarding the strength of the HIPPY programme shifted from children's school readiness skills to supporting families' and communities' cultural pride and awareness. The second process relates to the women's self-identity. There has been a movement from a disconnected or negative Aboriginal identity to a more positive, strengthened pride in identifying themselves as Aboriginal. The third, and final, process concerns whether HIPPY is Aboriginal, which initially was not an issue for the Consortium members. Over time, however, it became important to the women that the programme be recognised as Aboriginal because they, as Aboriginal women, delivered it.

Conclusion

An examination of contemporary Aboriginal early childhood education programming reveals that the mission of "Indian control of Indian education" continues to take shape. "Taking ownership" of Aboriginal HIPPY as it was observed and documented here, is one small example of this mission in action. In this instance, "Indian control" of Aboriginal HIPPY did not appear to be planned or deliberate. It occurred, almost organically, as the women sought to understand why some parents had difficulty committing to and completing the programme with their children. Through their efforts to understand these families, these women's knowledge of their cultural as well as own personal histories grew. Aboriginal HIPPY provided a reason for and a structure to facilitate the emergence of an explicit understanding of these histories, which enabled these women to reflect on, question the sometimes judgemental, and negative views they held of themselves and others. This, in turn, laid the path for these women to connect with their communities, their heritages and themselves in more meaningful and positive ways that ultimately were to the benefit of the families and children they worked with.

The question originally motivating this research was "Is HIPPY an appropriate early childhood education programme for Aboriginal preschoolers and their families?" We sought to answer this question by talking with and observing the women who delivered the programme. Although the Home Visitors continued to maintain that HIPPY was appropriate for their communities, one could interpret the data as telling a different story. Through taking ownership of the programme, the women were not content to deliver HIPPY strictly as it was described in the programme manuals, indicating an emergent appreciation that early childhood education programming in their communities needed to attend to more than school readiness skills. The actions and words of the women clearly demonstrated that sharing cultural knowledge in the context of the programme was important to them and, they believed, important for the children and families they worked with. The Home Visitors appeared to come to the position that adding cultural components to HIPPY created an appropriate early education programme for First Nations children and families. But did it? As non-Aboriginal researchers we are not in a position to answer this question. However, we remind the reader of two things: first, the views of Kirkness (1998), who decried such compromising and instead advocated the creation of a new and unique

Table 2. Taking ownership.



Consortium's frustration and lack of understanding of families resulted in an explicit effort to learn of the history of Aboriginal people, education and culture		
↓	↓	↓
Consortiums view regarding strength of HIPPY	Self-identity	Cultural relevancy: Is HIPPY Aboriginal?
School readiness/ role of parents	Disconnectedness to Aboriginal identity, negative view	Not seen as an important issue: focus on school readiness
↓	↓	↓
Supporting families and communities' cultural pride and awareness	Strengthened Aboriginal identity, positive view	HIPPY is Aboriginal because of who and how it is run

educational model based on Aboriginal traditions and values; and second, the concern voiced so clearly by the HIPPY Home Visitors that, for now, there is a need in their communities to prepare young children for success in mainstream educational institutions.

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