Revamping Family Preservation Services for Native Families

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ABSTRACT. Family Preservation Services (FPS) have become widespread among child protection agencies to prevent the unnecessary removal of children from their families and family homes. Native children, who are over-represented in public care systems, are largely absent from reports evaluating the effectiveness of FPS. This paper examines the FPS philosophy and program structures in the context of Native culture. The authors provide practical suggestions for changing FPS in hopes that such programs will improve success in serving and preserving Native families with child protection concerns. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> © 2001 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

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INTRODUCTION

Family Preservation Service (FPS) entered the child welfare arena in the late 1970s and early 1980s in response to the growing number of children

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placed in foster care because of inadequate or harmful care in their own homes. Its major goal was preventing large numbers of children from unnecessarily entering and "drifting" through public systems of child placement (Fraser, Pecora, & Haapala, 1991), as well as curbing the growing costs incurred by such systems (Callard & Morin, 1979). FPS, which was once hailed as "the most strategic program option" in social services (Yuan & Rivest, 1990), spread rapidly across North America during the 1980s and 1990s. It did not, however, appear to reach Native families.

At the same time that FPS was proliferating across North America, Native children were being removed from their homes and communities in record numbers (Weaver, 1999). In the United States, Native children were counted as 3 per cent of the total out-of-home care population, but less than 1 per cent of its total child population (Mannes, 1993). Similarly, Canadian reports of Native children in care ranged from 5 (Pimento, 1985) to 25 per cent (Thomlison & Foote, 1987), with the Western Provinces and North West Territories reaching close to 50 per cent (Pimento, 1985). Yet, less than 5 per cent of children in Canada are Native (Thomlison & Foote, 1987).

It is odd that FPS never targeted Native families as a priority client group, particularly since the proliferation of FPS programs followed on the heels of the 1978 Indian Child Welfare Act, which mandated placement of America's Native children in Native homes and preservation of the family unit when possible (George, 1997; Wares, Wedel, Rosenthal, & Dobrec, 1994). Given the disproportionately high rates of placement for Native children, it is worthwhile to revisit the original goal of FPS; that is, to prevent large numbers of children, and in this case Native children, from unnecessarily entering and "drifting" through public systems of child placement. If FPS is to be effective with Native families, however, then its services must be tailored to be culturally responsive to Native ways of living and being (Bending, 1997; Cross, 1986).

After two decades of applied research efforts, policy makers and FPS providers have accepted that FPS is not the panacea intervention to safely deflect children from public care placements. At present, FPS is accepted as one of many strategies to assist families with child welfare and child protection concerns (Weber, 1996), but it has not yet been "tried and tested" for Native families.[1] Program evaluations consistently show that minority groups are underrepresented in FPS client pools (e.g., Fraser, Pecora, & Haapala, 1991; Wells & Whittington, 1993; Unrau, 1995a). A survey of 248 family preservation workers, for example, reported that only four (1.6%) programs served Native clients as their primary service population (Denby, Curtis, & Alford, 1998). The goals of family preservation would seem a good fit with Native families, that is to prevent the removal of Native children from their homes.

While the need for FPS among Native families with child welfare concerns may be evident, simply applying "mainstream" FPS to Native families is inadvisable. To do so would likely result in more harm than good, especially since FPS has been criticized for being less successful for minority families (AuClaire & Shwartz, 1987).

This paper examines the design of FPS in terms of how programs can be adapted to best fit with Native culture and needs. FPS has been the subject of many research efforts during its time of growth, giving some practical hints as to what works and with whom. (Fraser, Pecora, & Haapala, 1991). At the same time, literature about culturally sensitive practice with Native populations has expanded (see for example, Weaver, 1997b). This paper aims to increase general awareness and appreciation of diversity when working with Native families and to provide practical hints for FPS workers who work with Native families. Recommendations for organizing services around program principles are also provided. Given the diversity within Native people, this paper is designed to stimulate thinking about best practices for Native people, rather than impart a 'cookbook' approach to preserving Native families.

A BEGINNING NOTE ON CULTURAL COMPETENCE

The discussion of how FPS might better be adapted in terms of cultural fit for Native families with child welfare and child protection concerns begins with a few general considerations about cultural competence with respect to doing child welfare work with Native people.

First, this paper does not debate whether non-Native workers should work with Native families, but argues the importance of cultural competence. The reality is that there are not enough Native people doing child welfare work. Until there are, non-Native workers will continue to be primary agents of change in Native child welfare. Native and non-Native people can work together to improve the quality of life for families living in Native communities. FPS must be redesigned to address the context of Native families, recognizing that the best way to help children is to help their families, and an effective way of helping families is to ensure that social resources are available to enhance successful parenthood (Garbarino, 1987).

Second, with over 550 recognized Native nations in the United States and over 1000 reserves in Canada, a great deal of heterogeneity exists within Native culture (Weaver, 1997b; Weaver, 1999; Thomason, 1991). Proposing that *a single* program can meet the needs of *all* Native families risks stereotyping, as well as reducing Native culture to a single entity (Gross, 1998). FPS pro-

grams and workers alike must acknowledge the dangers of overlooking or ignoring spiritual, language, social structure, and government differences across tribal communities or risk overgeneralizing cultural knowledge or using this knowledge inappropriately and ineffectively with Native families (Sue & Zane, 1987; Weaver, 1997b). Programs cannot be rigidly applied so that individual differences are overlooked. In the words of Gross (1998), "all the study in the world about a given culture or subculture might not lend a hint of explanation of the behavior or attitudes of a single member of that culture or subculture" (p. 9).

Third, helping families within the context of culture necessarily means that workers must understand clients on both a societal and individual level. Gross (1998) discusses the importance of understanding "grand narratives" of a culture from the perspective of individuals, or "micronarratives," within that culture. Grand narratives of Native people include respect for people, land and creatures; giving high esteem to Elders; noninterference into the lives of others, including in childrearing efforts; and, interconnectedness and interdependency (Weaver 1997b). Such grand narratives tell a story of people who value cooperation and group harmony. This story, however, has been misunderstood by cultural outsiders as being co-dependent rather than interdependent and enmeshed rather than interconnected (Weaver, 1997a).

Moreover, workers must relate to families on two levels–based on cultural grand narratives and micronarratives. Micronarratives deserve their own place in intervention, and they can only be uncovered, not by reading about diversity, but from listening (Gross, 1998). Thus, workers need to listen to each client family, using the grand narratives as a cultural backdrop to working with any one family. Because it is impossible to know everything about a specific cultural group or family, FPS workers can use assessment and interviewing skills to find out essential information about each (Weaver & Wodarski, 1995).

Fourth, understanding the history of Native people is as important as accepting diversity within Native culture (Weaver, 1999). The history of Native people is marked by periods of intense pressure to assimilate with the dominant culture, and Native ways of living have been under siege for almost two centuries. Colonialism and non-Native domination disrupted traditional life, displaced child-rearing practices, and tore Native people from traditional helping networks (Cross, 1986). Indiscriminate placement of Native children in residential schools, foster and adoptive homes severed parent-child learning and deprived Native children of their cultural and spiritual heritage. Government policies and practices in both Canada and the United States all but eliminated family and community from involvement in childrearing.

This historical trauma has implications for how Native people today respond to helping services (Weaver & Yellow Horse Brave Heart, 1999). Many Native people have a deep-rooted distrust for social workers, viewing them as coercive authority figures (Miller & Pylpa, 1995; Schacht, Tafoya, & Mirabala, 1989; Thomason, 1991; Weaver, 1997b). Native people may hold negative opinions of social workers, in part because of a history of social work interventions that have been culturally insensitive and damaging to Native people and their traditions (Weaver, 1997a).

Finally, not all Native people are connected to their cultural heritage in the same way (Joe & Malach, 1998; Weaver, 1999). Factors such as location of residence (reservation or nonreservation, rural or urban), inter-tribal marriages, inter-racial marriages, and involuntary placement of Native children in boarding or residential schools may help to explain varying degrees of connection to traditional Native ways. Moreover, it is common for Native people today to have blended traditional and nontraditional practices in their daily living (Joe & Malach, 1998), and even for very traditional Native people, practices such as the Sundance do not come into play every day. For example, while Native families participate in the mainstream workforce and send their children to mainstream schools, many engage in daily smudging rituals (i.e., prayer). Still others may refrain from eating certain foods as prescribed by their clan customs (or, as in the case of religious/spiritual membership, may refrain from particular activities). Acculturation can be seen as a mosaic, blending traditional Native ways with dominant cultural ways (Williams & Ellison, 1996; Joe & Malach, 1998; McPherson, 1997; Morrissette, McKenzie & Morrissette, 1993; Red Horse, Lewis, Feit & Decker, 1978; Weaver, 1996). While it might be tempting to characterize all families by the wholeness of the mosaic, or a favored part of it, the richness of a mosaic is in the multiple perspectives it offers.

FAMILY PRESERVATION SERVICES AND NATIVE FAMILIES

Homebuilders is one of the oldest and best defined models of FPS. Its description of treatment, however, is broad (Lewis, 1991). The developers of Homebuilders argue that workers must be prepared to use many different approaches to help family members resolve difficult problems (Kinney, Haapala, & Booth, 1991). The assumption is that a wide range of theories offers workers flexibility to tailor interventions to the unique needs of each family. Homebuilders uses an eclectic approach to treatment that incorporates psycho-educational, social learning and cognitive behavioral theories.

General descriptions of FPS present potential dangers for Native families receiving such services. FPS workers who lack cultural competence risk mis-

understanding Native family dynamics, or worse, labeling these dynamics pathological or dysfunctional. Moreover, if "mainstream" FPS interventions are applied to Native families, and subsequently fail, then families are at risk of being labeled "untreatable" and their child(ren) being removed.

To tailor FPS to Native families with child welfare concerns, FPS must be re-examined on philosophical and programmatic levels. Unrau (1995b) helps us understand the difference:

> . . . there is an important distinction between the idea of family preservation and the implementation of such services. Family preservation, as a *philosophy* of child protection practice, is a set of principles and beliefs that guide practice situations, but do not necessarily offer specific knowledge about how to intervene with client, a program, agency, or department can hold the belief of keeping families together, but not have the necessary intervention technology, resources, or political support to carry the idea to fruition. On the other hand, family preservation as a *program,* namely FPS, is comprised of an organized plan of administrative, political, and clinical activity that aims to fulfill the double-edged social goal of alleviating crises that lead to child placement while maintaining the safety of children in their own homes. . . . (pp. 51-52)

If FPS is to have a chance at being effective for Native families, then adjustments must be made not only to how we think about FPS, but also what additional (or different) structures are needed to support the "new" mode of client service delivery. In the remainder of this paper, key concepts and program features that are central to FPS and how they must be changed in order to properly serve Native families with child welfare concerns are examined.

Challenging Key Beliefs of FPS for the Benefit of Native Families

The philosophies, or beliefs, that guide family life within Native cultures are unique from those guiding non-Native cultures. In this section, four key concepts related to FPS and Native cultures are presented: family, childrearing, spirituality, and time. Each concept is discussed by comparing and contrasting general narratives that explain Native customs and cultures to general narratives of the dominant, or mainstream, culture.

Family

One of the first concepts to rethink before developing FPS for Native families is the family itself. The dominant Western culture values individualism and the nuclear family, a focus that neatly defines the target group of individu-

als eligible to receive FPS. Traditional Native people tend to have larger family networks as compared to non-Native people raised in the dominant culture. The immediate family, for example, grows when a child marries because the concept of "in-law" does not exist. Rather, those marrying into a family become full family members (Sutton & Broken Nose, 1996). Extended family can reach beyond blood relatives to include Elders and neighbors. In part, these larger family systems are reflective of Native people's value for group orientation and interconnectedness. Interconnectedness involves a set of relationships, starting with the family, expanding to others (McCormick, 1996). Community membership is valued among Native people, reflecting the importance of collateral relationships rather than individualism. This value is apparent since group consensus is a major value in decision-making (Joe & Malach, 1998).

Extended family plays a central role in raising Native children. The importance of extended family is realized when one considers that the primary child-adult relationship may not be between child and parent in a Native family (Cross, 1986; Pimento, 1985; Red Horse, Lewis, Feit & Decker, 1978). Grandparents and community Elders are considered potent sources of influence for children, families, and the community as a whole. It is common for grandparents to willingly assume child-care responsibilities for their grandchildren and for parents to seek advice from community Elders. FPS workers must take the time to map out the family network for a family and then be prepared to work with aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, and possibly neighbors as alternative child care providers (Red Horse, Lewis, Feit & Decker, 1978).

The availability of extended family may depend on where the family is living. Native families living in reservation communities, for example, will likely have more connections with extended family than those who have moved to the city. Native families living in urban areas tend to adopt a nuclear family structure, but may wish to reconnect with family networks in their tribal communities.

Throughout the work with Native families, workers need to be cognizant of the definition of family as it pertains to Native culture, as well as the specific worldview that Native families hold in terms of their relationships with others. Red Horse (1980) further suggests that social workers must adapt services to reflect the inclination of Native families to integrate generations. Genograms provide a concrete strategy for bridging cultural gaps between a worker and a family. When used with Native families, however, genograms should capture the "broad" definition of extended family and span three or more generations in order to depict traditional clan systems.

Child Rearing

Given the expanded definition of family among Native people, it follows that Native people value *shared* responsibility for raising children; an ideal that stems from the Native perspective of wholeness and connection with the world (Assembly of First Nations, 1994). As previously discussed, it may be common for relatives to assume the primary childcare role. It is also possible for childcare responsibilities to be divided among family members. For example, an uncle or aunt might assume the primary role as disciplinarian, whereas grandparents might be relied upon for spiritual guidance.

Modeling is an important method of child rearing (Brant, 1990). This means that children are *shown, rather than told* how to behave. As with many other cultures, many Native people learn parenting skills through imitation, but for many Native parents, boarding schools, foster care, and adoption disrupted learning about cultural traditions and parenting practices (Assembly of First Nations, 1994; Fischler, 1985). Simply put, some parents have had no role model for their own parenting (Weaver, 1999). This leaves the FPS worker to seek out models within the Native community that may help with parenting skills.

Another parenting tradition among Native people is that children are viewed as having privileged positions in Native society. Adults with children are considered wealthy, and Native tradition encourages adults to treat children with kindness and gentleness. As such, parenting styles are typically non-coercive and aim to foster self-determination of children, unencumbered by expectations about developmental timing (Pimento, 1985). Physical punishment is not part of traditional Native parenting practices. This style of Native parenting has been interpreted as "permissive" or "pacifist" by Western standards (Fischler, 1985).

While mainstream culture tends to value the "take-charge" approach to a situation, Native children are taught that there is a natural order to life and that one must be accepting of natural and non-natural events (Joe & Malach, 1998). Respect for others' independence makes instruction, coercion, or attempting to persuade another person undesirable (Brant, 1990; Schacht, Tafoya, & Mirabala, 1989). Advice also is perceived as taking power away from someone and can even be a sign of disrespect (Thomason, 1991). If child rearing is successful, then children will have learned to accept both the good and the bad things that happen in life. Family preservation workers must understand this and avoid using intrusive approaches with families and be sensitive to individual autonomy.

In addition to acceptance, Native people value self-reliance and autonomy for their children, more so than other cultures. Native children, for example,

reach developmental milestones such as dressing themselves, doing regular chores, going downtown alone, and being left alone in the evening, earlier than their White and African American counterparts (Miller, 1979, in Joe & Malach, 1998). In addition, Native children may be placed in charge of care for younger siblings at a younger age than other cultures (Fischler, 1985; Joe & Malach, 1998).

At a practical level, FPS service delivery should identify extended family members who have had success with parenting. These family members could be included in the service plan where parenting is an issue. The Native community can also be involved in the planning and implementation of the intervention (Williams & Ellison, 1996). Parents, however, should be able to decide whom they want to include in meetings with a FPS worker (Joe & Malach, 1998; Schacht, Tafoya, & Mirabala, 1989). Another option is to determine whether culturally appropriate parenting sessions are being offered by a community agency. Culturally-specific parenting classes are particularly important given the disruption in parenting created by residential schools (Fischler, 1985). For example, the recent Head Start movement in Canada has opened the door to unique approaches to parenting initiatives. In Lethbridge, Alberta, the Aboriginal Head Start Program utilizes Elders to teach traditional parenting philosophies. Various aspects of parenting are discussed in group format, often with the aid of the medicine wheel (i.e., physical, emotional, mental and spiritual elements of development). It is common for parents to share stories about how they strengthen emotional development with their children (i.e., through hugging, cuddling, praise, playing catch, or simply being present). Similarly, stories are shared about how emotional development is stunted (i.e., inappropriate expression of anger; family violence; excessive alcohol consumption). Elders are often part of these informal group discussions. Further, group discussion can also take the form of comparing past histories (i.e., boarding school experiences) and how they differ from healthy practices.

Time

There are fundamental differences in how Western and Native cultures experience time. In traditional Native culture, time is not linear and approaches to time-management may be different than how time is understood in mainstream FPS where a central organizing principle is *brief* intervention. Most noteworthy is the four-week time limit allotted for Homebuilders services. The idea is that a single worker enters a family home and works intensively, but briefly, with the family to help create concrete change as quickly as possible. In contrast, Native people have intuitive, personal, and flexible concepts of time which are ingredients for harmonious living (Brant, 1990).

On paper, the time principles of Homebuilders, such as therapist availability, appear to be a good match for Native families. First, client needs dictate workers' schedules for any given family. Workers are available to spend time with families during times of difficulty, from early morning to late night. Second, workers are available to families by telephone. Arrangements are made so clients are able to contact their workers 24 hours a day. When primary workers are not reachable, backup staff members are available. Third, workers meet with clients face-to-face within 24 hours of referral to the program.

Upon closer examination, however, the time features of Homebuilders' services that are centered on principles of crisis, immediacy, and action may not be in harmony with beliefs about time in Native culture. Workers stand ready to intervene at a moment's notice when called upon by a family. However, what if the family does not call or does not mobilize for action? Without sensitivity to the role that time plays in Native culture, there is danger that workers will superimpose upon Native families a time schedule that will result in misunderstandings and cultural insensitivity. In Native culture, time is not interpreted as a rate of speed. Rather, it is a moment in which something occurs; the present being rooted in the past and branching out to the future. Native people are more likely to think of rituals or events as important markers of time, rather than time itself (Joe & Malach, 1998). Workers should, therefore, take the lead from their clients with regard to time-related service issues. This will necessarily involve open discussion about how time factors are perceived by families during service delivery.

The action-oriented and fast moving pace of FPS intervention, which is based on quick assessment and structured intervention, is incongruent with Native values. Native custom allows for time to feel comfortable with new people until all parties get to know one another (Harper & Lantz, 1996; Joe & Malach, 1998). In addition, non-directive approaches such as storytelling and use of metaphors may be most appropriate when working with Native families (Sutton & Broken Nose, 1996). Yet, to be effective, these approaches take time, something lacking in traditional models of FPS.

FPS needs to be structured around a time frame unique to the culture, including flexibility regarding appointment times and availability to respond to crises. Workers will need to get a sense of family time as well as community time if the family lives on a reservation to find out important "time markers" for the family apart from calendar time. Identifying markers will help the worker learn about the family's rhythms apart from calendar times. Workers must take time to learn about the family, to build a trusting working relationship, to move at the pace of the family, taking a noninterference approach (Schacht, Tafoya, & Mirabala, 1989). For instance, one approach may be to

form a circle which includes the family, extended family, Elders, and significant community people to assist in the case management process.

Spirituality

Spirituality plays an important role in Native culture. Generally speaking, families with spiritual practices also have more traditional Native beliefs. Nevertheless, many Native families keep traditional beliefs associated with historic customs that include ritual ceremonies and symbolism, some of which acknowledge the close association between illness and the Spirit (McCormick, 1996).

Homebuilders identifies 21 training modules to help workers with particular client problems (Kinney, Haapala and Booth, 1991). Each training module focuses heavily on skills, behavior, and cognition, but none give adequate consideration to spirituality, which is integral to Native well-being. Spiritual intervention among Native people may include sweats, smudge or pipe ceremonies, and Sundances, which are not typically part of FPS training. This means that FPS workers may be faced with interventions that they do not know or understand. There may be difficulties in incorporating spirituality into FPS model. Workers would be advised to learn about spiritual practices within Native culture and the special meanings of ceremonies.

Moreover, acquiring spiritual services is typically the responsibility of family members. Families who engage in traditional spiritual practices are often connected to a number of Elders who perform such ceremonies. If this is not the case, there are often community opportunities (such as the Sundance) in which families engage. It is not uncommon for Native families to travel to other Native communities to seek the services of Elders. Some ceremonies may involve activities that require parting with personal belongings or money. Extended family members may also share their possessions with individuals undergoing such ceremonies. In some cases, it is acceptable for workers to participate in the sharing of gifts as a gesture of helping. The giving of gifts is a cultural norm and, depending on the context, may even be viewed as helping families by virtue of having a close relationship with that family.

Whether or not a family practices such intervention may be revealed through the assessment process. However, workers must be respectful of family wishes to keep traditional ceremonies confidential (Joe & Malach, 1998). Congruent with the Homebuilder's model, workers must be authentic and show respect and concern (Kinney & Haapala, 1990).

Program Considerations for FPS with Native Families

Given that Native and mainstream culture have fundamentally different philosophies about family, child rearing, time, and spirituality, it is reasonable

to expect FPS programs will be defined by different structures so that client service delivery can be carried out in a manner that is consistent with these beliefs. Existing templates of programs need to modified so that Native families are not exposed to "pre-fabricated" service.

Because poverty is such a significant factor among many Native families, it may be useful for the FPS agency to initiate partnerships in intervention at the macro/community level. For example, historically, communities/clans/extended families would organize various activities to help alleviate hardship, such as hunting parties (where wild game was distributed among family members) and berry picking/preserving groups. Through partnering with local services (i.e., health services, community groups, extended families), perhaps some of these historical ways of enduring hardship could be renewed, making room for family empowerment/competence.

On an empirical note, Native families with children at risk for placement have different needs than their non-Native counterparts. That is, more Native children enter placement for reasons of alcohol abuse and neglect than compared to non-Native children. Alcohol abuse within Native communities is related to unemployment and powerlessness (Pimento, 1985). The type of neglect found within Native communities stems from deprivation, poverty and child-rearing beliefs, rather than willful acts of disregard or abandonment of children (Thomlison & Foote, 1987). These two risk factors are important to consider since Courtney (1997) has called into question how typical FPS deals with existing social conditions such as poverty, racism, substance abuse, and inadequate housing. They are also important since the Native value of noninterference may be misinterpreted by non-Native people as neglect or lack of guidance (Weaver, 1997a). In addition, Native populations are among the poorest of the poor (Horejsi, Heavy Runner Craig, & Pablo, 1992). In Canada, for example, the annual incomes of Native people is about half of the Canadian national average. In the United States, poverty rates for Natives are two and three times higher than Asian and White non-Hispanic populations, respectively (Staveteig & Wigton, 2000).

FPS programs and workers must be attuned to the problems that Native families face, if they are to be successful in preserving them. FPS has the basic ingredients to effectively serve Native families such as one-on-one attention, in-home service, and uniquely tailored interventions. Programs can be further adapted according to the unique customs of each family, band, or and tribe. Following are five important program structures that must be part of FPS in order to properly prepare and support FPS workers to help Native families.

First, FPS hiring practices must assess whether workers have a sincere interest in learning and accepting Native culture. Workers with such interests have a better chance of evening out power differences that exist within

helper-client relationships formed under the umbrella of child welfare. Once hired, FPS workers must feel collegial support to admit cultural ignorance when it occurs. In turn, program supports ought to assist workers to develop strategies to learn about the client family without compromising service or safety.

Second, workers must be trained and willing to challenge their ethnocentric beliefs as ongoing part of practice. Supervision can help to uncover workers' universal assumptions regarding "normal" or "healthy" families. Additionally, supervision ought to include examination of theories regularly used in FPS programs in terms of their fit with Native culture and expectations of change. These include such theories as crisis intervention, behavioral parent training, and ecological intervention. For example, the modeling component of behavioral parent training appears to be congruent with practices in Native culture.

Working with families in a cultural context necessarily must include reflection in practice (Schacht, Tafoya, & Mirabala, 1989; Weaver, 1999). Reflection involves the ability of workers to be self critical and aware of their practice, and can help workers understand clients as cultural beings (Weaver, 1999). It also reduces the risk of imposing unwanted values on clients and further oppressing clients during vulnerable times (Weaver & Wodarski, 1995). Moreover, reflection can be a way of demonstrating that workers are willing to learn about Native culture, an act that Native families will appreciate (Joe & Malach, 1998). Multicultural sensitivity is a necessary part of social work education and accreditation standards for social work programs require that graduates be knowledgeable about human diversity and develop and apply culturally competent practice.

Third, workers must be encouraged to express openness to collaborating and sharing their work with traditional healers, community people, extended kin, and Elders. Indigenous helping systems can be a source of support and strength for Native people as shown by the interconnectedness between people (Weaver, 1997b). Abandoning FPS's familiar single-worker approach in place of unfamiliar helping strategies is enough to move any FPS worker well out of their practice "comfort zone." However, if Native families are to be successfully preserved, then FPS workers must support family choices about indigenous sources of help that parallel, supplement or replace interventions that are more common (Weaver, 1997b). Natural helpers in communities should be part of the service delivery system, if only for the reason that they are important role models (Cross, 1986; Thomason, 1991). FPS programs, therefore, have a role and responsibility to support and assist workers treading through unfamiliar cultural territory to avoid poor decision-making that can result when workers misunderstand client situations. FPS workers should be com-

mitted to establishing relationships with the family and the community in which the family lives.

Fourth, it is critical that FPS workers understand and use existing client support systems. When seeking advice, expertise, or services of an Elder, various protocols must typically be followed and differ between and within Native communities. Tribal politics can be challenging and workers must be "tuned in" to how best to proceed. Those not familiar with seeking the aid of Elders may consider approaching the band manager or interagency committee for guidance and/or to mediate and ensure protocols are followed. Elders have different roles (e.g., doctors, counselors, spiritualists, historians, and teachers) and protocols may vary with the type of service that is needed. It is important for FPS workers to spend time in the community, being aware that the community has to decide whether or not to accept a particular worker. When seeking spiritual guidance, for example, it is customary in many communities for individuals to offer tobacco to Elders who then use the tobacco in smudging and prayer for individuals.

Fifth, the teaching skills used by FPS workers must be adapted to Native cultures. Skill-focused behavioral interventions common to FPS (Barth, 1990) may be one reason for the low numbers of Native families referred to FPS to date. By and large, Native parenting skills are acquired through imitation. Thus, teaching parenting skills might be less valuable than having parents model acceptable behavior to their children. Fischler (1985) refers to two specific Indian Parent Training programs and more materials are available on the web. Other curricula are available on the internet (see for example, <http://www.nicwa.org/catalog/catalogu.htm>).

How do FPS workers 'model' healthy parenting skills at the risk of violating cultural norms such as noninterference? Consideration of a few points may help clarify this issue. FPS workers must be clear on why involvement is necessary. If the family is referred for problems of neglect (i.e., poverty), how will "parenting skills" alleviate poverty? Similarly, if the family is involved with child protection because of substance abuse, it is unlikely that improved parenting will alleviate this problem. On the other hand, if the family is referred for physical abuse and FPS is involved to teach the family alternative methods of discipline, this will involve both philosophical and practical approaches.

Some Elders specialize in the teaching of parenting. Inclusion of their services on the case plan may be beneficial. Whenever possible, modeling should occur as part of the natural discourse. Whether the FPS worker contracts with an Elder or extended family member who is successful in parenting, modeling can occur naturally as experiences arise in "teachable moments." The key is

that the family is committed to practicing alternative methods of discipline for the well being of their children/family.

Fifth, training of FPS workers must cover cultural knowledge, which includes knowledge of communication patterns, worldviews, belief systems and values (Weaver, 1999). Communication patterns are key because miscommunication leads to misunderstanding or mislabeling. The following is a brief list of communication differences between Native and dominant cultures.

- Communication in Native culture generally involves patience, ability to tolerate silence and listening (Weaver, 1999). Silence is not only acceptable among Native people; it also demonstrates respect for another person (Sutton & Broken Nose, 1996; Tafoya, 1989). Similar silences in mainstream culture suggest resistance.
- Direct eye contact may suggest that one is respectful and attentive in the dominant culture, yet in some Native cultures, direct eye contact is considered disrespectful (Tafoya, 1989). For example, in traditional Blackfoot families, it is customary that a father refrains from speaking directly to his daughter-in-law. Similarly, mothers refrain from conversing with sons-in-law and instead speak to a third party. While this is gender based, it is also custom that certain boundaries exist pertaining to type of conversation between people and their parent-in-law, regardless of gender.
- It may be disrespectful to ask personal questions in the Native culture, yet mainstream FPS assessment and intervention strategies require at least some intrusive questioning. It may be of benefit to FPS workers to redirect these types of questions to a third party (i.e., a spouse, parent, or extended family). Further, the manner in which information is sought is important. For example, asking a mother's relative to describe "strengths" is different from asking her to tell you "how" she teaches her children right from wrong (i.e., experience in the form of story telling). Another method of soliciting this information is by presenting a scenario and asking how it would be played out in that particular family.
- Native culture generally does not rely solely on verbal communication. Moreover, Native language and knowledge not written is passed on through story telling, which can involve gestures, rituals, symbols, and words. For example, in some Native cultures, direct verbal confrontation is a violation of familial and community norms. In the case of a family dispute, a FPS worker may feel it necessary to gather family members to discuss the dispute; however, this plan of action may further alienate family members. The FPS worker would be wise to determine cultural customs regarding settling disputes, particularly if reconciliation contributes to the well-being and resourcefulness of family functioning. In

some cultures, disputes are initially handled indirectly, by a third party prior to the disputing parties coming together. This preserves the integrity of the parties as well as redirecting potentially hostile behavior.

- Traditional Native people do not typically discuss personal strengths as this can be interpreted as bragging. Consequently, Native people may be foreign to ideas of praise, reward, and reinforcement (Brant, 1990; Thomason, 1991). It may be necessary for FPS workers to frame questions to avoid misinterpretation as well as to identify strengths through assessment and observation. Workers must also be humble and express a willingness to learn (Weaver, 1999). Praise can be worded subtly.
- In Native communities, emotional restraint is encouraged (Brant, 1990; Pimento, 1985). Workers are attuned to subtle communication differences; language barriers may impede work and lead to misunderstanding. Workers must take time to learn about the communication styles of Native families (Joe & Malach, 1998). For example, workers may sometimes notice that when visiting a Native family, they may be offered something to eat (or simply given something). This offering is a gesture of hospitality, as well as relationship building that is reciprocated by the simple act of accepting the meal/food. To refuse the offering, regardless of how gently this is done, can insult the family and the value of what they have to offer. There is a story about a young boy visiting a friend. His friend's family was eating raw kidney, which is a traditional food and offered the visitor a place at the table. As much as the visitor disliked raw kidney, he sat at the table. While he was eating, he carefully took the kidney out of his mouth and hid it in his jacket pocket. When he was asked how his meal was (the old man knew what he was doing and was teasing him), the visitor smiled and said "mmm, good." It was more important for him to graciously accept the offer and maintain the family's respect, than to insult them and potentially damage their relationship or to embarrass his good friend's family.
- Most FPS intervention is based on a "talking cure." However, among some tribes such as the Sioux Indian, talking is forbidden in certain family relationships. Without understanding such special relationships, the worker may impose the dominant culture's beliefs on families. Reduced emphasis on verbal expression frees Native families for other kinds of experiences such as working with concrete services (McGoldrick & Giordano, 1996).
- Working with clients around concrete issues is one way for social workers to begin to establish trust (Weaver, 1999).

Finally, the importance of agency responsibility for supporting workers through culturally sensitive education, training, and supervision needs to be highlighted. Administrators of agencies should take the lead in providing cross-cultural learning experiences for FPS staff. In assessing parenting techniques, for instance, it may be more effective if workers meet with community members (i.e., Elders, natural helpers) before working with families to learn about cultural values and how they manifest into behavioral norms. Learning about cultural values can be built into the agency orientation to prepare the family preservation workers, and regular supervision can focus on the workers' transcultural competence.

The agency can also insist that their workers learn about and establish a relationship with the community before working with families. Additionally, administrators must be prepared to sanction and support decisions that allow for service flexibility. If for example, an FPS program is bound by time constraints (e.g., 4 weeks), then FPS administrators must be willing to waive such restrictions when they conflict with expectations of another culture.

SUMMARY

FPS, to be effective, must demonstrate cultural sensitivity by adapting services to multiple layers of the helping process, including values and beliefs, community context and relationships. This paper has examined FPS's philosophy and program structures in the context of providing services to Native families with child welfare and child protection issues. It has explored the important concepts of (1) family, (2) childrearing, (3) time, and (4) spirituality and provided examples of how Native and non-Native cultures attribute different meanings and understandings to each. Given that there are many subtle and not-so-subtle differences between Native and non-Native cultures, FPS programs must change how they are structured in order to provide workers with the necessary support and training needed to better serve Native families. FPS can be reconfigured to become more culturally responsive to Native families while maintaining many of its fundamental philosophical principles. This effort, however, takes sensitivity, cultural awareness, and conscious effort if programs expect to be of service to Native families and their communities. Sometimes the philosophies will be in conflict, in the sense that child welfare programs necessarily involve the tension between preserving the integrity of a family and a child's right to protection. Conflicts can be minimized if FPS can be flexible and adjust to variations in culture. Workers need to stretch past their own "time zone" and concept of "family" and "parenting." Social workers need to be realistic about what they hope to achieve if they do not address

larger issues faced by Native people. Focusing exclusively on the family without addressing larger social concerns perpetuates notions of pathology. The philosophy of FPS fits with the need to deal with ecological issues.

NOTE

1. Other minority groups have also been absent from FPS and deserve special attention. See, for example, Fong (1994) for a discussion of FPS with Asian families, and Carter (1997) for African-American families.

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