

ADVANCED MULTI-SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO PRACTICE:
TREATY 4 STUDENT SUCCESS PROGRAM
FORT QU'APPELLE, SASKATCHEWAN.

A Field Practicum Report
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by:

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I returned to the Faculty of Social Work to simply finish my undergraduate degree. Eldon Wildeman, one of my first professors, challenged my stagnate view of Social Work and reinvigorated me as I discovered my newly defined role within the much more contemporary world of Social Work. Furthermore, he gave me renewed confidence in my ability as a researcher and the confidence to plot a course and find my way.

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Ultimately, I would like to acknowledge my husband and children for taking this journey with me. I feel renewed, refreshed, and reassured that I can now take the helm to navigate my future in a profession that I have come to love all over again.

Advanced Multi-Systemic Approach to Practice:

Dedication

This report is lovingly dedicated to my mother, Margot Perrin. Her gentle hand, unrelenting support and enduring love have remained a constant in my life.

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1. INTRODUCTION

When thinking about my Graduate studies practicum, I recognized early that I wanted a practicum experience in community engagement and community development. Next, I was looking for an opportunity in a rural First Nation. Finally, recognizing the need to balance home and school, I was looking for an experience close to home. I became increasingly aware of the professional absence of human service work in rural areas. There were several possibilities for placement with agencies where community engagement was part of the work, but it became apparent that the specifications I was seeking were not available. Those avenues were made unavailable because individuals lacked the necessary qualifications to be a professional associate of the University of Regina. I did find another discipline where graduate or higher level professional associates were willing, but their scope of experience and knowledge did not meet my specific goals and objectives.

In July, while completing a contract with Ochapowace First Nation, I was introduced to Lori Whiteman, Director of the Treaty 4 Student Success Program (T4SSP). I shared my practicum challenge with the Director and with the program's Curriculum Consultant, Cheryl Mantei, and I was encouraged by their enthusiasm at the possibility of completing my practicum. Their attitude was a fresh rain for my very parched outlook. The rest is history.

I quickly began refining my goals and objectives to align with T4SSP while holding tight to a macro focus on community engagement. I researched the organization and began to acclimate myself to the daily operations of T4SSP. I was able to dovetail my learning goals and objectives to align with the organization.

- Gain graduate level Social Work skills, knowledge and values in rural First Nations;
- Improve my knowledge and understanding of adolescent youth in rural First Nations;
- Improve my knowledge and understanding of secondary school services in rural First Nation schools;
- Apply a collaborative approach and linkages within and across agencies and organizations; and
- Study the impact on development and implementation of locally-driven programming in First Nations communities.

The practicum began on September 6, 2011 and concluded on December 2, 2011 for a total of 450 hours. The schedule was fluid with travel, elongated days, and the occasional weekend. I was thankful to work close to home as my family dynamic had changed in the last year and my presence and impact in my children's lives was a priority for me.

My research began with a hazy definition of community engagement. I needed to carve out what T4SSP felt was community engagement and how this fit with a social work definition of the same. I researched and later found and followed an Advanced Multi-Systemic approach with an added emphasis on Engagement & Empathy.

2. AGENCY PROFILE

2.1 Practicum Setting

My MSW practicum experience was at the Treaty 4 Governance Centre, in the heart of the Qu'Appelle Valley, in Fort Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan. The Treaty 4 Student Success Program (T4SSP) is an educational initiative serving 18 schools across Treaty 4 territory spanning across the southeast section of the province and extending east into southwest Manitoba. T4SSP is committed to the development and delivery of sustainable education.

The heart of my work began with an in depth look at all T4SSP initiatives that centred on community engagement and development. Initially, I proposed a work plan that included outlying First Nations close to my home community. Simultaneously, T4SSP was embarking on a “friendship” (partnership) with the South East Cornerstone School Division and I was able to narrow my work plan to include: White Bear, Ocean Man, and Pheasant Rump First Nations.

2.1.1. Treaty 4 Student Success Program (T4SSP)

As stated in their 2010-2011 Building Student Success Report, Treaty 4 Student Success Program, 2011, the Vision of T4SSP is to “Honour, Embrace and Implement Treaty Rights to Education” (p. 3), and they are “committed to setting high standards of excellence in all First Nations schools across the Treaty 4 Territory” (p. 3). T4SSP is an educational initiative serving the First Nations of the Treaty 4 Territory. Currently, through a letter of commitment from each First Nation Chief and Council, 12 out of 18 schools have committed to participating in the program. The Treaty Four Chiefs are aware and concerned about the considerable gaps in learning for their First Nations children. They desire change in their communities and are unhappy with the achievement

T4SSP finances flowed through File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council (FHQ), as required by Indian and Northern Affairs of Canada now Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada.

In recent years there has been an increased lack of communication, separation and competition among First Nations and further discontent for many of the First Nations regarding student outcomes. The layered political structure and “push and pull” for power and authority in many Tribal Councils and First Nations have cast a shadow over education. It gave rise to a vision of unity, collaboration, progress and change. T4SSP is the only Treaty based First Nation Student Success Program (FNSSP) with Aboriginal Affairs Northern Development of Canada (AANDC). The following is taken directly from the T4SSP 2010-2011 Building Student Success Report:

Treaty 4 Student Success Program is an educational initiative serving the First Nations of the Treaty 4 Territory. The program was initiated in August, 2009 as part of the INAC First Nation School Success Program (FNSSP) initiative, which provides funding for First Nations schools across Canada to implement school success planning focused on the mandates of student retention, literacy and numeracy. Treaty 4 Student Success Program is one of 6 FNSSP sites in Saskatchewan and the only program which brings together student/school improvement across 4 Tribal Councils and 2 Independent First Nations.

(T4SSP, 2011, p.12)

The Board of Directors for T4SSP consists of two representatives from each of the Tribal Councils and Independent First Nations. The Board, which was established in 2010, is comprised, as of 2011, of the following members:

- Chief Reginald Bellerose of the Muskowekwan First Nation

- Chief Michael Starr of the Starblanket First Nation
- Chief Leonard Keshane of the Keeseekoose First Nation
- Chief Gloria Shepherd of the Ocean Man First Nation
- Chief Ross Allary of the Ochapowace First Nation
- Chief Rodger Redman of the Standing Buffalo First Nation
- Chief Darin Poorman of the Kawacatoose First Nation
- *Councilor Patricia Sparvier of the Cowessess First Nation **chair of the Board*

2.1.2. First Nation Student Success Program

T4SSP is a First Nation Student Success Program (FNSSP) which is a proposal-driven program. FNSSP's are all focused around their three mandates of reading and writing (literacy), mathematics (numeracy), and encouraging students to stay in school (student retention). T4SSP was the only FNSSP to include and add to their program by placing all these mandates within a tri-pod tipi showing the connecting essence of community as a fourth focus for their program. The FNSSP is a key component in reforming First Nation Education and setting the foundation for long-term reform of First Nation education. The FNSSP is aligned with the federal government's long-term goal in providing on-reserve First Nation youth with access to a high quality education that encourages them to stay in school and graduate with the skills they need to enter the labour market. However, this would seem contradictory to the disparity which exists within First Nations communities with 40% less tuition dollars, through federal funding dollars, than their provincial counterpart and limited access to secondary services. Projects funded through this FNNSP are required to include three interrelated components

to include: School Success Plans, Student Learning Assessments and Performance Measurements.

T4SSP supports all four components and provides services and supports to the Treaty 4 schools. The program assists First Nation schools to develop school success plans to set goals in the areas of numeracy, literacy, and student retention. SMARTER goals are developed in consultation with the school and community. The SMARTER acronym stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound, Engagement, and Reporting. Achievable and realistic should be automatic in any goal setting. The engagement and reporting is basically a review to ensure the community had input into the goal and then planned accordingly. The weight, however, lies often with the most difficult points, Specific, Measurable, and Time-bound. The rest should naturally fall into place if these are well established and thought out in the planning stages. Each goal is measurable and outlines activities that provide tangible outcomes for improving student achievement levels in the three priority areas of literacy, numeracy and student retention. T4SSP endeavors to assist and support communities and their schools in creating a thriving learning environment along with assessment tools that help measure success.

All assessments are tailored to inform teaching practice and measure student outcomes. T4SSP participates in the Ministry of Education's Assessment for Learning as well as the Learning Bar's "Tell Them From Me" and the "Early Years Evaluation". Further, locally developed assessments have been developed for use with the early years. Aggregated data are made available to each community. An aggregate report for each assessment is developed for the program's annual report. Assessment is not meant to be competitive, or a system to either target or isolate children; it is meant to provide

meaningful feedback to teachers, students and members of the community. The data guides decisions in instruction, environment, and material to accurately adjust and improve student outcomes and enhance the educational experience. Holistic assessment practices are for everyone's benefit. The proposal which T4SSP submits for funding as a FNSSP is evaluated on a national level and therefore their success is paramount to their long term sustainability of the program.

T4SSP scope in Education stems from the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) under the Education and Training Secretariat. The FSIN is the political structure for councilors from each community. The FSIN Education and Training Secretariat provide technical assistance to many streams of First Nation education including regional responsibility with First Nations and their education systems. It is their responsibility to provide technical support on all issues and in all respects to the education systems development for First Nations.

3. PRIMARY ACTIVITIES DURING THE PRACTICUM

The Scope and Activities of the Practicum were as follows:

1. My work was held to five areas of focus in the area of community engagement:
 - The coordination of monthly gatherings through the Community Literacy Advisory Network (CLAN). The intention of this program is to bring Elders from all communities to develop programming and care for children. Elders work together to ensure that all children know who they are and where they come from by age seven.
 - Coordinate Heroes training in each community. Building capacity in community for leaders (a program that ended during my practicum).

- Resurrect *Returning to Spirit* a residential school recovery program. See the following: <http://www.returningtospirit.org/>
 - Facebook© Intervention: having a Facebook© connection where the students could freely interact with Elders and service members of the community.
 - Develop an information portfolio for adolescent students outlining all post-secondary opportunities as well as options with bursaries, scholarships and course requirements. Create a better understanding of future education and employment with increased knowledge of program opportunities.
2. Visit each of the 18 communities seeking out grandmothers and young women to co-develop programs. My work with enhancement of service implementation and community engagement was primarily between the main office in Fort Qu'Appelle and Sakimay, Cowessess, Kahkewistahaw and Ochapowace.
 3. Develop skills in the application of social work theory and knowledge with available community resources, local agencies, or support services and learn the various mandates and social welfare options.
 4. Develop initiation and self-directness for my field supervision by identifying areas for discussion, seeking both formal and informal meetings with my professional associates to further identifying my strengths and challenges.
 5. Reflect on any ethical and social work value related issues throughout my practicum and discuss these with my agency supervisor, professional associates, and co-workers. Further, initiate discussions about cultural sensitivity in practice and the issues surrounding culture and spirituality as it relates to best practice from the service users' and deliverers' perspectives. This will further assist me in developing

an increased self-awareness of personal values, beliefs, biases, culture, ultimately achieving an understanding of my own role as a non-First Nation graduate level social worker in a rural First Nation.

6. Examine how the services, the delivery mechanisms, modes and methods as well as those delivering them impact the existing issues/conditions in the community, specifically those at risk including poverty, violence and substance abuse.
7. Develop effective working relationships by working on my engagement and rapport-building skills. Learn about effective working relationships through observation and discussion with my agency supervisors and co-workers and further discussion with my professional associates.
8. Research community engagement and community development with secondary school services within rural First Nation schools, and implementation as it relates to the field of social work.
9. Meet with and discuss secondary school services programming, development, and implementation with a variety of stakeholders to discuss their first-hand experience and insights pertaining to programming and delivery of secondary school services.
10. Write my Practicum report.

T4SSP must be adaptable and flexible as priorities change. I found this exhilarating. I felt T4SSP was more progressive than many agencies and organizations in that it held in the highest regard to be genuinely responsive to the supports and assistance the communities and schools wanted and requested. My work with the Community Literacy Advisory Network (CLAN) was a much larger initiative than originally expected. It was project-based and focused on a small region of communities and schools. The majority of my work was via a main project in the south east of Treaty 4

Territory. I focused on the communities of White Bear, Ocean Man and Pheasant Rump First Nations as well as Stoughton, Arcola and Carlyle communities and schools. I did have the opportunity to visit many of the Treaty 4 communities and assist with program goals.

I reflected on all my activities through a Blog I kept during my practicum. It was an open Blog for my professional associate, practicum supervisor and some co-workers at T4SSP to review my comments and provide feedback. I researched literature that would assist me in further understanding my role within my practicum experience and the role of a social worker within the T4SSP organization. Once my role became clear, tasks and desired outcomes guided necessary work. I was able to identify areas for discussion with almost every person I came into contact. Everything was new to me, and I would try to make the most of every interaction to build a genuine and authentic connection with people.

As I reflected in my preparation for my formal presentation and while writing this report, I was able to identify my strengths and areas where I felt I could improve. I needed to take time to critically analyze and reflect to measure growth through this unique experience. While in the field, I did collect observation notes from many principals and community members. As I mentioned, my blog became a “sounding board” throughout my practicum if only to put thoughts down and be able to reflect critically on this experience and measure professional growth. Cultural responsiveness in practice and the issues surrounding culture and spirituality are something I will go into later in my report. I will, however, only discuss the subject matter as it relates to my own observations and experiences regarding the challenges I perceived for myself during my experience.

I had a lot to learn, and had to do it very quickly, around the services T4SSP provided and the organization itself when I first started. I learned a great deal about secondary school services and the benefits of an interdisciplinary team working in supporting First Nations schools. My role nurtured my engagement and rapport skills which ultimately led further to a focus on the impact of quality relationships on learning, sharing, and experiencing knowledge and skill as tangible elements of human connectivity.

3.1 Strategies & Theory

T4SSP utilized a variety of diverse assessments to collect meaningful quantitative and qualitative data to improve programming and, thereby, student achievement. The *Tell Them From Me* (TTFM) survey is a product of The Learning Bar's interactive online school evaluation system. Its purpose is to assist educators and administrators to garner feedback and further gauge how to improve learning outcomes for students. TTFM is able to capture, summarize and display aggregate and disaggregated data. The implementation and use of this assessment tool, guides community intervention and school programming. *Tell Them From Me* "provides a continuous feedback for schools and communities that are directly linked to School Improvement" (T4SSP, 2011, p.37).

I was interested in this survey as it did address the community engagement mandate outlined in their proposal for funding. The data engaged the school and community to collaborate and plan for development of programs and interventions that are specific for their community and school, and T4SSP could begin to debunk the myths about First Nations schools and substandard education. Treaty 4 communities and their leaders want to develop mechanisms for ongoing strategic qualitative data such as TTFM

to complement the quantitative data that are collected as per provincial education policy on academic achievement. The survey has the potential to provide information that schools can use to better understand what the students are thinking, feeling and experiencing.

I found a lack of consistency with how surveys were presented to students prior to their participation and how they were informed about what their purpose was and how the collected information would be used and shared. I found grades four to twelve students participated in the survey, although there was little participation by parents and limited participation by teachers. Through informal discussions with T4SSP staff, teachers in the schools and a few administrators, I found it varied in how the survey was administered. For the most part, each teacher was to work the survey into their timetable, and the teacher oversaw the participation. I felt if the survey was introduced and delivered to students with some sort of comprehensive and consistent model, it may reap increased participation, consistency, and a greater degree of accuracy.

As I read through the survey, I found some of the questions unclear. I felt student understanding of the importance and value of the information gathered was not evident. I felt student “buy-in” would further engage a greater degree of participation from both students and parents. Although I knew the aggregate numbers of the survey did not accurately reflect the large majority of the schools, the information did enlighten me as to some areas of inquiry which aligned with my practicum focus.

Truancy and attendance were noted as higher than the national average in the TTFM aggregate, a concern and red flag in the area of student retention. The use of a multidisciplinary team, through T4SSP, could assist schools and communities who do not have access to adequate professional support outside the basic contracted service through

their Tribal Council and Band level agencies. For example, engagement is an advanced art in interrelationships and interpersonal relations, and in many communities, the historical context has stripped away natural modes of community connecting and engaging in each other's lives, as well as the broader community. The struggle is between a traditional sense of community with communal resource sharing (interdependence) and the post-modern global exchange of resources for individual advancement (independence).

When you explore the private versus public discussions, the impact is very real on most rural First Nations. Access to adequate human resources is not easy to achieve in any rural centre but even more difficult for a First Nation. The colonialism and oppression of these communities does not have them eager to have outside professionals offering 'assistance'. However, it is far beyond the human resources that an organization like T4SSP can offer. T4SSP could offer macro assessment in a broader organizational and environmental context.

Asset mapping and social systems assessments are an example of comprehensive knowledge for the school in developing an inclusive atmosphere. Parent involvement and engagement is another area I believe is not receiving enough attention. My observations are that an increased multidisciplinary team would be able to offer a collection of specialized skills to these communities. T4SSP becomes a storehouse of resources and a mechanism for sharing the learned knowledge amongst the Treaty 4 schools and communities.

Practicing collaboration as described by Nelson, Prilleltensky & MacGillivray, (2001) is about building on the "relationships between stakeholders that strive to advance

the values of caring, compassion, community, health, self-determination, participation, power sharing, human diversity, and social justice for oppressed group(s). These values drive both the processes and the outcomes of partnerships that focus on services and supports, coalitions and social action, and research and evaluation” (p.651). Further Nelson et al (2001) states that “Building relationships and trust, establishing norms and principles for working together, sharing power and resources, and being open to challenges are some of the key processes for value-based partnerships, no matter what the focus of the particular partnerships” (p.670).

I have always learned more rapidly from experiences, and with greater retention from people, rather than textbooks. Experiential learning is when the experience becomes tangible, and the knowledge and skill are practiced and internalized. In this way, T4SSP has the opportunity to bridge communities, agencies, organizations and it certainly is not shy about challenging the status quo. As I found with all my activities, I began to see the emergence of an Advanced Multi-Systemic Approach to practice which I will go into further detail later in my report. I found myself growing within T4SSP as a graduate level social worker. As Kurt Lewin (1951) said regarding his concern for the integration of theory and practice, “There is nothing so practical as a good theory” (p.169).

I believe I have spent the better part of my academic life trying to be a critical thinker, develop professional objectivity and neutral perspective for practice. I have more recently grown to believe everything is a process. At first I had to learn to critically analyze and conceptualize through methods I was taught through early academics. As I developed professionally with diverse experiences and higher level education, I began to see focus and specialization emerge in my interests in graduate studies. It is only recently that I have begun to see the impact of process. It is this understanding of the power in

authentic and genuine relationships that I began to refine my skills and to maintain professional ethical values and principles. Also, I increased the quality of my work relationships as I evaluated my personal relationships. I was able to further understand the strength and value of my capacity along with a greater awareness and understanding of myself within the social work profession. It was an aligning of my professional and personal identities which brought me to an advanced perspective of my whole self. With this improved clarity, I was able to think, act and reflect with an advanced skill and knowledge at multiple levels.

The social work profession requires a break from the medical model and the ultimate desire for scientific validity. Leaving a Western paradigm of my theoretical training behind, the Indigenous ways of knowing emphasize the power in understanding knowledge from experience rather than third-party acquisition. Internalizing knowledge and filtering it through a personal lens enriches learning before it is offered back into the world. The impact on the knowledge learned once combined with the individual's experience and perception offers a uniqueness to that internal knowledge which is not duplicated.

3.2 Skills

It was difficult to examine the skills I used during the practicum, as they were varied. Systems analysis for intervention and implementation and then reviewing feedback was my basic for all practice. I want to discuss the skills I learned and my advanced level of understanding and value of them. It was in the process of my work when I began to see my focus narrow and specific interests toward empathy and

engagement in meaningful relationships develop. Empathy has been described as a learned skill.

Empathy is the "capacity" to share and understand another's "state of mind" or emotion...the ability to "put oneself into another's shoes", or in some way experience the outlook or emotions of another being within oneself." Empathy is a powerful communication skill that is often misunderstood and underused. Initially, empathy was referred to as "bedside manner"; now, however, authors and educators consider empathetic communication a teachable, learnable skill that has tangible benefits for both clinician and patient: Effective empathetic communication enhances the therapeutic effectiveness of the clinician-patient relationship. (Ioannidou, F., 2008, p.118)

I realized early on in my practicum that empathy and the quality of genuine relationships were not as prevalent as I would have liked to believe. I observed a direct correlation between skills such as empathy and difficulties in engaging in authentic sustainable relationships as common. This correlation from my observation directly impacted the ability of the practitioner to adequately activate resources, whether their own or the communities and schools. Empathy and other related skills are important to the process of sustainability in relationships. As Miley, O'Melia, and Dubois (2004) point out along with skills the practitioner's perspective guides their process and "that to apply the strengths perspective practitioners need to reexamine their orientation to practice, their view of client systems, and the interpretations of the issues clients represent" (p.81). Miley et al (2004) have found:

There are three key transitions social workers has to examine in practicing the strengths perspective viz problems or challenges, pathology or strengths, as well

as past and future. These transitions serve as important guidelines in the paradigm shifts strengths-focused social workers have to make. Viewing problems as challenges, turning points, or opportunities for growth shifts the perspective and clients. The word 'challenge' has a different meaning than problems and creates a more positive frame of mind in both the client and the social worker. The same applies to the word 'strengths' as opposed to 'pathology' and the word 'future' as opposed to 'past.' (p.81)

Again it is the beginning of relationships, the initial engagement and empathy which can then impact the effectiveness of the practitioner to maximizing their role in assisting communities with resources and further the education and information sharing.

4. CHALLENGES

4.1 Ideology

So much of the environment and historical context of my work was set on a stage of oppression, racial tension, trauma and colonialism. Through my training, I developed the view that trauma and challenge are not to be viewed as obstacles and hurdles but instead as experiences which teach and illustrate the resilience and endurance of people. This resilience is directly tied to people's spiritual beliefs and values. I observed many issues with perspectives surrounding the shared reality. I view circumstances through the basis of my foundational belief system which makes sense of my relationship to the divine and this filter emphasizes circumstances as a tool which refines my character. This perspective views circumstances, their frequency, intensity or duration as not reflective of or in direct relation to my value or worth to the divine. I feel this perspective was apparent and recognizable during my practice in the dialogue and actions of people as was the absence of this perspective, that 'Karma' or the relation to the divine believes that

our circumstances are in proportion to our thoughts and actions and reflect our changing value and worth to the divine.

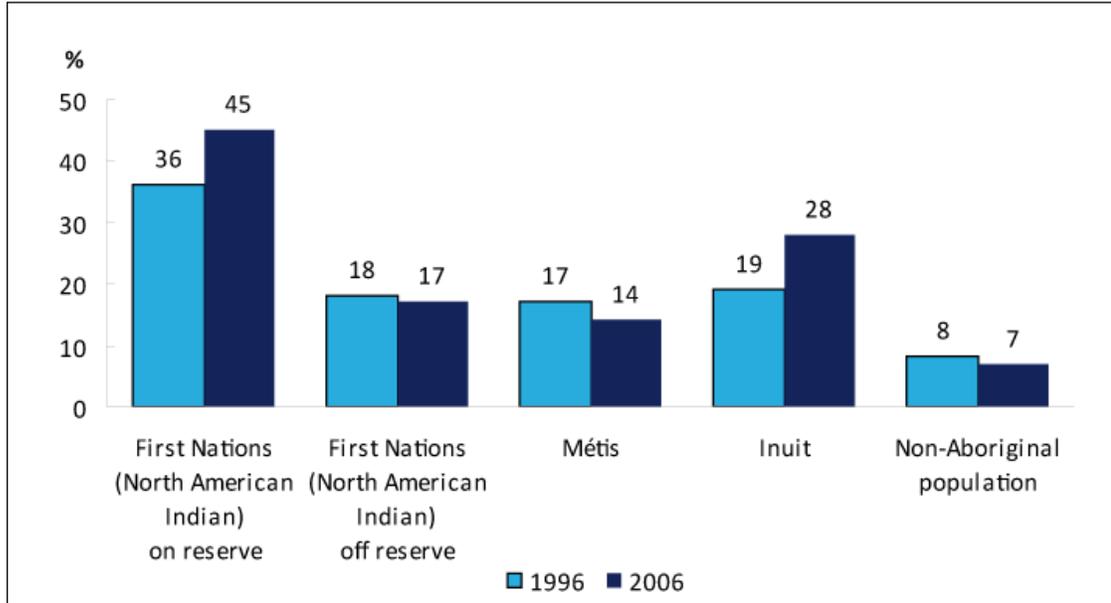
Discussing individuals' relationship to the divine leads into the question from where this ideology stems. T4SSP and societal perspective in many cases was one of limits and boundaries, the agency's perspective was often toward challenge and struggle, this perspective is derived from the environment within which the work takes them as well as the historical past of the communities they engage and serve. Yet when one takes into consideration the staggering gaps and differences between household dynamics, median income, and education in rural First Nations and Canada a paradigm shift may occur in their perspective.

I observed most of the societal perspective on the determinants of the problems were primarily socioeconomic. This was a reality most of the First Nations communities live with every day (See Table 4.1). A great deal of emphasis was on program funding and integration of of service delivery.

About a third of First Nations children living on reserve resided with a lone parent in 2006. The percentage was higher for First Nations children living off reserve at 41%. Among those living off reserve, First Nations children with Registered Indian status were more likely than those without Registered Indian status to reside with a lone parent (44% versus 35%).

In 2005, the median annual income of the First Nations people aged 15 and over in Canada was lower than that of the non-Aboriginal population. The median income of First Nations people in 2005 was \$14,517, about \$11,000 lower than the figure for the non-Aboriginal population (\$25,955). This gap was similar in 2000. (Statistics Canada, 2006)

Table 4.1. Statistics Canada Housing Conditions, 2006



(Statistics Canada, 2006)

Robert Laboucane (2010), a columnist for *Windspeaker* stated, “Today, 54 per cent of all Aboriginal children are in the care of government agencies” (para.15). He further remarked, “The Aboriginal student dropout rate, nationally, before grade 12 is currently at 51 per cent. Students who have the most difficulty in schools are those who have experienced a long history of discrimination, subjugation and prejudice” (para. 21-22). Today there are 518 schools on First Nations reserves in Canada. This number should be a factor in understanding the correlation between gaps in social, economic and education between First Nations and the rest of Canada. It is reasonable to think that narrowing the gap in education is integral in improving the social and economic strength of Aboriginal people and their communities and reduce the disparity between First Nations communities and schools and their provincial counterparts. (Laboucane, 2010, para. 3).

Provincial schools are paid more than double that of on reserve schools for student tuition. Over the past 10 years these on-reserve schools: education funding increased 19 per cent, while in the same period provincial systems funding increased 45 per cent. In 2006-07, the Elementary/Secondary Education Program supported... on average \$2,000 less per student than provincial student funding. (Laboucane, 2010, para. 9-10)

T4SSP holds this same perspective as they wish to advocate where other political bodies have failed to do. These families have been lobbying their representatives with their concerns about their children. The Elders and Knowledge Keepers of Treaty 4 Territory and the CLAN take the stance with their 'Nation Builders' vision that it is at the heart of positive and healthy child development to develop a positive sense of their identity. It is a common hope to accomplish that every child in Treaty 4 Territory would know who they are and where they come from as part of their identity by age seven.

It is absolutely contradictory that the government states the FNSSP is a key component to Reforming First Nation Education Initiative, which is setting the foundation for long-term reform of First Nation education. The FNSSP is aligned with the Government's so-called long-term goal of providing First Nation youth on-reserve with access to a quality education that encourages them to stay in school and graduate with the skills they need to enter the labour market in order to pursue their career aspirations. This was tongue in cheek as the long-term goal does not correlate with the government's actions. This is a perfect example of an invalid relationship that is not built with any empathy or intent of sustainability. It is systemic oppression meant to continue to hold the power that it always has in the federal hands.

The federal government claims that the Human Rights Act applies only to the delivery of government services, and not to the funding decisions that ultimately determine the kind and quality of services that can be provided. Nationally, however, the education system as a whole is failing Aboriginal students.

So here is how it works: First you create a funding gap, and then you end up with a real readiness gap. This, in turn, gives the government, our country and Aboriginal people an achievement gap and then, of course, we end up with the terrible socio-economic gap.

(Laboucane, 2010, para.6,7 & 13)

Laboucane makes a strong statement that I would say is a commonly affirmed belief by T4SSP and Treaty 4 First Nations communities and schools. He states, “First Nations are asking no more and no less than being allowed to benefit from a quality education that is comparable to that of all other Canadian children. Despite the importance of education in improving prospects and reducing poverty among the nations, hundreds of marginalized Aboriginal communities, federal, provincial and Aboriginal governments have all failed to address these most serious difficulties” (para. 24-25).

Jimmy Ryan (2011) wrote an APECT Resource paper for the FSIN discussing promising practices in education for First Nations students. Some of what he shared from a personal communication was alarming although not surprising. Ryan’s discussion with Gerry Hurton, Executive Director of the FSIN Education and Training Secretariat, revealed “that currently First Nations schools in Saskatchewan are funded at approximately two-thirds of provincial schools and at one-third of the funding provided for Francophone schools that honour French language and culture (personal communication, October 4, 2011 as cited in Ryan, 2011, p.4).

Michael Mendelson (2008) of the Caledon Institute of Social Policy discussed this issue of Indian and Northern Affairs now Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada and their blatant stance of ignorance as to the apparent education disparity.

INAC's figures show a level of funding for instructional services per student that ranges between \$5,500 and \$7,500. The Pan-Canadian Education Indicators Project (PCEIP 2003) shows a range of per student expenditures from \$6,800 to \$8,400 across Canada. Although the PCEIP data are not directly equivalent, they provide a sense, at least in terms of order of magnitude, of what provincial jurisdictions are spending on elementary and secondary education per student. Because of a number of high cost factors such as isolated location, high levels of socio-economic need and high proportions of special needs students in First Nation and Inuit, one study conducted for INAC concluded that per student for First Nations would likely exceed provincial averages [Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2005b: 48].

(p. 9)

I had to disagree with Mendelson (2008) as I think the Department (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada or AANDC) is living in a self-perpetuating dream world that is receiving legalization from the Federal government. I do not agree with Mendelson (2008) that "the Department's confidence in the parity of its funding is misplaced, since it simply does not know" (p. 9). He goes on to say there is "no regular data collected to compare provincial and federal education funding levels, nor is there any mechanism in the budget-setting process for First Nations education to ensure that funding levels are indeed comparable to those in provinces" (p. 9-10). I do not believe this to be the case. AANDC and the Federal government purposefully added to the

bureaucratic tangled web to firm up their power and systemic oppression with First Nations.

4.2 Relationships

My intent and purpose when working with people was to engage and further assess the nature of the relationship(s) to then plan for the needs to build connections and relationships. This assessment generally led me toward one of four categories: lay the foundation to prepare for future relationships and connections, re-establish and reconcile relationships, re-establish and ignite stale-dated relationships or build and nurture new relationships and connections. Many would say this seems like networking and to a point it is except for the focus. 'Networking' imitates business and garners value from association and socioeconomic and positional power and authority with emphasis on outcome and has the goal of self, while 'Relationship-ing' imitates social systems and garners value on human need with the emphasis on process and has the goal of resource sharing and interdependence. As Rogers (1975) found, "over the years, however, the research keeps piling up, and it points strongly to the conclusion that a high degree of empathy in a relationship is possibly one of the most potent factors in bringing about change and learning" (p. 3).

I think both have purpose, however, with relationships it comes down to significance and security or impact, quality and purpose of the connection and communication. As Judith Lee (1994) puts it "we write as we speak and as we attempt to live, in authentic communication. We are known even as we seek to know" (p. xii). As T4SSP is an educational organization with the mission of learning specific to Treaty 4 Territory, I made it my responsibility to assess the dynamic inter-relationships in my practice and the specific influence and impact on learning.

I came to understand regardless of area and scope there was a commonality in that we were all interested in two key goals when we came together and everyone seemed to evaluate the opportunities presented for relationships and connections: preparing our children for the world and preparing the world for our children. This establishment in the early stages of engagement of a common goal leads to a foundation of making sense of how each member of the connection or relationship relates to one another in their perspective of why they should become involved, remain involved or alter their nature of involvement with one another.

For one of the Principal (School Administrators) meetings I created a tool for of community engagement. It was a general socio-gram which was presented for the principals as a visual tool to assist with their assessment and understanding of their relationships within their communities and the nature of those relationships. I described it briefly as my time was limited, and I know it was not understood as I would expect for the subject because it was not fully understood as significant to their other responsibilities and activities. If properly introduced, supported and implemented as an information gathering tool for T4SSP, the 'Relationship Map' as I titled it, would have far reaching qualities of assessment and implementation for all relationships which affects schools and their programming; what is working, what is not and some opportunities for changing the existing to the desired. The Rogerian approach "indicates that therapist's attitude rather than their knowledge, theories, or techniques facilitate a personality change in the client" (as cited in Singer, 2001, The Nature of Empathy section, para. 1).

It was a simple visual exercise, yet the complexity in understanding the possible usefulness would have required further sharing in understanding the various components of the learning environment. This further sharing would have highlighted the particular

focus on an undervalued and underrated, yet empirically supported facet; dynamic engagement and empathy in relationships. I think if there was a greater focus on the quality and impact of these relationships it would cultivate in schools the ability to assist communities and our children in navigating and understanding their own relationships. This perceptive navigation of relationships is a crucial skill many adults are lacking today, both in a personal and professional context.

Empathy has two faces: the esthetic and the personal (Gauss, 1973 as cited in Singer, 2001). On the esthetic dimension empathy is visual. The personal dimension is more than just knowing what we see. Empathy is a vicarious experience in which the empathizer ‘tastes’ the recipients’ experience (Zderad, 1969 as cited in Singer, 2001). As the empathy process occurs the person who empathizes, abandons himself temporarily; he relives in himself the emotions of another person (Ehmann, 1971 as cited in Singer, 2001). Empathy is a bridge from the objective to the subjective (Katz, 1963 as cited in Singer, 2001). Empathy requires living as well as knowing. If sympathy requires compassion, empathy adds to the formula also passion.

(as cited in Singer, 2001, The Nature of Empathy section, para. 1).

T4SSP is an agency highly focused on pedagogy (the art, science or profession of teaching) and specifically in areas of assessment and implementation of instructional strategies. They are always learning about learning. My challenge at the beginning was first find the nature and identity of social work within the activities I was responsible for and then explain to those I worked with the strength and scope of possibilities for social work within these activities. It was here I began to unpack the width and breadth of scope for possible avenues within each activity for social work and drill down to the nature of

the relationships. I needed to critically evaluate engagement and empathy as a few focal points for my scope of inquiry. It was then I learned to elaborate to others the complexity of the field of view with the significance and reasons for pursuit of the specific focus in familiar and often new language. In turn, I learned new ways to develop my field and scope of work within a macro, mezzo and micro context that was always adapting and further shaping my own identity as a social worker in an educational multidisciplinary team.

5. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND CHALLENGES

What I encountered regarding my own value-base and that of the communities I practiced within, was a clarification of self through critical analysis of values and their importance in relationships. Values and the description of values have changed over the last century. Values can be described as a societal set, standards and principles we hold ourselves and others to embrace and practice, they also emerge from our beliefs and are therefore are morally based. They are reflected in our actions that directly indicate the qualities we possess and the beliefs we hold. There are significant differences between values and virtues yet one cannot exist without the other being present I believe. Heenan (2007) describes values as something to have and virtues as something “to be” (para. 89 & 91). Both are the groundwork for the person we are and what we believe, they are an internalized understanding of ourselves within our perceived reality.

What I felt as challenging in this regard was the instable process in most implementation strategies. Drilling down to understand the valuing process instead of teaching the values themselves would be a place to begin. As I observed, I further developed my own set of reasons for challenges with this value programming implementation, for example with culture and language in many Treaty 4 Territory

schools and communities. The valuing process is an internal process whereas value-based programming is often externally driven and delivered in most schools. In the context of learning the individual needs to begin to understand and identify themselves without restrictively defining themselves as an unchangeable entity. Internalization of the value process is when a person begins to see their natural self prior to the development and growing into their spiritual self.

Part and parcel of understanding and valuing communication and genuine relationships is to understand that empathy is related to our view, our perspective and therefore tied to our value process. Now to be clear, values can emerge from cultural norms but they do not become a filter for our personal lens without a spiritual base. This filter leads to the appearance of other actions and their quality, in turn, is a direct reflection of this moral foundation. It is a difficult area to provide more than discussion around. If one begins to try to measure and quantify values you are ultimately judging, measuring and attempting to quantify beliefs and going down a road one does not want to go down if the goal is to indeed build and re-establish or nurture relationships. Compassion should not become a 'thing' in our materialistic and quantitatively oriented culture. We are damaging our values when we deconstruct them past the human essence which carries and brings them forth to only the scientifically proven. The gap is widening in the study of ways of knowing.

I found a vast difference between what exists in First Nations schools as compared to what existed in the area of learning shared by community members and those I worked alongside. Whether indigenous or western, and not too long ago, there was a dual purpose for children to attend school as well as a dual goal for parents to send them. These goals were to prepare children for the world with basic skills and knowledge and to

help children develop their character toward insight into their talents and strengths for productivity and positive societal impact in adulthood. My values, now entrenched and built on my beliefs, are to an extent a result of my home and school experiences. The separation which occurred out of frustration from clashes between belief systems has had a disastrous effect on one of the influential environments for our youth.

While the curriculum developers of the 1960's may have sought to illuminate indoctrination they simply traded the fear of indoctrination in the old virtues with indoctrination in the ideology of moral relativism. The outcome has been that young people, regardless of their social, racial and economic background, have absorbed the unmistakable message that right and wrong are relative, that they must not be judgmental, that what is right for one person may be wrong for another. Right and wrong are personal values, never objective, and always dependent upon time, place and circumstance. Ironically, it can be argued that there is more indoctrination in schools today than at any time in the past.

(Heenan, 2007, para. 119 & 120)

Values or virtues as Heenan (2007) points out are “consistent, universal and transcultural, multi-ethnic and cross all lines of race and creed” (para. 66). This comes full circle to the quality of our connections and relationships. It is core to our learning and teaching cycle for everyone. Our values are what binds us to one another, guides our thoughts, directs our actions and gauges the importance relationships have to our quality of life. Once community and families have taken their beliefs in mutually responsive and respectful ways, reflected these in the programming of the school, then the programming is their own as a whole and not exclusive to certain environments or settings. This grounds the values in a valuing process, which can be continually revisited and sustained

through dialogue and discussion. Heenan (2007) states his understanding of how the context of values has been eroded.

The vacuum left by the loss of objective meaning in the vocabulary and language of character has been replaced by the word values which has no universal objective meaning. The noun value is subjective and means what the speaker assumes it means. For this reason most discussions on values are frustrating because they are undermined by the absence of a universal acceptance of any given value. Consequently, a traditional objective virtue such as courage is no longer the possession of an individual and part of his or her character. Courage ...has become the subjective, even if informed, opinion of an observer. Character is reduced to little more than a matter of opinion.

(para. 129-132 & 134)

We need values for all areas of our life. We need to have commitment and diligence and a good work ethic at home as well as at our workplace. We must be cognizant of balance and priorities but will emerge a more unified and whole individual if we are not different people adjusting to the setting in which we find ourselves. If we attempt to practice a different set of values from home to work we run the risk of separating others from us and us from ourselves. Values can either bring congruence and convergence to relationships or dissimilarity and divergence. Strong values in action bring synchronization to relationships and ensure emphasis on strengths and commonalities while respecting diversity of the individual and equality amongst the whole. Strong values grounded in emphasizing strengths and common ground of individuals, or shared experiences, are powerful when practiced consistently and believed sincerely. Our values model for our children how relationships are built, formed, re-

established, reconciled, healed and nurtured to become sustaining aspects of our lives.

The children are a mirror of our own beliefs, practices and modeling, any inconsistency and disparity is a result of what we are showing them.

I learned the greatest piece of knowledge during my academic career while practicing here at T4SSP; how to be the same professionally and personally without compromise, ethical conflict and with greater overall awareness. This does not come as a cost or caution for me during practice, instead a shift in my perception of strength. My perception as a social worker unearthing the strengths and challenges in communities and relationships, allowed me an increased awareness of my beliefs and perceptions. This alignment between my professional self and my personal self developed my overall character. As Dr. Martin Luther King (1963) said “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they are judged not by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character” (King, 1963, para. 20). I say this is still a common goal for parents and should be a goal of our educators and all who concern themselves with the education of our youth. The outcome for great content of character includes an emphasis on our valuing process.

Freire (1970) makes known throughout his work his philosophy and perspective that instead of turning toward true freedom and deliverance the oppressed often themselves become the oppressors. This thought should be a warning to those who are reforming and formulating education plans for First Nations which include value programming. It will take mindfulness in the approach to not program, yet nurture and grow these young people with more than academics and knowledge. This nurturing requires increased focus on others and less time spent on ourselves.

I state the focus on relationships and our purpose in relationships as equal, though varied. Seeking to change the perspective from 'pride' to 'humility', from ideas of identity, which are separate, toward ideas of identity which draw us together.

It is a reminder of what is important. It places first things first. And the good news is that it does not cost a mint of money or attempt to implementation theoretical constructions that probably don't work in practice. Children make up ...100% of the future. If we want to renew our society, we must raise up a generation of young people who have strong character. If we wish to do that we have two responsibilities: Model good character in our own lives and intentionally foster character formation in our young people.

(Heenan, 2007, para. 158-162)

It is documented and accepted that relationships help us grow and develop. Relationships not only help us, but we need and require healthy relationships to grow and develop. As Saleebey (2001) says "humans can only come into being through a creative and emergent relationship with others...there can be no discovery and testing of one's powers, no knowledge, no heightening of one's awareness and internal strengths without outside relationships" (p.12). He sees dialogue as a tool to affirm the importance of others and the process through which we are healed.

The common occurrence I found during my practice relates to the idea that any time short-term objectives in behavioral and measurable terms are required for work plans or outlines, the pressure for performance outcomes removes the humanity aspect of how we begin to relate to one another in any relationship. Ultimately it means the professional should never speak without feeling. Certainly the stress to 'think' before one speaks has

been drilled into us, but has the same amount of attention been spent on ‘feeling’ before one speaks and then converging both important streams toward action.

6. FINAL CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Goals and Objectives Outcomes

As I discussed earlier, I was able to form three main goals or objectives for my practicum proposal and below I will go into each a bit further to demonstrate the outcomes I felt I experienced with each and why.

I was given a major project for the better part of my practicum. It was called “Building a Broader Community”. It was a “friendship” among the White Bear Education Complex, Ocean Man Education Centre, Pheasant Rump First Nation and the South East Cornerstone School Division (SECS) and T4SSP. My main role was to engage and facilitate the Friendship. This was a relationship emerged from the .2 secondment of one of the T4SSP staff. I was to facilitate meetings, work on planning and project refinement and revisions, keep all players up to date, ensure all communication was clarified and generally work on project development. There were existing ideas of relationships among these communities through a variety of interactions, both professional and personal in nature. It was part of the challenge to create a stimulating environment that would nurture personal and professional relationships.

There were agreed upon strategies for each relationship. Between Ocean Man and Stoughton the focus was ‘Strengthening the Bridge’; supporting necessary student transitions between communities and schools. Ocean Man students attend their own school until grade eight when they transition to Stoughton Central High School to complete the secondary education. This transition has been less than successful given the data presented on First Nation graduation.

Between Arcola and Pheasant Rump First Nation the focus was ‘Strengthening the Relationship’; enhancing school and the broader community connection and feelings of belonging for students. Pheasant Rump First Nation and Arcola had a relationship where historical experience was that of upheaval and distress and little movement at other times. All Pheasant Rump students are bused to Arcola, approximately 90 children. There was a newly appointed Chief and Council on Pheasant Rump and a Principal in Arcola who was easy to work with, there is only one First Nations teacher in Arcola and most Arcola community members do not have close relationships with Pheasant Rump community members.

Finally, the focus between White Bear First Education Complex and Carlyle Schools was ‘Managing the Gateway’; addressing the reasons for student mobility and increased levels of transfer between schools. This relationship was interesting in that both communities provide K-12, although there are many White Bear students who go back and forth between the schools. The primary focus here was to establish what protocol was in place and what could be done to analyze and strengthen the “Gateway” between the schools to prevent any extensive student movement and increase stability.

I worked with T4SSP staff throughout my practicum but mainly worked independently during the latter part of my practice. Specific members of the T4SSP Team I worked with were: Lori Whiteman; Program Director, Cheryl Mantei; Curriculum & Assessment, Vera Tourangeau; Community Engagement, David Riddle; Instructional Consultant, Deni Miclea; School Success Planning, Yolande Howrie; Communications and others of the Treaty 4 Student Success Program Team.

All strategies presented to the partners for ‘Building a Broader Community’ were to emerge from the T4SSP values-based framework and perspective. These were to build

upon the Seven Teachings: Courage, Respect, Truth, Love, Humility, Wisdom, and Honesty. Although this came under some fire as a 'Cree' Values Framework in one area, it was a place for us to start. The main idea was to begin introducing an ethical framework based on common ground values for educational programming within diverse schools and First Nations.

The days as outlined were a result of the secondment between SECSO and T4SSP. There were some points of the project SECSO recommended which were adjusted after meeting with the T4SSP team. For the 'Shared Canvas Series' with White Bear First Nations Cree Artist, Michael Lonechild, all classes for grades five, four and five, five and six for Stoughton Central School and Ocean Man took place in Stoughton. I attended the Gallery Opening for this collaboration in December. Classes were held at Arcola School and for White Bear and Carlyle; the sessions took place in their respective schools.

The project was extremely well received in the age range delivered and it was interesting with the pop-art Michael worked with as part of the curriculum. I was able to spend a good deal of time with Michael Lonechild and T4SSP videographer and brother to Michael, Ken Lonechild. I was also able to work a great deal in the three communities with the beginnings of Strategy 5 and met a wonderfully diverse group of resourceful individuals. As you will see illustrated in table 6.1, the strategies which I assisted in developing during my practicum were:

Table 6.1 Strategy Table

Strategy		Days	Detail
Strategy One	Board Engagement	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interfacing, Think Days • Explore Opportunities
Strategy Two	First Nation Métis Advisory Board	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FNMA Board Development, Direction • Development of historical timeline in community • Network Development for the Broader Community
Strategy Three	Strategic Planning	1.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings regarding Strategizing for T4SSP services, Development and Implementation, Consultation
Strategy Four	Shared Canvas	8-9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation with Michael Lonechild, T4SSP Artist-in-Residence • Additional information from children artists-bios • Display work in schools after gallery shows
Strategy Five	Supporting Community Knowledge Keepers/ Elders Program	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gathering Community Knowledge Keepers and Elders contacts • Initiating consultation process for Cultural Protocol and resource development for each school; appropriate, expectations
Strategy Six	Community Liaison-Outdoor/ Cultural Trek	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on building relationships and smooth transitions • Build on Health & Wellness Curriculum
Strategy Seven	Community Literacy	7.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with families/communities to support Literacy Attainment • Sharing of Kits/T4SSP Literacy (Running records, Parfleche, Word Walls) • Early Learning PLC
		39	

Out of Strategy 5 came discussions of a Heritage Fair with the grade ten teacher in Arcola. This class had a dynamic for the historical balance as well necessary skill level for project work. The Principal Kevin Hengen and the grade ten teacher, Ms. Sparvier, were going to continue to meet and plan the ‘learning on the land’ aspects of the course Native Studies 10. This course has met with a great degree of dissatisfaction and this pilot application of tapping into the local archives as well as local historians and Elders, would bring a relevant, fresh and updated spin to ‘Teaching Treaties in the Classroom’ as well as Native Studies 10 for Arcola. The primary goal was to build relationships and

this would engage students creatively while informing in a personal manner some of the history of Pheasant Rump First Nation as well as the town of Arcola. It would aim at developing a historical timeline for both Pheasant Rump and Arcola community members who have a rich, shared historical experience from very different yet equally important perspectives. A main idea was to change the way students learned their own history. The goal was to increase the student's ability to learn 'from' the Knowledge Keepers and Elders' instead of 'about' them. As well the 'learning on the land' was the incorporation of values-based knowledge with historical context and an experiential learning modality to ultimately increase student engagement and retention. Another goal, especially in Arcola, was to increase parental involvement and interest as well as feelings of valuable contributions to the education of their children. Nina Wilson (T4SSP contract writer), Ken Lonechild and various Elders from the three First Nations were also part of another aspect of Strategy 5 which also paired with Strategy 6 in developing locally-based literacy resources.

What I found when I began work on this project was: Engagement with the primary project individuals was collaborative and the skilled use of empathy was necessary to any successful relationship building. Focus on developing an advanced level of rapport to further assist with the engagement process and developing a trusting and open professional relationship that nurtured an environment of possibilities. A well planned engagement process was necessary to build optimism around building a different future from what is anticipated within the context of what has been. Again, I was challenged to be an agent of change on many different levels and in mainly a preparatory manner as I would not be there to see the outcomes. I was required to build an exceptional foundation for future working relationships.

Did I achieve my learning goals and objectives with T4SSP while focusing on community engagement and community development and did I develop a sense of my professional identity as a social worker and my own technique and style?

Learning Objective One:

Gain graduate level skills, knowledge and values in social work practice, within rural First Nation Schools and communities while working with the Treaty 4 Student Success Program.

1. I utilized an Advanced Multi-Systemic Approach (AMS) to practice throughout my practicum which consists of four main areas: (a) Ecological Systems perspective, (b) Biopsychosocial perspective, (c) Strengths Empowerment Perspective, (d) Social Constructionism.
2. I focused on advanced engagement and rapport-building skills with an advanced understanding of empathy. In doing so empathy contributes to authenticity, expression and exploration.
3. I utilized assessment skills at micro, mezzo and macro levels.

The use of the AMS Approach gave me a framework to gather, conceptualize and analyze the multi-systemic data of the tasks I was assigned which involved areas of the political, economical, social, legal, and physical environment. Due to the unique nature of the rural settings and communities (which involved multiple dimensions of involvement with individuals, groups, organizations, agencies and communities, both First Nation and non-First Nations) the need to understand the components of the AMS Approach at a graduate level was an absolute necessity.

The AMS Approach produced valuable dialogue and in-depth information from individuals and groups of different backgrounds with extremely different cultural and

personal histories to ultimately develop a multi-level, multi-community, multi-cultural, diverse, dynamic project. I utilized Lewin's Change Theory when thinking about the tasks within the project; core to unfreezing the present dynamics of the interrelationships meant creating the environment(s) which allowed beliefs and values to be challenged.

Ecological Systems perspective was needed to assess the inclusion of particular communities and environments for this project. Miley et al (2004), list the following components arising from an ecosystems perspective on assessment which I followed a great deal:

Assessing structures: The two most important elements to be assessed are power and closeness. Questions to be asked in this regard are who has the power, what connections are working, and what connections are missing?

Assessing interactions: An assessment of interactions examines how people and their environments relate and evolve.

Assessing thinking and feeling: An assessment of thinking and feeling is necessary to understand the cognitive and effective factors influencing human behavior.

Assessing cultural influences: An assessment of cultural influences is necessary because cultural identities of a system influence the way it interacts with other systems.

Assessing spiritual dimensions: The importance of the use of spirituality in social work has of late become very prominent.

Assessing physical environments: This is an assessment of the influence of the physical environment on client functioning.

(p. 250-258)

Biopsychosocial perspective provided increased insight into the internal needs of the individuals especially the primary project players. Much of the focus was on the complex interrelationships and historical context. My role was also in assisting with preparing the players for the process of change and further ensuring their role in that change. In cases where I was able to follow up with some of the relationships and work it was important to gauge the initial expectation with perceived outcomes.

Strengths Empowerment Perspective provided a lens for resource management as all settings are rural communities and rural First Nations. With this lens, taking into account the historical context, the need for creativity and ingenuity is necessary to ensure success of any new or developing project. Increasing the awareness of options and choices these communities have will lead to the success of their realizing ownership and primary involvement over the projects and change process.

Social Constructionism added to my ability to see how the project players and those with vested interest in the project defined themselves and their environment; different people attribute different meaning to the same events even if from the same community or same family. This is vital in examining how people construct meaning with language and traditional cultural beliefs, as this project dealt with a 'friendship' and sharing of resources between First Nations and the neighboring provincial school division and its schools. This was necessary in the assessment and development of the project intricacies and resource management.

"Building a Broader Community Project" as my project work was broadly named, included communications and facilitation of meetings. These meetings defined project purpose and activities which included members who were diverse; Community Leaders, School Staff, International Artist, local individuals and organizations both First Nations

and non-First Nations, provincial school division staff, and others. There was a need for facilitation of meetings and advanced communications with various players for evaluation of their level of contribution to each project, duration and intensity of their involvement and necessary groundwork for their involvement in the projects.

My proficiency increased with interpersonal skills, communications, cultural competence and responsiveness in the field. I performed duties within the T4SSP, outside of this main project on multiple levels such as: Information Meeting with Treaty 4 Chief and Council's, Elder's Forum, involvement with Principal/Director Retreat, consultant Barrie Bennett Parent Workshop, Student Workshop at Treaty 4 Gathering with some information collection from participating classes, on-site facilitation of Craig Benjamin of Amnesty International speaking at local high school to Treaty 4 schools. There were many opportunities for me to increase my knowledge, use my skills and clarify my values.

Learning Objective Two:

Improve my knowledge and understanding of adolescent youth focusing on community engagement and community development.

1. My observance and discussion returned to studying the quality of relationships; engagement, empathy, authenticity.
2. My work with the "Building a Broader Community" project: (a) I researched around curriculum and assessment, (b) I researched Teaching Treaties in the Classroom; improving on this provincially mandated curriculum focus, adding relevance and context, (c) I studied and practiced advanced communication skills; creating environments which produce effortless engagement and promise an open atmosphere built on genuine rapport.

3. I worked with incorporating Barrie Bennett strategies utilized in student engagement and participation with regard to information gathering.

I did not experience as much progress in this objective as much of my work focused on interaction with school administration at the division and local levels, community leadership, decision makers, power brokers and other adults and studying these interrelationships within the systems. My research around curriculum led me into lengthy discussions with staff around reporting and assessments and improving quality data gathering. I observed with disappointment the importance of Teaching Treaties in the Classroom and relevant local history was not a priority of many schools, although it is provincially mandated. There is so much that our general Saskatchewan population does not know about our own local history. For example many adults and children alike have no knowledge of the Pass and Permit system which existed for half a century oppressing First Nations people.

Canada imposed an illegal pass system on First Nation people from 1885 through to the 1950`s. At the time, First Nation parents had had their children taken away by the state and by the church and locked in Industrial Schools. The Industrial School era was followed by the Residential School era. The Pass System allowed Indian Agents/Affairs to deny and or restrict parental visits to these parents. Secondly, the Pass System was imposed to keep the First Nations away from towns and villages. And, finally, it kept First Nations from crossing the USA/Canadian border, and to keep First Nations from stealing horses. First Nation people who were found to be off the reserve without a Pass could be punished as a vagrant under the provisions of Section 207 and 208 of the Criminal Code.

(T4SSP, 2011, p.10)

Learning Objective Three:

Increase my understanding of collaborative approaches and linkages within and across agencies and organizations, and the impact on development and implementation of locally driven programming in First Nations communities; what often works and what does not, while developing a sense of my professional identity as a social worker and my own technique and style.

All of the knowledge and understanding for this objective surrounded work during my “Building a Broader Community” project and the 6 distinct community’s specific relationships I focused on during the engagement and assessment periods:

1. Stoughton School and town and Ocean Man First Nation.
 - Building the Bridge: Supporting necessary student transitions between communities and schools.
2. Arcola School and town and Pheasant Rump First Nation.
 - Strengthening the Relationship: Enhancing school and the broader community connection and feelings of belonging for students.
3. Carlyle School and town and White Bear First Nation.
 - Managing the Gateway: Addressing the reasons for student mobility and increased levels of transfer between schools.

The town of Stoughton and Ocean Man First Nation required the focus on strengthening the transition from one school to another and the building of relationships. This transition has been less than successful as it is apparent by the number of grade twelve graduates Stoughton has experienced who are from Ocean Man. The project based work was to accomplish tangible ties and program sharing which could be further built on or developed into the future.

The next relationship was that of Pheasant Rump First Nation and Arcola. Previous Chief Olive McArthur of Pheasant Rump, when unhappy with student achievement and treatment in Arcola School a few years back, pulled all the Pheasant Rump students making the racial and relationship tension an unavoidable situation for the school to address. At the time I began working with this community I had to quickly engage a newly appointed Chief and Council and further build on existing relationships between these individuals and the Arcola staff. I spent a great deal of time with these two communities focusing on the “Shared Canvas Series”, “Knowledge Keepers and Elders Resources”, “Heritage Fair”, and all parts of the overall “Building a Broader Community” project work.

I was not as active within the Carlyle school. The time I did get to spend in the White Bear school and the work regarding this relationship between schools was more of a knowledge building exercise. I attended meetings with other T4SSP and the principal of White Bear, Murray Bird to discuss some of his concerns. This knowledge further helped me to understand why some of the concerns he had are ongoing and existing. It also helped me to understand difficulties and challenges with expectations of programming, sustainability, outcomes and maintenance are alike from First Nation school to provincial school in many ways. Mainly in that it is often individuals and community that make the difference, not always funding and structure.

Collaborative approaches and linkages were significantly developed via my role for the T4SSP project “Building a Broader Community” and its many facets. I utilized skilled delivery of change-focused questions, task, role, responsibility and expectation clarification, reframing, verbal skills for promoting communication, checking

understanding, reflective responding, enhancing motivation, managing follow-up and dissemination of information.

6.2 Professional Identity

As for my professional identity as a social worker and understanding my own technique and style, I learned advanced engagement skills are lacking across professions and becoming absent in communications. Knowledge and understanding of identity, both personal and professional, is the internalization of something akin to the Multi-Systemic Approach to practice. A change in any of the sub-systems impacts the whole, and the “whole is greater than the sum of the parts”. The quality of our lives is dependent on the quality of our relationships.

When we understand how to not separate who we are and everything we have experienced with who we have become professionally and what we are capable of in our work, we see we are exactly where we need to be and possess far more knowledge, skills and values than we ever realized we possessed. I have learned now to not edit myself as I do on my resume for the prospective job or hiring committee, but introspectively see past the unimportant to that which enhances the overall ‘big’ picture.

I learned some of the advanced skills required in successful and meaningful human engagement; empathy, honesty, authenticity, and genuineness. These must precede any policy, programming and non-human focus of the initial meeting and rapport building period. In this age of advancement in technology and the desire for increased efficiency and effectiveness in all design and performance, the engagement and rapport building stage must not be overlooked at something which can be fast-tracked, skipped or overlooked in its weight and importance to the outcome and desired change we hope for

in 'reforming education' or any other community or macro, mezzo or micro level initiative, action or intervention.

6.2. Recommendations

Upon reflection of all I have shared I add a few recommendations or perhaps more along the lines of shared possibilities.

- Increase the distribution and access to resources for First Nations which can assist these communities in building collaboration from within the community and with other local communities. AANDC should increase funds directly to First Nations for development of local and regional development toward community organization and development.
- Increase the accountability of federal departments for decreasing educational transfer amounts and maintaining the status quo with disparities in tuition.
- Increase the accountability of AANDC in disparity research and study between what their department and ministry dedicate to Education on –reserve per student with what the provincial amount is, and what they plan to do to address this for their next fiscal year. There is a high degree of micro-managing with AANDC and their administration of dollars with the First Nations yet less accountability from AANDC to First Nations regarding what they are contributing to increase outcomes of First Nations on-reserve students.
- Increase access by rural First Nations communities and schools to specialized professionals outside of the education-related field. While urban areas and large centres can afford to have specialized schools unfortunately rural areas cannot. Rural First Nations must be able to administrate the best broad scope delivered education

they can to a broad population. A caring and collaborative connected community is indicative of a healthy environment for student success.

- Increase use of multidisciplinary teams with specialized knowledge and skills in areas of rural and rural First Nations community schools. Specialists in different fields of work with community, group and individual have a broader role than service satisfaction on a micro level but instead with the broader overall community.
- Broaden the idea of education and push the status quo as parents, family and friends of children who are attending our rural schools and specifically our First Nations schools. Be part of the change in the nature of education in rural schools, the width, breadth and scope and range of these schools to be as rich a learning centre for the whole community, a place all feel a part of, all feel responsible for, all feel they are contributing to and benefiting from. It is not simply about revitalizing culture and language, it is about design and implementation of a living relevant reflection of the resources and uniqueness of each community who support lifelong learning and the implementation of a values process in that learning.
- Encourage and support schools in providing activities that will enable students to promote and practice the values of interdependence and interconnectedness. Develop human resources which can assist in providing students with greater understanding on how to improve the quality of human life, for themselves as well as others. This is the teaching of stewardship. That we are all responsible for each other as well as the world we live in.
- Promote empowerment and strength perspective to students with concepts, values and skills in genuine, authentic and truthful relationships which further promote wisdom

regarding subjective and objective thinking and reasoning of our relativity to one another.

- Examine existing programs and curriculum for learning activities which build and foster value concepts, attitudes and behavior that displays love in action and service to others. Experiential opportunities and learning to provide students practice arenas for development of these and further the attributes of integrity, empathy, caring and sharing.
- T4SSP revisit their organizational strategy. I believe there is often an imbalance between the staff's needs and that of the communities they serve.

Organize, organize, and organize! This is the lesson we derive from organizers like Si Kahn (1982) and Saul Alinsky (1971). Each organization...has to perfect the art of internal and external effectiveness. This requires a delicate balance between attending to the needs of their members and completing tasks. Two threats assail organizational effectiveness. One is the lack of attention to members' needs for personal attention (Speer, Hughey, Gensheimer, Adams-Leavitt, 1995). The other is the lack of attention to task-orientation. We have to be good at both. Without attending to members' voices we neglect relational and personal wellness. Without attending to specific tasks we neglect the aims of the movement.

(Prilleltensky, 2010, Preparing for Action section, para. 7)

The system is greater than the sum of its parts. All the individual parts are never separate. This would be like removing ourselves from humanity to try and define

ourselves. Who we are and the values we hold, which are the base for the choices we perceive and the decisions we make, are integrated and intertwined with our relationships with others and the systems within which we exist. These relationships are dynamic and complex and impact our identity and values. Therefore our quality of relationships is a direct correlation to our quality of life. We exist in reciprocal relationships with each other and our perceptions stem from values and beliefs that are not intrinsic but instead developed and internalized over time through reflection and spiritual growth.

Knowledge, skills and values create a whole. They cannot be compartmentalized and examined separate as they synthesize together to form the whole. They are all tied directly to experience and this becomes a dynamic and relative understanding when we begin to look at the significance of the value process in our students and with each other.

We would all do well to adopt Article 1 from the UNESCO, (2002) A Culture of Peace as presented to the United Nations, A/53/243 Fifty-Third Session, Agenda Item 31:

Article 1: A culture of peace is a set of values, attitudes, traditions and modes of Behavior and ways of life based on:

- Respect for life, ending of violence and promotion and practice of non-violence through education, dialogue and cooperation;
- Full respect for the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of States and non-intervention in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any State, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and international law;
- Full Respect for and promotion of all human rights and fundamental freedoms;

- Commitment to peaceful settlement of conflicts;
- Efforts to meet the developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations;
- Respect for and promotion of the right to development;
- Respect for and promotion of equal rights of and opportunities for women and men;
- Respect for and promotion of the rights of everyone to freedom of expression, opinion and information;
- Adherence to the principles of freedom, justice, democracy, tolerance, solidarity, cooperation, pluralism, cultural diversity, dialogue and understanding at all levels of society and among nations and fostered by an enabling national and international environment conducive to peace.

(UNESCO, 2002, p.176)

All I have written are my observations and experiences through a lens of holistic knowledge, skill, values and experience and with the intent and purpose of humbly and honestly relating my perspective both personally and through my academic learning in social work. As Freire stated I am sharing with the thought and ultimately the hope that “To speak a true word is to transform the world.” (Freire, 1970, p.68)

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