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RESEARCH INTO TEACHING



**TEACHING AND LEARNING  
RESEARCH EXCHANGE**

**Creating a Culturally  
Affirming Learning  
Community**

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*The art work in this report is drawn from pictures painted on the walls of Princess Alexandra Community School by Shaw Sanderson, a teacher and participant in the research. It is reproduced here with the permission of the artist and Saskatoon Public Schools.*

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# Executive Summary

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The purpose of this research is to seek to improve the quality of our students' educational experience and our staff members' work experience.

Aboriginal students in Canada are not doing as well in school as the rest of the student population. According to Statistics Canada (2001), very few Aboriginal students graduate from grade 12.

Staff members at Princess Alexandra Community School wanted to make a difference. We hope that if we learned a different way of working with our students and families, the students would be more successful. It appeared to us that the lack of success students experienced in schools corresponded with the lack of acknowledgment of their cultural identity. We hoped that if we could create a culturally affirming school, our students would succeed. A culturally affirming school climate meant more to us than a few beading classes and a dance troupe. We wanted to learn to do "things" in more traditional ways. Over a period of five years we learned about control theory, restitution, traditional teachings, community education and staff development.

The students, parents, community members and we, the staff members have many stories to tell about our successes. The difficult part has been to try to sort out what caused our success. We believe that each of these areas of study (control theory, restitution, Aboriginal teachings, community education, and staff development) have contributed in varying degrees. However, the principles of community education and staff development through transformative learning seem to be the key to our successes.

We have dedicated a chapter to Control Theory and Restitution, and another chapter to Staff Development and Community Education Practices. Our second chapter addresses what we perceive as the cause of our students' failure, namely, residential schools. We will also present First Nations' Teachings as we understand them. Stories have been included as examples of what we learned.

After examining what we learned, we will present the process we used to achieve our goals. Our findings from this study suggest that it is possible to make significant gains in students' academic performances and enhance the climate of a school community while reducing both the workload and stress level that teachers experience.

# Acknowledgements

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We would like to acknowledge a number of individuals who contributed to the completion of this project.

Thirty-two Elders, from six different nations, taught us to see other possibilities. Special thanks goes to Kokum Ina. She volunteered at our school everyday for the last three years.

The staff members at Princess Alexandra Community School who participated in this research project over the last three years have helped to create a better understanding of how to better meet the needs of our students. Sixty some staff members have contributed to this project.

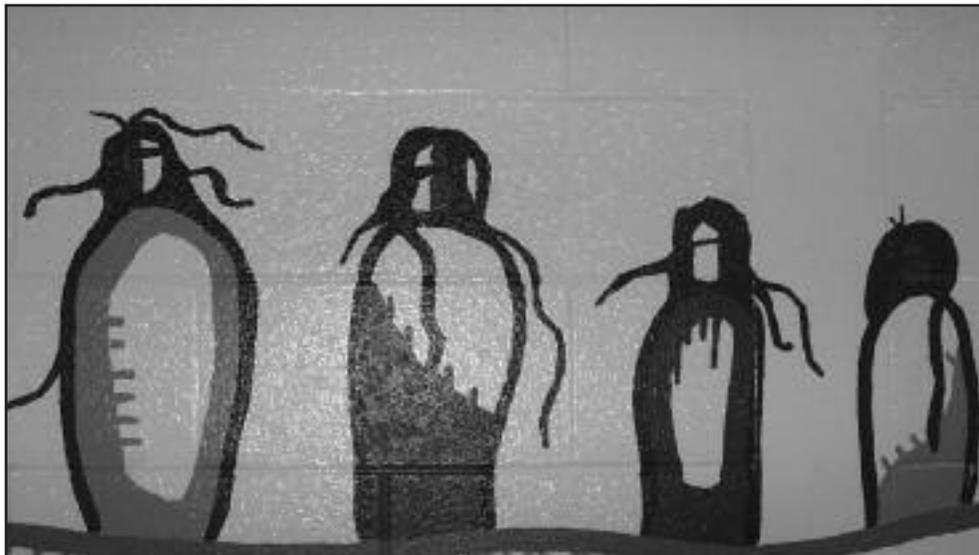
The Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation and the Dr. Stirling McDowell Foundation have been great supporters of teacher-initiated research. Without the generous financial support from the Foundation, this research would not have been possible.

Mrs. Diane Gossen generously supported this project by offering training opportunities for parents, students and staff members. Mrs. Gossen has been working with the Aboriginal community for 25 years. She shared with us the knowledge she has gained during that time.

The most important contributors and supporters of this project were the parents and students at Princess Alexandra Community School. They attended workshops and conferences. They participated in staff meetings. They encouraged us and pointed out the improvements along the way. They were also patient and generous teachers.

# Introduction

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*Our culture is once again thriving. Many ceremonies are being revived with the young taking an active part along with the elders...a new culture has evolved, a culture which has blended remnants of the past with adoptions from a new way of life.*

Elder Pat Deiter McArthur, Plains Cree Nation

## BACKGROUND

In Saskatchewan, current demographic statistics indicate that nearly 40% of Aboriginal people are under the age of 15 (Statistics Canada, 2001). Some projections state that by 2016, 45% of all students entering Kindergarten in the province will be of Aboriginal ancestry. Although the young Aboriginal population in Saskatchewan is growing, the outcomes for First Nations and Métis students have not been realized. In Saskatchewan, the Aboriginal population aged 15-24 years that has completed high school is only 29.8% (Statistics Canada, 2001). Although there have been slight gains, addressing educational attainment for First Nations and Métis students is a major challenge for Saskatchewan. It is still a concern that statistically, a young Aboriginal mother registering her child for Kindergarten faces the reality that her child will most likely be held back at least once during his/her elementary school experience, and if her child graduates from elementary school, he/she is very unlikely to complete grade ten. This is not to blame anyone who works in our provincial schools; however, it is the reality for most Aboriginal families entering the provincial educational system.

The lack of success experienced by Aboriginal students was the driving force behind our desire to learn better ways to serve their needs. It is easy to try something new when you know that what you are doing is not working.

## PURPOSE

We wanted to find a way to increase our students' academic successes while reducing the "stress" level our staff members experienced. We hoped that if we learned more culturally appropriate ways of working with our students and their families, we would be more successful in helping them in the school setting.

## HYPOTHESIS

Before starting our study we assumed that if we adopted Mrs. Diane Gossen's (2001) ideas on Restitution-Self Discipline, we would experience greater success with student management.

## SETTING

Princess Alexandra Community School (PACS) is located in the inner city of Saskatoon, just west of downtown. The school is situated on the busy Avenue H, between 20th and 22nd street. A railway track runs diagonally across Avenue H, just north of the school's main entrance. Over 98% of the students attending Princess Alexandra Community School (PACS) are of Aboriginal ancestry. The Cree Nation makes up the largest number of students at PACS, but the Dene, Anishabe, Saulteaux, Dakota, and Métis nations are also represented.

Many families whose children attend PACS live at or below poverty level. According to information gathered by the City of Saskatoon, 41% of families in the area had an annual income less than \$19,999 in 1996. The average family income in the neighbourhood of Princess Alexandra Community School in 1996 was \$29,973. The same source of information stated that 30% of the adults had less than a grade 9 education, and 40% of the families had English as a second language.

The school is part of the Saskatoon Public School Division. It offers programming from pre-kindergarten to grade eight. Many students take advantage of the free breakfast program offered before school, and the majority of the student body stays for lunch.

During the study period, the enrolment was around 235 students. However the enrolment changes from month to month, being at its lowest in September and reaching its peak in the spring. Historically, the student population has been very transient. We experienced a stabilization of the student population as we implemented ideas discussed in this paper.

Princess Alexandra Community School was one of the first schools in Saskatchewan to be designated a Community School back in 1980. A number of factors contributed to that designation, including the high percentage of Aboriginal families in the area, the level of education of family members, and the high level of transiency and poverty to name a few. As a Community School, PACS receives additional funding from the provincial government.

# SUCCESSSES

This research study took place at Princess Alexandra Community School over the course of the years 2000-2004. The research team was comprised of both staff and parents. The following is the perception of the findings of the research team and the themes that emerged which created successes.

## 1. GREATER PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Like many other schools, we had very low participation in our school parent council at the beginning of our study. It involved five to ten parents out of a possible hundred and thirty. Towards the end of our study, it was common to have one hundred and twenty parents, Elders and community members attend our parent council meetings.

One such meeting was held in January 2002. The temperature was -30 C and the wind was blowing. Most of our parents do not have cars. We were concerned there would be a poor turnout. One hundred and thirty people came. They pulled their kids on toboggans, all bundled-up, and they came. There was one person who the principal did not recognize. He approached the young woman and introduced himself, stating that he didn't think they had met before. She replied that her sister, Claudette, could not come because she was sick and had asked her to represent the family and be ready to help the school. The theme of that meeting was "Strengthening Our Children". Appendix 1 is a point-form summary of the ideas generated that evening. Many of those ideas were implemented the next day. Parents felt valued, heard, and needed.

## 2. DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS' SELF-DISCIPLINE SKILLS

In September 1999, on average, 35 students a day were sent to the school office because of discipline problems. By 2003, we averaged less than one child per week in discipline referrals. Actually, in September of that year, the first child was sent to the office in the third week of September.

Given below is an example of how students were learning to solve their problems:

*In the spring of 2002, a couple of grade 3 boys were sent to the office. They had to wait a few minutes while the principal was on the phone. When he called them into his office the principal asked how he could help them. The boys explained that they had been pushing each other over the sharing of a tire swing. But they went on to say that they had come up with a plan. The principal invited them to share their plan. They proceeded to explain that they would count to 10 and take a turn. At which time the administrator expressed his concern that more conflict could arise over the speed that one could count to 10. The students stated that they thought of that and agreed to count one steamboat, two steamboat, etc..." The administrator further probed their plan by asking what would happen if another child came to play on the tire swing. The students replied that they would teach the new comer the plan. "What if he won't follow your plan? What will you do" was asked. Both grade 3 students indicated that they would get help*

*from an adult. At which point the administrator asked the boys if they would be willing to teach the plan to all students in Kindergarten to grade 3. They readily accepted.*

*Sharing of the tire swing had been a regular source of conflict at PACS. After the teaching by the two grade 3 boys, that source of conflict disappeared.*

### **3. BETTER SCHOOL ATTENDANCE**

Attendance was an issue at PACS. We would have perhaps 70 students out of the expected 235 on the first day of school. Our enrolment grew over the first two months of the school year, reaching the projected enrolment in late October. However, attendance was always inconsistent. Some primary classes had two-thirds of their students missing in the first week of January because parents often kept their kids home on very cold days. Senior students would start missing classes as spring arrived and warm days facilitated their outside activities. Although attendance never reached the level that we would have liked, it did improve from 73% to 90% in certain classes.

Also, we made some significant inroads with respect to transience. Teachers at PACS had been experiencing up to 300% turnover in their class enrolments over the course of the school year. In 2003, the grade one teacher at PACS graduated 23 students that were with her for the entire year. Families continued to move out of our area but they told us that they kept their children at PACS because the school climate was supportive of Aboriginal peoples.

### **4. FEWER REFERRALS TO OFF-SITE PROGRAMS**

The best place to help children is in their neighborhood school. This has been the philosophy implemented by the leadership of Saskatoon Public Schools. Staff members at PACS pride themselves on not giving up on students. The staff members, on average, had six weeks training in Control Theory and Restitution. They were highly skilled and motivated to help all students. As a result, we rarely referred students to other programs. And our students succeeded.

An example of this commitment is provided by a grade seven teacher at PACS who received a grade 7 student from Winnipeg.

*Darryl had been in eight schools over his short educational career. He had been asked to leave schools and programs. His mom sent him to Saskatoon to live with his dad because she felt she could no longer help her son. Darryl was a difficult child. He was very intelligent but sabotaged our every effort. The teacher decided to meet with Darryl, his dad and step-mom one evening. She told Darryl that she cared for him, wanted him to succeed and was not going to give up on him. She was not going to send him away. We expected Darryl to increase the intensity of his misbehavior to test the teacher's resolve. We were wrong. Darryl became a respectful, responsible young student overnight. We have many stories like Darryl's. The dedication, motivation of the staff members at PACS was impressive.*

## 5. INCREASED TEACHER SATISFACTION

Teachers' life at PACS changed over a period of five years. We went from bonding together to survive to having fun teaching. In 2001, the Superintendent of Human Resources with Saskatoon Public Schools noted that teachers at PACS were using fewer and fewer sick days, which ran counter to the school division, provincial, and national trends. When we discussed this development with the teachers, they expressed that they loved their job. They said that they no longer went home feeling stressed. Teachers enjoyed being with their students so much that three of them started to have lunch with their students every day.

Other teachers in the school division started to hear about the positive working conditions at Princess Alexandra Community School from their friends. Teachers within the school division began requesting a transfer specifically to Princess, something that had not been common practice. In February 2000 and again in 2001, Community School principals offered sessions at the school division institute to encourage experienced teachers to consider moving to a Community School. The number of transfer requests from teachers at PACS dropped considerably.

## 6. DEVELOPMENT OF COLLECTIVE IDENTITY: BECOMING A "WE"

In January 2000, we hosted our first professional development activity that included parents and students. At that point the school culture still very much differentiated between "us" and "them". However, staff members at PACS were courageous and continued to invite parents and students to staff meetings and professional development opportunities. By the spring of 2000 the staff members, students, community members and Elders had become "WE". Appendix 2 provides the planning document WE created that spring. Beside each action that was planned are the names of the "advocate", the people who would remind us to pay attention to our goals and objectives in that specific area. Parents, students, and staff members signed-up as advocates.

Parents, students and community members became part of the solutions to our problems, as shown in the following example:

*June and James, who were parents in our school, started to help with outdoor supervision. June would help the younger students by the creative playground. James organized games for the grade 3 and 4 students. When new family moving in from British Columbia was touring the school, family members met June and James who invited them to join them on supervision. Friendship grew and a new family felt connected to a new school and neighbourhood.*

## 7. DEVELOPMENT OF A COMMON LANGUAGE

Control Theory and Restitution gave the staff a common language to use in our work with students. Because parents were invited to workshop sessions on Control Theory and Restitution, they shared the same language. Our students were taught Control Theory and Restitution from pre-kindergarten up. An example of how students used that common language was provided by Steve:

*Steve was a grade 7 student relatively new to PACS. He had been*

*out of school for 3 months when a social worker brought him to school. He had attended a program to change his behavior without success. After 3 months in our school Steve was talking to a new student in his class. The conversation went something like this: "Damien, what you are doing right now is called harassment. And in this school you cannot do this."*

## **8. ENHANCED FEELINGS OF SAFETY**

As students learned more about self-discipline and shared beliefs, the climate of the school improved visibly, as shown in the following example:

*While visiting a classroom at PACS, a senior official with Saskatoon Public Schools noticed a social contract the senior students produced. One of the items on the social contract was: "It is everyone's responsibility to keep the classroom a safe environment". She asked the students if this is how they wanted their classroom to be or is this how your classroom is? To which the students responded, "This is how our classroom is!"*

Students expressed how safe and peaceful their classrooms had become. Two benefits resulting from a peaceful classroom were better attendance (students felt safe in their classroom) and better academic performance (students could concentrate on academics rather than how to stay safe).

## **9. ESTABLISHMENT OF SHARED BELIEFS AND VALUES**

In March, 2001, staff members, students and parents were invited to a half-day meeting to discuss the development of school beliefs. The morning began by reviewing the concepts of the new discipline program, i.e., Restitution and Self-Discipline. Beliefs around community education and Aboriginal philosophy were shared as a foundation for the ensuing discussion. Groups were then formed to talk about "what we believe about this place". Each group spent 1.5 hours in a circle, discussing what they personally believed and what they ideally believed about the school. These statements were then shared with the whole meeting when the groups came together. The process took the entire morning and the community felt strengthened by discussing a common goal.

The group work was picked up about two weeks later with parents, staff and students pulling common themes from the beliefs developed at the P.D. day. Four themes emerged: Safety, Respect, Self-Esteem, and Connectedness. Consensus was reached at a later date on these themes expressing the four beliefs of our school.

After the beliefs had been decided, it was now time to come to a shared understanding of what these beliefs meant to "us". Through processes with staff, parents, students, and community members, a shared understanding of these beliefs was created and statements summarizing each belief were developed. These beliefs were posted throughout the school and the shared understanding was taught to students in each classroom.

This process of community engagement took much time to develop; yet we believed it fostered a true sense of community and modeled much of the philosophy of community education. If you want to change people's beliefs and

behaviour, “you need to create a community around them, where these new beliefs could be practical, expressed and nurtured” (Gladwell, 2000, p. 173). A copy of Princess Alexandra Community School beliefs may be found in Appendix 3.

## **10. DEVELOPMENT OF CONSENSUAL DECISION MAKING**

Early on in our efforts we realized that to engage parents, students, community members and staff members, we had to share “power”. We adopted the decision making model of Dynamic Harmonization as described by Dr. Jane Hudson. In this model, anyone present at a meeting essentially has a right of veto. Dr. Hudson suggests that there are three levels of response in considering a decision;

- I can support this decision.
- I have the following concerns about this decision, but I will support it.
- I cannot support this decision. The decision will be in conflict with our beliefs.

It is amazing how easily consensus can be reached if decisions are based on our shared beliefs. We learned to welcome conflict during the decision making process. Everyone learned to stay respectful during a conflict. The advice from Steven Covey (1990), to “seek to understand first, then be understood”, was frequently used. People would say, help me understand why you are opposed to this change. Once people had a chance to understand each other, new solutions were created. Diane Gossen (2003), in her workshops, describes this process as collapsing the conflict. Steven Covey (1990) refers to it as the Synergy.

## **11. CULTURALLY SUPPORTIVE**

We recognized early on that to be successful we needed to learn about First Nations and Métis cultures. We believe we did many things the right way, and we also made mistakes. This part of our experience was so important to us that we have dedicated the next chapter to discussion of this topic.



# TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

In the fall of 2000, a committee of staff, parents, and Elders was formed to plan and host an Elders' Gathering for the school community. It was understood that learning Indigenous Ways of Knowing began with Elders. By creating an opportunity for staff, parents, students to learn from Elders, a culturally affirming school community could be achieved. In the spring of 2001, staff began to meet with one Elder to discuss protocols for hosting an Elders' Gathering. The Elder explained the protocols and significance of such a gathering to the staff over the course of three meetings. From this, and with the continued support of Elders, the committee felt confident in hosting an Elders' Gathering.

In the fall of 2001, the Elders' Gathering was hosted over the course of a day and a half at the school. The event was lead by 22 Elders, and attended by 200 participants, including staff, parents, community members, and students. The question, which guided the Gathering, was framed by the school administrator as follows: "How can we be more successful in helping our students?" The Gathering allowed Elders to explain in detail many aspects of Indigenous Ways of Knowing. Through both large group presentations and small group dialogue, staff and parents were able to learn from Elders. These teachings became our foundation. This tangible event was needed for staff to be able to begin to understand what is often described as Indigenous Ways of Knowing. Through this event, staff members were able to connect these teachings with classroom instruction, which resulted in relevant learning for students and creation of a culturally affirming learning community. In staff meetings that followed the Gathering, staff members often spoke of the teachings they had heard and how their practices had changed in order to more appropriately match what they had heard. The Gathering became a "measuring stick" as we evaluated our practices.

Traditional Knowledge is valid in its own right. As PACS moved towards engaging First Nations and Métis families, traditional knowledge was validated in the activities and learning of the school. Honouring different ways of knowing by Aboriginal peoples begins with the inclusion of Elders. In traditional Aboriginal ways, Elders are seen as guides, leaders, keepers of knowledge, counselors, healers and grandparents. We found that their teachings of worldviews initiated a new level of understanding and impacted positively on educational processes and outcomes for students. We found that Elders' teachings of traditional values and beliefs were beneficial for all people.

By meaningfully including Elders in the school, we found increased harmony in the school and community, which assisted us in building and enhancing relationships between the school and the Aboriginal community. Elders played a vital role in creating a culturally affirming school environment. Elders can link students, staff, families and community to Aboriginal cultures and traditions, as well as bring an enhanced Aboriginal perspective to the school and transfer that knowledge to the classroom. We found that involving Elders can lead to:

- an environment of respect for Aboriginal knowledge,
- opportunities to experience traditional Aboriginal knowledge, perhaps in greater involvement in the school by Aboriginal peoples,

- academic success for students, and
- communities built on a new foundation of understanding and respect between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.

After our Elders' Gathering, one Elder began to visit the school regularly, providing us with the following valuable experience:

*An Elder walks into the school at 8:45 a.m. just as she does every morning. She comes with her grandchildren and says Tansi (Hello.). She is welcomed with a hug or handshake by staff and students who try to reply Namjyananito, Kᖃya Mᖃka (Hello back. How about you?). As she meets children in the halls, they all call her Kohkum (grandmother) or Nohkum (my grandmother). She refers to the staff, students and community members as her grandchildren and always makes time for any of them. She is there when staff, students or community members are experiencing hard times and is willing to listen to them, smudge and pray for them and most importantly, to make them smile. Her sense of humour is unmatched and laughter abounds when she is in the room.*

*She is always welcome into classrooms, as there is no Elder time. The classroom door is always open and the teacher sees her as a respected person with a wealth of knowledge, not as a senior who tells stories, occupying important instruction time. She helps all to learn some Cree, creates a welcoming atmosphere, helps with some discipline in a grandmotherly way and visits every classroom at least twice a day. She is respected, honoured and loved by the community. She is changing the way this school understands the term Aboriginal education or cultural inclusion. She is helping students feel a sense of pride in who they are and feel at home in their school. This grandma is well loved.*

## LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Language and culture are closely related, and offering opportunities to learn both within a school context was found to be critical in our school. Prior to 2000, Cree language instruction was offered at the school, but only to a limited number of students. The instruction was delivered through an itinerant teacher, which resulted in limited connection and relationship with the students, and school community. In 2000 language and culture were identified as priorities for students. In the fall of that year, Cree language instruction was offered to every student at PACS by a full-time Cree language teacher based solely at PACS. The program quickly evolved from a language program, to a language and culture program. The classroom provided a good opportunity for the Elder who visited the school each day to connect with and teach students.

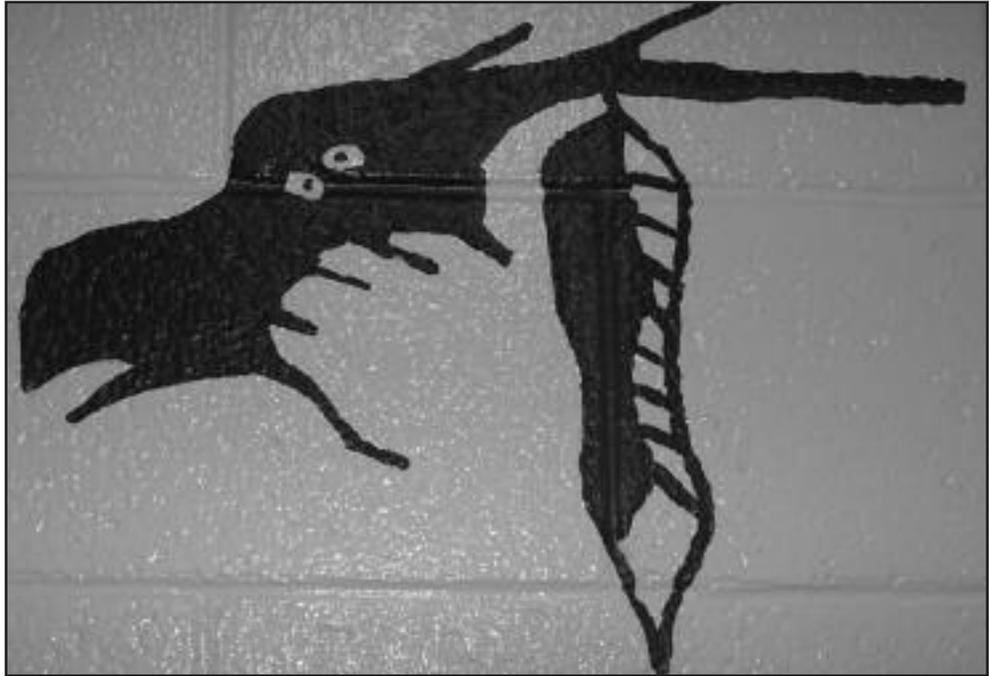
Given below is an example of how language and culture was taught:

*The Cree teacher identified students' behaviours at Feasts as inappropriate. This was due mainly to their lack of understanding of the significance of such a ceremony. The teacher worked with the school Elder and organized mini-feasts which occurred by*

*classroom over the course of the school year. These mini-feasts allowed the Elder to teach students the protocols, meanings, and significance of feasts and the appropriate behaviour which was required for anyone attending a feast. Through this process, community members were also invited to teach young people roles of both men and women in traditional ceremonies. For example, Elder's Helpers were invited to the classroom mini-feasts and worked with young boys on the significance of that role and what they needed to do to be able to enter into that role. This resulted in senior boys at the school being included in school-wide feasts as Elder's Helpers, particularly in serving. This is another example of a practical way to honour Indigenous Ways of Knowing and impart that to students in the context of a language and culture program – another opportunity to create a culturally affirming learning community.*

# Control Theory and Restitution

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*The Creator gave each person a special talent, and if they are in touch with their spirit and know their special work on this earth they will flourish. If people can keep doing what they are supposed to be doing, they can keep on living. People are supposed to support people so they can do what they are supposed to do - to carry out their identity.*

Elder Abbie Burnstick, Paul Band, Cree Nation

Our staff members, parents and students studied Control Theory and Restitution to try to improve our relationships with one another. As we studied these ideas, we found some close parallels with traditional First Nations' beliefs.

## CONTROL THEORY

Control Theory, later to be called Choice Theory, is the work of Dr. William Glasser and is intended to explain human motivations and behaviors. There are three core beliefs in Control Theory:

- We are internally motivated
- I can only control myself
- I have some genetic needs to fill that drive my behaviors

Glasser (1990) has identified five basic needs that he believes are genetically encoded in all human beings. His idea is that if we know and understand our

needs, we will be making better decisions about how to fulfill them. Often Control Theory instructors use a hand to explain these five needs (see figure 1), which are important to understand to appreciate Control Theory. The needs identified by Glasser are Survival, Fun, Power, Love, and Freedom.

## 1. SURVIVAL

Survival is probably the most misunderstood need. People often think of Survival in terms of shelter, food, water, and other basic necessities of life. In conversation with Dr. Glasser (2002), it became evident that this need is about one's outlook on life. If Survival were represented on a scale of 1 to 5, at the low end of the scale we would find thrill seekers, and at the other end of the spectrum, we would find the cautious planner buying extra travel insurance. This spectrum provides a brief but accurate description of the Survival need.

## 2. FUN

Fun means not only “fun Ha-Ha” but, more importantly, a sense of happiness or contentment that everything is as it should be. Many staff members at PACS related the need for Fun to the quadrant (or direction) Generosity on the Medicine Wheel. Comparison between the two provided us with many hours of discussion that deepened our understanding of Control Theory and First Nations' beliefs.



*Figure 1: The Basic Needs in Control Theory*

### 3. POWER

The Medicine Wheel has a quadrant that is called Mastery. We think Mastery is a much better term to describe this need than Power because it is not meant to signify authority over others but rather power over oneself. I have power if I feel in control of my life. I lose power if I let other events take over and “stress” my life.

### 4. LOVE

Glasser (2002) often referred to this need as Love and Belonging. One of the four quadrants on the Medicine Wheel is Belonging. We need to be loved and therefore we need to be loving.

### 5. FREEDOM

The ability or “power” to make choices is very important. Even at a very young age, we see children who have a strong desire for one choice over another. Independence is the corresponding value on the Medicine Wheel. In a private conversation with Dr. Martin Brokenleg (1992), author of *Reclaiming Youth At Risk – Our Hope for the Future*, he was asked about the similarity between the values on the Medicine Wheel and Glasser’s Basic Needs. Brokenleg responded that the Medicine Wheel has been on this continent for over 15,000 years and someone else was bound to figure it out eventually, which confirmed our thoughts that Control Theory is similar in many respects to First Nation traditional beliefs when it comes to human behaviors.

Once we understand that our driving force to behave comes from genetically pre-programmed needs, we can start helping others to understand their behaviors and choose better ways to fulfill their needs. This is where Restitution Self-Discipline comes in.

## RESTITUTION SELF-DISCIPLINE

Mrs. Diane Gossen (2001), author of Restitution Self-Discipline, has often said that she based her approach to discipline on her experiences in working with First Nations people and observing how they resolved conflict. In a June, 2004, article in *Aboriginal Times* (p.21), Gossen (2004) states:

*Restitution Self-Discipline is rooted in aboriginal practices. Independence is encouraged rather than conformity. There is a group built by the teachers and students sharing their family beliefs and making up a social contract to outline how they agree to treat each other.*

During her workshops, Gossen (2003) defined Restitution as follows: *Creating the conditions for the person to fix their mistake and return to the group strengthened.*

Gossen teaches how to engage in a discussion with students who made a mistake based on their Basic Needs (Control Theory) and the Shared Beliefs. An example from PACS may help to develop an understanding of how

Restitution Self-Discipline works. The intent of this example and this paper is not to teach Restitution but rather to point out the differences between this approach and traditional disciplinary practices in schools that discipline students rather than engage them in a teaching process.

*Situation: Morley, a grade 8 student, is sent to the office for hitting a child in grade 5. An abbreviated version of the discussion between Morley and the school administrator would look like this using the concept of a triangle.*

### **Side 1 – Stabilize the Identity**

*The purpose of side one is to create a safe environment for the child through comments such as;*

- *I am interested in helping you. I am not interested in punishing you.*
- *hope things will be better for you by the time you leave my office.*
- *It's okay to make a mistake.*

*Once the administrator assesses that the student psyche is not in fight or flight condition, he moves to side two of the triangle.*

### **Side 2 – Validate the Need**

*Administrator: "Help me understand why you hit Dale."*

*Morley: "He called my mom a drunk!"*

*Administrator: "Should I tell you not to stand up for your family?"*

*Morley: "No"*

*Administrator: "I agree, you need to stand up for your family."*

### **Side 3 – Seek the Belief**

*Administrator: "What do we believe about how we solve problems?"*

*Morley: "We solve problems in a respectful way."*

*Administrator: "Would you say that the way you solved your problem with Dale was respectful?"*

*Morley: "No, but he shouldn't call my mom a drunk?"*

*Administrator: "Would you like to discuss a way that you can stand up for your family" (Love need) and stay respectful?"*

*Morley: "Okay"*

*From that point the administrator worked with Morley to develop a plan to address the future and fix the past that allowed him to get his need met and stay respectful. In this case Morley decided that next time he would come to the principal and seek helping dealing with Dale. Morley also decided to meet with Dale and his mom to assure her that he would not hurt her son again.*

*This is a brief summary of a 30-45 minute discussion between Morley and the administrator. Dale also needed to look at his behavior towards Morley.*

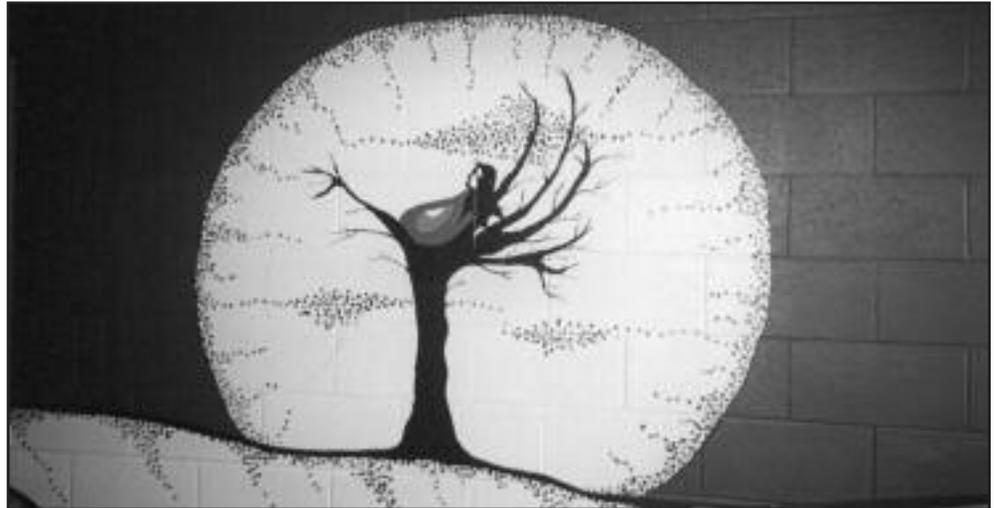
## **IMPLEMENTING RESTITUTION SELF-DISCIPLINE**

In January 2000, parents and students were invited to a school meeting to discuss an option for a student discipline program. The program was based on a rewards and consequences model. A presentation was given to staff, parents and students on the program elements and all were asked to give an opinion on the program. Staff members were divided as to whether or not to use the program. Parents and students were clear in their objections to this program. It was not culturally appropriate. The staff listened to the voice of the community and the program was rejected.

A month later, parents, staff members and an Elder attended a professional development workshop introducing Restitution Self-Discipline. At the end of the workshop participants appeared supportive of the program. To ensure the program was culturally appropriate, staff asked the Elder present if this program was appropriate for our school. The Elder supported the ideas presented and said, "These are our teachings that were lost due to residential schools." The staff and parents agreed with this program and the staff began to adopt it within the school.

# Staff Development and Community Education Practices

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*It should be in the curriculum (identity) because that's what we want because it's a need. Our children need this education that they learn who they are, that you can learn who you are, you learn to be responsible. You learn to be strong. I think the children should pray and what we wish from the Elders to be put into the curriculum, not to let temptation get you just like what he was talking about, drinking, stealing, these young people, anything you know, you're strong if these things don't get to you. So I feel it should be in the curriculum and also time and space for the class. There should be a time just like they do for math. There should be a time like that to talk about this, history, and treaties and things like that, a class, a whole class...And learning about the culture, it teaches you all these values, what makes you an important Indian. What makes you're a strong Indian person, living the values, but not stealing, not doing those things wrong. It's very important that they learn about their culture that will be one way.*

Elder The Late Emma Sand, Mistawasis First Nation

*Many schools are like little islands set apart from the mainland of life by a deep moat of convention and tradition. Across the moat there is a drawbridge, which is lowered at certain periods during the day in order that the part-time inhabitants may cross over to the island in the morning and back to the mainland at night. Why do these young people go out to the island? They go there in order to learn how to live on the mainland. After the last inhabitant of the island has left in the early afternoon, the drawbridge is raised. Janitors clean up the island, and the lights go out. Such, in brief, is the relation of many American schools to many an American community.*

J. Minzey and C. LeTarte (1994)

Community Schools are founded upon the principles of community education, which in turn have their roots in community development. Community Schools build strong relationships with families, community members, and organizations. These close ties serve to improve educational opportunities and programs and strengthen the communities in which the schools are located (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004).

Princess Alexandra was designated a Community School in 1980; however, the full implementation of the Community School vision requires the school staff to have an understanding of community education philosophy and implement community education practices aligned with this philosophy. This chapter is devoted to our transformative learning that resulted in the adoption of community education practices.

## **COMMUNITY EDUCATION**

Community education is a philosophy based on community engagement and life-long learning. It believes that learning occurs in many settings, not just in school. Schools alone cannot do all that is needed to help children and youth achieve success in their lives. The collaboration between and engagement of families, community members, organizations, teachers and students to build a learning community is the cornerstone of Community Education. Together, all are involved in the identification of community strengths and needs and together they decide upon courses of action. Collaborative processes lead to a more meaningful and successful learning experience for all. Community education has proven to be successful in addressing the needs of students, families and communities in an increasingly complex society (Saskatchewan Learning website).

## **TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING**

Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in basic premises of thought, feeling, and action. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world. Transformative learning makes us understand the world in a different way, changing the way we experience it and the way we act in our day-to-day lives. Transformative learning has an individual dimension and a collective dimension, and it includes both individual and social transformation (University of Toronto website). The adoption of community education practices requires transformative learning, as the practices often go against many of the norms in education.

Mezirow (1990) describes the use of critical reflection as a means of implementing transformative learning. He identifies how our beliefs and assumptions may need to be challenged and how reflection allows this to occur. A process of critical reflection can be used for staff development to help people better understand community education philosophy and begin to adopt community education practices.

## **SCHOOL LEADERSHIP TEAMS**

Before critical reflection can take place, school leadership teams must create the conditions for new learning to occur.

*A school leadership team's greatest job is to create the conditions for growth and change to occur. They need to take an active role in shaping people's beliefs and values by creating a broader frame of reference for their learning community. They can do this by having a clear picture of where they are now and where they want to go. They share ownership of this picture by inviting others to help develop it. (Saskatchewan Learning, 2005)*

A school leadership team may include the principal and the traditional administrative team, but consideration should be given to creating leadership opportunities for those not traditionally included in this role. The school leadership team could include parent and community representatives, school staff and youth. It needs to be representative of the community it serves.

## **DEVELOPING A LEARNING COMMUNITY**

Mitchell and Sackney (2000) identify a learning community as inclusive of teachers, staff members, administrators, students, and parents. The successful creation of a learning community requires shared vision, values, a sense of belonging, and commitment to the idea that 'we are better together'. Learning communities are built on the principles of community education as the school staff engages the assets of the broader community.

*The practice involves an intense process of negotiation and professional conversation. It involves setting goals and aspirations through discourse among teachers, administrators, students, parents, and other interested parties. It means providing the conditions that will make the learning healthy and effective. (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000, p.10)*

Mitchell & Sackney describe the process to create a learning community and how this learning community leads to profound improvement in schools.

It was important for the school leadership team at PACS to develop a learning community. A learning community or 'community of learners' can include staff, students, families and community members. At PACS the school leadership began this process by increasing the staff's knowledge of community education through personal growth and learning opportunities and then facilitating the sharing of new knowledge among the staff. Our actions included:

- Purchasing books on community education and making them available to the staff;
- Sharing research articles on community education practices with school staff for their personal reading; and
- Focusing professional development days on understanding "What is community education?"

## CREATING A CULTURE FOR CRITICAL REFLECTION

As staff had the opportunity to engage individually in exploration and personal learning, the school leadership moved the discussion to critical reflection as a group. Before beginning this task, it was important for the school leadership team to create a culture that allowed open and honest dialogue. Grundy (1982) focuses on the relationships that must be developed if critical reflection is to occur. She argues that there must be a structure that allows equal power relationships between group members if the freedom to choose is to be a valid one. To deal with the issue of power, the staff created a social contract describing how we wanted to behave when in conflict. This contract served as a guide throughout the transformative learning process and is provided in Appendix 4.

## CHALLENGING ASSUMPTIONS

Mezirow (1990) advocates for critical reflection in order to critique the assumptions on which beliefs have been built. Prior to adopting community education practices and engaging youth, family and community in new ways, the school staff began to deconstruct the assumptions we had about our community. Some guiding questions we used to do this were:

- What do I believe about my community?
- What role do I believe community should play in the school?
- What opportunities have I given community members to be meaningfully involved in the school?
- What benefits would I receive from working more closely with community?

Questions such as these were helpful in identifying personal and shared beliefs about the community. Making these beliefs explicit opened up the dialogue as to whether these beliefs were helpful or harmful in engaging youth, family and community within our school.

## BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

With a school culture and environment that were becoming more welcoming and respectful, the staff members went out of their way to involve parents and community members. Some ideas that we tried are listed below:

- Stop by a new family's home to welcome them and begin building the relationship.
- Invite parents and community members to staff meetings.
- Include parents and community members in professional development opportunities so that all are learning together and getting the same information.
- Decide as a collective on ways to support the learning program.
- Design additional programming (e.g., family literacy, nutrition or community programs) that could be offered after school, in the evening or during the summer.

Engaging in these relationship-building activities was imperative for authentic youth, family and community engagement. Relationships must be strongly developed before community members will feel that they belong in the school and can contribute in a meaningful way.

## CRITICAL REFLECTION ON PRACTICES

Deepening an awareness and understanding of community education leads to reflection on practices. As a staff, we began to ask “If we say we believe this, why are we doing this?” These discussions took place in a context and environment of respect. Continually reflecting on beliefs and aligning with practices is critical to adopting new practices and to achieve consensus on the assumptions beliefs and practices are based upon. (Mezirow, 1990).

The process of critical reflection on practices allowed our staff to create meaningful opportunities to work with students, families and community. This led to a change in school culture and environment, a change to the learning program, a change in current structures, a change in leadership style, and a change in school beliefs. A process of continual personal and collective reflection was needed to ensure that current practices were aligned with the philosophy of community education. Once staff had the opportunity to test and challenge their assumptions through critical reflection, the territory was opened up for transformational learning and for staff to create new practices. These new practices included parents and students attending school meetings, sharing in decision-making regarding classroom groupings, involved in budget and staffing, etc. Once we learned how to make decisions together as a group of staff, students, parents, and community members, there were few decisions made in the school without the engagement of the learning community.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The term community engagement is used frequently across many sectors, including education. Community engagement involves working together with those affected by the school to improve conditions and outcomes. It requires creating opportunities for youth, families, staff, organizations and community members to be involved in planning, decision-making and evaluation.

*Research suggests that parent and community engagement in schools improves student success and wellbeing. (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Saskatchewan Learning, 1999; Ho & Willms, 1996)*

*Studies find that students with involved parents, no matter what their income or background, were more likely to: earn higher grades and test scores, and enroll in higher-level programs: be promoted, pass their classes and earn credits; attend school regularly; have better social skills, show improved behaviour and adapt well to school; and graduate and go on to postsecondary education. (Henderson & Mapp, 2002)*

Authentically engaging youth, family and community involves identifying the assets of a family and community and mobilizing them to improve conditions and outcomes (McKnight & Kretzmann, 1993). Engaging community in this way is not simply about needs identification, nor is it about rescuing families.

It is about honouring and including youth, family and community assets – their strengths, resources, knowledge, beliefs, values, traditions and cultures.

As a staff, we operated on this belief. Teachers began interacting with family members using an approach that recognized their strengths – “we need you”. As families began to connect to the school and community, a learning community was developed. We found that this approach is needed to strengthen families and communities. Of critical importance is relationship-building to discover a family’s hopes and dreams, to find what keeps them resilient, and through this relationship, to truly understand the obstacles and barriers that they face and how we might best support the family in overcoming them.

Consider the following story from our school:

*A First Nation grandmother is raising four of her grandchildren. The grandmother’s adult daughter, Claudette, also lives in the home and provides support to her mother. The school begins to develop a relationship with the family and learns that Claudette is willing to volunteer in the school. The school engages her in the nutrition program and invites her to community and school association meetings. Claudette meets the school staff and many community people through her involvement with the school. She begins to regularly drop by the school and becomes actively involved in the education of the four children attending the school.*

*The community association is looking for a newsletter coordinator so a staff member asks Claudette if she would be interested in this position. Claudette has not held such a position before and initially has some worries about taking on the task. The staff members indicate their willingness to support her through this process. Claudette accepts the position and she and a staff member assemble the first few newsletters together. In this way, Claudette learns the computer skills, financial skills and coordination skills necessary to create and distribute a community newsletter. She soon begins to handle the task independently and the school supports her when she requests assistance.*

*As Claudette becomes quite comfortable in the school, she begins to share with staff members her dream of working in the school as an educational assistant. The staff inform her of a teacher assistant training program that the school division is offering in partnership with SIAST. Claudette has some initial fears about returning to school, but feels confident that the staff and community will support her through her training. She completes the program and is now employed and working in the school and community where she has developed a close relationship.*

*This is about working in an environment of respect **with** families, not **for** families. When families see that they have a role in the life of the community, are treated with respect and have control over their outcomes, they will take steps to improve themselves, their family and their community. This led to many successful stories of engagement within our school.*

# Conclusion

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*In order to survive in the twentieth century, we must really come to grips with the white man's culture and the white man's ways...we must stop lamenting the past...to be fully Indian today we must become bilingual and bicultural. But, in so doing, we will survive as Indian People, true to our past. We have always survived. Our history tells us so.*

Elder Joseph E. Couture, Cree Nation

Through our research study, we found a number of strategies that worked to successfully create a culturally affirming learning community. Our conclusion highlights the pieces we believe most strongly contributed to our successes.

## RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

After examining our beliefs, we recognized that we had limited understanding of Aboriginal peoples, their cultures, teachings, and worldviews. We understood that in order to make schooling relevant to Aboriginal students, we needed to learn more about Indigenous Ways of Knowing. Through the Elder's Gathering we were able to begin the journey towards shared understanding and transferring this learning to teaching and learning. By hosting the Elders' Gathering, we were able to demonstrate to our community that we were willing to learn new knowledge and work authentically with families and communities in new ways.

# DEVELOPING A NEW SCHOOL CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

Creating an environment in which the norm was family and community engagement was also a major factor in our successes. It was common for parents, students, and staff to make decisions regarding all aspects of the school. Staff meetings became school meetings, in which parents and students were included in authentic ways. Essentially, all had a right of veto as we made decisions.

Creating a culturally affirming school environment was accomplished by facilitating a leadership role within the school for Elders and parents. Some examples of this process include:

- a father taking young boys to a pipe ceremony once a month;
- hosting feasts and other cultural events;
- hosting the Elders' Gathering;
- offering Elders opportunities to hold ceremonies for the community; and
- putting an emphasis on Cree language instruction.

In addition, it became the norm for school staff to seek out the guidance of Elders regarding many educational and personal issues. Having an Elder visit the school each day provided the opportunity for staff, students, and parents to access traditional knowledge and help on a regular basis. All of these actions led to the creation of a culturally affirming learning community.

## ADOPTING COMMUNITY EDUCATION PRACTICES

At PACS, through focused staff development, we were able to learn and adopt community education practices. These practices lead to authentic engagement of youth, family members and community within all aspects of the school. Through the adoption of community education practices, leadership opportunities were facilitated for staff, students, and parents within the school. Parents and students contributed to school planning, attended professional development opportunities, and were even involved in establishing a school discipline policy. Through all of these opportunities for authentic engagement, it became the norm at PACS for students, parents, and staff to work together in all areas.

## DEVELOPING SHARED BELIEFS

The process undertaken at PACS to develop school beliefs became an important community development activity as well as building a foundation for the decisions we made at the school. It created the opportunity for parents and community members to become involved in an important area of the school in a non-judgmental way. It also created the opportunity for staff and parents to build relationships and work together in new ways. The "we" in our school became staff, parents, and community members. As a true learning community working together, we experienced greater successes, including improved student outcomes.

## ADOPTING NEW PRACTICES

The following are only a few suggestions drawn from the many things we learned as a staff about engaging First Nations and Métis peoples in new ways.

- Offer tobacco to a parent to invite participation. Tobacco is viewed as sacred by many First Nation's people. Offering it signifies your understanding of the importance of tobacco and your willingness to work in a respectful way.
- Offer a greeting in an Aboriginal language. This helps affirm the identity of students and community members and demonstrates your willingness to learn.
- When arranging professional development for the school, include parents and community members in the activities so that all are at the same level and moving forward together. This inclusiveness creates a better environment than having staff learn new things and then try to convince parents that it is the right way.
- When a meeting requires formal structures, perhaps try a circle. Sitting in a circle is conducive to respect, as everyone is equally important in a circle. Speak only when it is your turn and move around the circle to the left. Pass a stone or a feather and feel the strength of a circle in which everyone's voice is equally valued.
- Have "community" meetings or "school" meetings as opposed to "staff" meetings. A staff meeting denotes a meeting just for staff members. If my voice is truly valued and if I am to feel that my opinion is respected, then a school meeting may be more appropriate to creating this environment.
- Move to consensual decision making. Making decisions by consensus truly demonstrates community development.
- Seek direction from Elders. In traditional Aboriginal ways, Elders are seen as our guides, our leaders, our keepers of knowledge, our counsellors, our healers, and our grandparents. Elders can teach us so many things in such wonderful ways. They can guide our self-reflection and lead us to our own understandings. If we truly believe this, it is important for schools to value them. When making important decisions, first present tobacco to an Elder and seek direction. When meeting as a school or community, invite an Elder to sit with the group and offer a prayer for the group. Work with Elders is only limited by our view of their role. As we grow in our understanding of their skills, we will feel new strength in our schools and communities.
- Explain to parents the processes and options for their involvement within current education structures. Let them know that they have a voice as concerned citizens and teach them how to express their views. Are parents aware of the role of school trustees and how to access them?

# A CULTURALLY AFFIRMING LEARNING COMMUNITY

Through our journey at PACS, we began as teachers but evolved as a community of learners who began to experience the value of Indigenous Ways of Knowing. We learned that as we adopted community education practices, parents and community members were willing to share their strengths and gifts with us. Our commitment at PACS was to doing things differently in order to work in new ways with our community.

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# Appendix 1: Summary of Ideas Generated at 2002 Parent Council Meeting

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## STRENGTHENING OUR CHILDREN: A FOLLOW UP

Inherent Spirituality – what is missing for some First Nations People

Urban First Nations Healing Initiative

- Principles of helping people – prayer guided by elders
- How to integrate principles into the school system – to help children and the parents
- Work together – inherent spirituality including language
- Society interrupted Native Way of Life
- Enhance inherent spirituality in kids-would help children – smudging
- Need willingness to understand what native spirituality is
- Make things culturally appropriate
- Melting pot of different nations – common thing prayer/ceremonies
- Encourage people to go back to the elders to learn spirituality
- Respect – learn at home – carry to school
- Identity – kids need to learn who they are at home
- Try to get kids to read at home – hard
- Not a lot of motivation
- Parents to not have had spirituality means kids did not get it
- Students need a reason to go to school
- Help find reason to want to go to school
- Find fun things to go to school for
- Students who are mean deter kids from coming to school
- Taking education out of the classroom
- Develop confidence
- Become teachers themselves
- Engaged when involved
- Barriers in some of school's policy
- Keep close to the land
- Problems associated with poverty
- Students need to be prepared for mainstream jobs

- Equal is not always appropriate
  - Different schools have different needs
  - Attendance/transiency
  - Get kids involved
  - Need special teachers to hook kids
  - Belief system: “believe kids will finish Grade 12”
  - Find the gifts that each kid has
  - More volunteers in to help with kids
  - Powwow welcomes all people; everyone is welcome, experiences generosity
  - 1987 permission for Pope Paul to go back to own spirituality – takes willingness to learn
  - Some people may not want to learn the traditional ways – that’s ok – “Free will”
  - Invite Elders – can’t advertise for More Elders in School
- 

- Elders - Respect
  - Language
  - Smudging - a cleaning of the body  
- a calmness
  - Books/Reading/Librarian
  - Access to Library
  - Early intervention
  - Home and School Support
  - Exposure to new things
  - Goals/Challenges/Choices
  - Look for the Gifts
  - Cross Walks/School Zones Signs
  - \*Parent Groups/Associations Partnerships
  - Child’s responsibility – education – develop – support the want to learn
  - Talk to your kids
  - Everyone’s responsibility/community
-

- Kids getting enough sleep
- School sending homework home at night
- Parents making sure students do their homework at home
- Every night more structured time at home – homework, rest, not movies and games
- Homework developing skills, good work habits
- Computer supervised for homework
- \*Educate parents about what is going on in school, so that the parents can support their children in their learning KEEP PARENTS INVOLVED
- More programs in which children can experience success – Hockey, dancing, etc.
- Bullying – how can we stop it, protect our kids? Why is it not as strict as it used to be? How can we get our power back?
- A safe place where kids can go so they can come back to the classroom (Restitution) not disrupt the classroom.
- Role models for our kids – MORE MALES (Big Brothers)
- Listen to kids when they are having trouble and follow through
- Bullying – they are not afraid – self-esteem, respect scares them.
- Kids need more TLC
- Teach them confidence and pride, parents teach, how to be happy with what they have
- YOUTH CENTRE – continue to build partnership with White Buffalo – role models, healthy choices, earn money, get involved in programs.
- Help Parents help themselves – they think it’s maybe family life.
- Community           \*White Buffalo  
                              \*Hands on  
                              \*Friendship Inn
- School                 \*Staff  
                              \*Teachers
- Maybe we need to support parents.
- Riversdale – more business
- Grocery stores, businesses not more pawn shops
- TV – protect our kids, help them make good choices
- Home life – we as a School Staff, Teachers and a Community can do everything but if it doesn’t carry out home RESPECT and SELF-ESTEEM it won’t change.
- One parent? The cluster theory but was interrupted by another person in the circle and we ran out of time come back to the idea. I wish we could have spent more time on the topic.

- Have rewards and reading games – use the library – visual recognition ex. Book worm around the building
- Parents coming to school in the afternoon or evening to read or write with students
- Act out stories or books, performing for others builds self confidence for kids and self –esteem, assemblies
- STAFF: open library for parents and students in evenings or weekends, stories told or activities in the library
- Enforce cultural aspect – more cultural trips ex. pow wow, round dance
- Involve and offer more opportunities to and for caregivers/parents to be included with their children as facilitators for cultural experiences
- Invite parents/community members to share experiences with children. People who have skills to show or share with students
- Push for more positive role models to share with us. Bring in more role models to share with us as a school
- Have multiple copies of books so that a family can all enjoy or share the same book. Parents can read the books together as a family. Everybody has the same book.
- Have the bookmobile stop by the school for this community to use. Try to get a bookmobile stop here
- Munch and Mingle more than once a week. Or open library after school for community
- Cree contests between schools. Would encourage students to take pride in speaking and learning Cree
- Recognize students or parents who do positive things or attendance. Good book award, student of the week, attendance awards
- End of the year awards
- Once a month recognize students for achievements and invite parents.
- Star of the day. Improves self-esteem.
- Teachers and parents need to have high expectations
- Older students walking younger students to school
- Translators at events open to the community. A list of people who could translate languages such as Dene, Sauteaux
- Work dictionaries, picture dictionaries
- Safety patrols for students. Guiding students across the road
- Parents fundraise for bus for students in cold weather
- Parents could do car washes, bake sales. Corporate sponsorship of a bus (FSIN, SIGA), a van for picking up students in the neighborhood
- Invite in retired school teachers as volunteers/student cook book for fundraising.
- Parenting classes
- Attendance every day twice a day

- Ina as in-house Kokum
- Culturally appropriate curriculum
- Need smudging – aboriginal culture is spiritual – our children need that connection
- Languages need to continue to be taught
- First Nation teachers as role models, someone who understands where the student is coming from – insight into background
- Special program for students who are hyper, i.e. instead of the use of drugs – keep these students active
- Students as story writers
- Learning to behave – needs to start at home
- Listening to your children, spending time with them
- Getting the children to bed early, making sure the children get to school on time every day
- We need to make the community a safe place to live (children know too much and see too much)
- Computers
- Parents supporting other children (friends of their children)
- Justice in the area (vandalism, theft) – needs to be safe!!!
- Extra classrooms (classrooms too crowded)
- More resource help – one on one experience
- Social passing doesn't help – children get frustrated
- Focus on the students who want to learn
- Making connections with students and community members who have been there
- If no one teaches the children respect, how will they know?
- Tough love – firm kindness – tough counselling.
- Dedication and perseverance – be there for your child
- Cree adult classes – evening
- Parents attend classrooms – parent involvement
- Bringing humor into the classroom
- School name change – to help the children learn and understand their culture
- More community events such as the bannock bake-off. Winter Carnival
- Full time culture teachers
- Report cards – do a “make and take”
- Parents scheduled into the classroom ex. making dream catchers, reading and math, and supervision
- Give children a certain bedtime

- Make children do their homework before playing games
- Children and their parents have to have in their minds that they are successful
- Children need to be “forward” about what they want to learn
- Education is most important so children can accomplish something – go on to university, too
- Parents and children need to know that education is important to get a job, and have a future
- Parents should help kids with their homework – be involved
- Education is number one for First Nations children
- We all need to work together as a nation/community to help these kids
- We need leaders
- Instill that we are never too old to learn
- Communicate more – children feel safe talking to someone
- Teach kids respect at school and at home
- All kids have gifts – finding the gift is a big job for everyone
- Have children learn about their background. History helps kids to be successful
- The more we have strong relationships, the better the communication – kids need to know schools/parents are working together
- Kids need healing – they are hurting inside – we need to put aside our differences and put the child first – need a place in the school where kids can come to heal (healing program)
- Important for school division to hear community voice
- Have to all work together – teacher is not the only one responsible for teaching
- Educators shouldn’t come to work thinking they have to stay within their duties (“within the box”)
- Get kids to open up by listening to them – ask them questions, let them know you are there for them
- Keep kids active in recreational activity, i.e. KHL
- Important for kids to have other things to do besides T.V.
- Encourage to participate in sports
- Need both male and female counselors
- Some of the adults need to learn how to work with kids
- Kids would learn about their culture if it was in the school
- Parents could be more involved in the school
- Important for grown-ups to be human beings to the kids they pass in the hall – just say “hi”

# Appendix 2: Planning Document

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## PRINCESS ALEXANDRA COMMUNITY SCHOOL PLANNING DOCUMENT 2000-2004

### **PARAMETERS:**

Our planning document is a living document. To write down goals, hopes, dreams, and have no means to constantly review and challenge them would not lead to effective change. Anyone of the 'WE' can challenge its content or our practices.

'WE' in this document means all the students, employees, parents, Elders and community members of Princess Alexandra Community School.

This is not a plan that can be achieved in one year. Some of our objectives will be attained quickly. Some of our goals, dreams, may take a few years to be implemented. In some cases, our practices as a school division may need to change to facilitate certain dreams. Regularly, "WE" need to assess how we are doing, and we need to take appropriate actions to re-focus our attention on our goals.

The role of the advocate. Parents, students and staff members have signed up as advocates. We agree that we are all responsible to support our goals and objectives. The advocate's role is to challenge us to be true to our goals and engage in the development of objectives to support the goals.

This plan evolved over the last 25 months and will continue to evolve.

### **SCHOOL VISION**

Princess Alexandra Community School is the heart of the community and is dedicated to education and harmony. To help our students reach their highest potential, we work together with them, their families, the community, agencies and other partners. As leaders in community education, we remain flexible and innovative to meet the diverse needs of our students and community as we continually grow academically, socially and culturally. Our community promotes life-long learning for everyone and Princess Alexandra Community School provides this in a safe, caring and healthy environment.

## THE LEARNING PROGRAM

Those italicized are new initiatives. The others are initiatives that we need to continue to develop.

<b>Initiatives</b>	<b>Advocates</b>
Integrated Literacy/Numeracy Project <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Share ideas/resources among staff members</li> <li>- Pilot integrated literacy/numeracy rubric</li> <li>- Munch and mingle</li> <li>- Fitness focus</li> <li>- Bike program</li> <li>- Reading club</li> </ul>	Ann, Vera, Joanna, Connie, Maryanne
Culturally appropriate values/anti-violence education (Empowerment) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Teach "need based discipline"</i></li> <li>- <i>Education, Restitution, Self-Management</i></li> <li>- Control Theory</li> <li>- Stirling McDowell Grant</li> </ul> Research in "Creating a Culturally Supportive Environment"	Sandi, Christine, Vera
Computer supported curriculum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Special needs students</li> <li>- Internet/working with First Nations</li> <li>- Other First Nations language c.d.'s</li> <li>- Peer buddies for teachers and students</li> <li>- School and community instruction</li> <li>- Cable in the classroom</li> <li>- Indigenous circle</li> </ul>	Joanna, Sylvia, Maryanne
Culturally affirming instruction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cree instruction</li> <li>- Cultural teacher</li> <li>- Elder in school</li> <li>- Developing a resource base</li> <li>- Combining Cree and cultural instruction</li> <li>- Elder's gathering</li> <li>- Feasts</li> </ul>	Sheila, Yves, Sylvia, Ann, Vera, Sandi
Elder Program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Student talking circles</li> <li>- Inviting Elders to the classroom for a specific purpose</li> <li>- Elders' gathering</li> </ul>	Sheila, Ted, Sylvia, Cec, Sandi, Christine
Enhance staff commitment to cultural programs (Hoop Dance) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pow Wow troupe</li> </ul>	Faye, Sylvia, Sheila, Sandi
Community/Adult Education	
Staff commitment to "community schools" philosophy	

<p><i>Strengthening teaching strategies</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Resource basis pilot</li> <li>- The role of the resource room teacher in the classroom</li> <li>- Teachers' strengths exchanges</li> <li>- Increasing the use of our consultants</li> <li>- Jacqueline's position – curriculum actualization</li> <li>- Control Theory and philosophy</li> <li>- Restitution</li> <li>- Circle of Strength</li> </ul>	<p>Maryanne, Christine, Joanna, Jacqueline</p>
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## PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

<b>Initiatives</b>	<b>Advocates</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Developing personal relationships with families</li> <li>- Supporting leadership among parents</li> <li>- Promotion of school/community events</li> <li>- Parents' participation in staff meetings</li> </ul>	<p>Cheralee, Cec, Lisa, Yves, Carol</p>
<p>Family Functions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dances</li> <li>- Talent night</li> <li>- Bannock lunch once a month</li> <li>- Munch and mingle every week</li> <li>- Fun night</li> <li>- Bingo</li> <li>- Bannock bake off</li> <li>- Family round dances</li> </ul>	<p>Cec, Cheralee, (students) Stephanie, George, Zoe, Lelly, Darren, Melissa</p>
<p>Community Center for the Arts</p>	<p>Shawn, Sylvia, Joanna, Faye, Cec, Maryanne (students) Rickson, Melissa, Stephanie, Justin, Darnell</p>
<p>Honouring Our People</p>	<p>Ted, Yves</p>
<p>Inviting parents to be partners in school meetings and professional development activities</p>	<p>Sandi, Yves, Shawn</p>
<p>Working with the Indian and Métis Education Consultant and other agencies to develop a "Parent Empowerment Program"</p>	<p>Sandi, Norma</p>

## INTEGRATED SERVICES

<b>Initiatives</b>	<b>Advocates</b>
Partnerships (developing/maintaining) - Culturally appropriate - Sandy Bay and Beardy's Reserve	Ted, Christine
Staff support of community association/events	Leah, Sandi, Cec, Cheralee
Career Days	Lisa, Melissa, Zoe (students)
Community walkabout/awareness	Yves
Invite the other three inner city schools to join us for interagency meetings	Yves

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

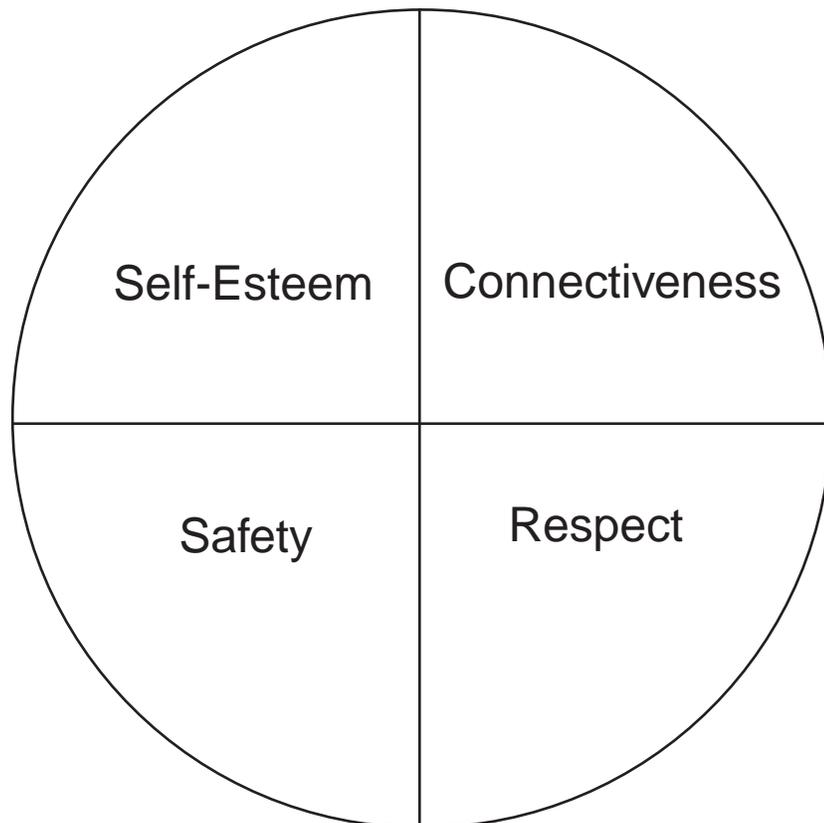
<b>Initiatives</b>	<b>Advocates</b>
Immediate attendance issues	Yves, Cec, Cheralee, Maryanne, Liaison Worker
Parents as teacher associate substitutes	Ted, Kim Lucenda
Post-secondary opportunities for parents	
Work program for senior students	
Safe learning environment	
Professional Community Development - Parents invited to P.D. opportunities	
School environment - Renovations/expansions - Playground enhancement	
Provide the leadership to bring forward the issues surrounding "poor housing" and poverty with governments and other stakeholders	
Discuss the issues around PTA and other money procedures and the lack of promptness	

# Appendix 3: Princess Alexandra Community School: Beliefs

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## PACS BELIEFS

Over the last two years, Elders, parents, students, community and staff members have developed our school beliefs. We review and clarify our beliefs frequently. Anyone can call us on our actions if they do not follow our beliefs. We teach them to our students and support them in their learning journey. Our beliefs are:



**Connectiveness** – Our actions have an impact on others. We care for each other.

**Respect** – Everyone has the right to be treated respectfully and the responsibility to treat others respectfully.

**Self-esteem** – Everyone has gifts.

**Safety** – Everyone needs to feel safe at school.

# Appendix 4: Staff Members' Social Contract

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## **PACS – STAFF MEMBERS**

### **SOCIAL CONTRACT**

- I will talk to the person with whom I have a conflict.
- I will be respectful.
- I will be honest.
- I will use “I” statements.
- I will seek to understand first, and then be understood.
- I will take time to calm down first before approaching someone else.
- I am interested in being part of the solution





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