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**Pre- and Post-Adoption Support Services in Canada:
Implications for Policy Makers**

**Working Paper for the
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We are living in an historical moment...the degree of variation in family forms and the amount of personal choice in making babies and making families seems to invite liberation and fulfillment. (Shanley, 2001, p. 1)

The dominant portrayal of “family” in popular culture is that families are biologically related, include both a male and female parent, live in one place, and share the same ethnic/cultural/religious background and that extended family members live elsewhere. We know, however, that this model is clearly a less than accurate representation of many Canadian families. In fact, contemporary families are more variable in composition than ever before. Even the most homogeneous communities include more and more examples of foster families, children being raised by their grandparents and other kin, non-related households, step and blended families, and same sex families, as well as families formed or expanded by open or closed adoption. (Laidlaw, 2006; Galvin, 2003).

The number of international adoptions in Canada represents another shifting dimension to family formation. In the 1990s, Canadians adopted 21,973 children from abroad, with more than 60% from East Asia, Southeast Asia and South Asia, with China being the number one source (Adoption Council of Canada, 2005). From 2000-2008, Canadians adopted 16,828 children from abroad, with China continuing to be the top source country (Adoption Council of Canada, 2009). The vast majority of people who choose to adopt East Asian children in Canada are white (Dorow, 2006; Volkman, 2005). The authors’ families are part of these statistics. Each of us has two daughters adopted from China, and we live in small communities where our children are highly visible minorities.

Lessons from the Past

Critics of transracial adoption have argued that white parents cannot provide their children with adequate exposure and connection to their birth culture or understand how to deal with the racism their children will face (Diller & Moule, 2005). Indeed, research outlining the experiences of Canadian Aboriginal children raised outside their traditional communities in white-adoptive homes seems to support this belief. The problems that arose during “the Sixties’ Scoop” are well documented. Many of these children suffered identity problems, which contributed to an onslaught of personal problems and difficulties connecting with their adoptive families. The children also had difficulties relating to mainstream society because they were often discriminated against based on their skin colour (Bennett, 2002).

Despite the lessons learned from the difficulties of past transracial adoption, adoptive families still face a challenge in Canada, especially outside larger urban centres, to integrate culture and strategies to combat racism into their everyday lives. Children isolated from their racial communities experience greater pressure to assimilate, face more stereotyping, and are both more visible and more vulnerable to institutional racism (Diller & Moule, 2005).

The Need for Research

In March, 2004, Intercountry Adoption Services, then located within the federal department Social Development Canada, hosted an Intercountry Adoption Policy Research Roundtable that brought together adoption researchers, provincial and federal policy makers and representatives from national non-profit adoption organizations. Policy makers indicated a keen interest in research investigating pre-adoption services that

would help prepare families and children and, therefore, promote positive outcomes. They also wanted to know which post-adoption services are both most useful to adoptive families and that have the most impact on improving adoption experiences and outcomes (Social Development Canada, 2004). As one scholar noted, very limited research exists to inform parents and scholars about the *normal* or average range of thoughts, emotions, and practices of adoptive families, on the best ways to acknowledge issues related to race or cultural heritage and on the right amount of attention that should be paid to them (Rojewski, 2005).

In 2006, funding received from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada allowed us the rare privilege of combining our professional and personal lives. Our study, *Examining Issues of Race, Racism and Racial Identity in Families of Asian Children Adopted by White Parents*, set out to explore what white parents in Canada who have adopted children from Asia think about race, racism, and racial identity. We wanted to know what parents' awareness and conceptualizations of race had been before they built their family through transracial adoption and whether their views changed after they became an adoptive family. What anxieties, if any, did they have raising their children and responding to issues of racism? Were they concerned about their ability to help their children develop healthy racial identities? What strategies did they use to deal with these concerns?

Three major findings emerged from this study (Gidluck & Corbin Dwyer, 2007; Corbin Dwyer & Gidluck, 2007a; Corbin Dwyer & Gidluck, 2007b; Corbin Dwyer & Gidluck, 2006; Gidluck & Corbin Dwyer, 2006; Corbin Dwyer & Gidluck, 2008; Gidluck & Corbin Dwyer, 2008): Parents spoke of the need to help their children acquire

strategies, tools, and support to handle intrusive questions, racial teasing, and racial isolation. However, many also expressed worry that they were not equipped to help their children deal with racism. These skills become particularly critical because of what parents view as a paucity of post-adoption services available to them and their children.

1. Since there is no clear consensus in the adoption field about the amount of attention that should be paid to, and the best ways to acknowledge, issues related to race and cultural heritage, parents were unsure whether what they were doing was appropriate or enough.
2. Parents noted that it was often difficult for them to separate ‘race’ issues from ‘adoption’ issues. They concluded that intrusive and often insensitive questions were asked of them because of the visibility of the racial difference between them and their children.

Our present study, funded in 2007 by the Atlantic Metropolis Centre, was designed to address and expand on these findings by exploring the types and availability of adoption services and examining policy needs.

Study Design and Methodology

In exploring with parents their experiences with pre- and post-adoption services, we posed three overarching questions: 1) Have you or has anyone in your family accessed pre- and/or post-adoption services? If not, why not? If so, were they helpful? How? 2) What pre- and post-adoption services are available to you in your community; within an hour’s drive; online; or via other long distance technology? 3) What services would you like to access that are not available to you?

In exploring with practitioners/support group facilitators/educators their experiences of pre- and post-adoption services, we posed three overarching questions: 1) What pre- and/or post- adoption services does your agency/organization offer? What is the level of interest/ participation of white families with children from Asia? 2) Is your

agency/organization developing or planning to offer pre- and post-adoption services not currently offered? 3) How is efficacy of these services assessed?

Participants were recruited in various ways: through private adoption agencies, government departments, adoption support groups, listservs, and adoption publications. Data were gathered from online surveys and individual interviews (in person or by telephone). The online surveys were in English and French and included demographic information. One survey was designed for parents and one for practitioners. Survey participants were asked to contact the researchers if they were interested in discussing their experiences in individual, in-depth interviews (the majority of which were conducted by telephone because of distance). One interview protocol was developed for parents and another for practitioners.

Sixty-six parents participated in the online survey (62 completed it in English and four in French). Of the 80 children adopted transracially, 58 (73%) had been adopted internationally and 22 (27%) domestically. Of the practitioners, only seven completed the survey (all in English). Fourteen interviews were conducted with participants. Four interviews were with practitioners: two with people who worked for provincial government adoption authorities, one with a counselor in an adoption clinic, and another with a social worker who is an adult adoptee and also has an adopted child. Ten interviews were conducted with adoptive parents: two organize and host adoptive family support groups; two have children born in Africa; one has a Hispanic child adopted from the United States; and six have children born in China, one of whom also has a Korean son. One interview was with a husband and wife in the process of adopting a child from the Philippines.

Frequency distributions were conducted on the quantitative data, while hermeneutic phenomenology thematic analysis was used with the qualitative data. Hermeneutics as a research method is a way of systematically dealing with interpretation (Bolton, 1987). van Manen (1990) explained hermeneutic phenomenological research as follows: the study of lived experience; the description of the experiential meanings we live as we live them; the human scientific study of phenomena; and a search for what it means to be human. As Bergum (1991) explained, the hermeneutic phenomenological approach is concerned with describing the experience and interpreting it as a way of identifying the nature of the phenomenon.

In qualitative research, themes are usually expressed as statements, which highlight explicit or implied meaning that runs through most of the collected data or that involve deep and profound emotional or factual impact (Ely et al., 1991). One of van Manen's (1990) approaches to isolating themes in text, the selective or highlighting approach, was used to assist with reflective analysis. The text was listened to and read several times by the researchers, asking "What statement(s) or phrase(s) seem particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon or experience?"(p. 93). These statements were highlighted and arranged into working themes.

Once the themes and data were revisited several times and a consensus derived on the essence of the experience, the data were turned to again to find examples of the essence. To help make it visible, some features of the phenomenon were extracted (van Manen, 1990) by asking the following questions of the data: Of what aspect is this an instance? What questions about an aspect does this item of data suggest? What sort of

answers to questions about an aspect does this item of data suggest? (Lofland & Lofland, 1995).

These results of the present study have implications for children of minority groups in foster care as well as for adopted children, social policy, multicultural and race-relations programming, and effective casework and clinical practice.

Adoption in Canada: Government Regulation and Administration

Under Canada's Constitution, social welfare matters, including adoption and foster care, fall under provincial and territorial jurisdiction. Each province and territory therefore has both its own legislation and policies regarding adoption and its own separate administrative structure, which means that provision of pre- and post-adoption services varies dramatically across the country. Our research revealed that even within provincial boundaries, no clear benchmarks or standards are followed by individual social workers or within regional offices that address the unique challenges of transracial adoption.

The federal government clearly has a role to address these inconsistencies. Indeed, on its corporate website, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC), the lead federal department responsible for intercountry adoption, posted an article written by one of its staff that outlines the process for adopting a child internationally and the roles played by various levels of government in this process. This article says one main function of Intercountry Adoption Services (IAS), which is housed within HRSDC and acts as Canada's Central Authority for international adoption, is

facilitating communications and strong working relationships among adoption officials in Canada at the federal, provincial and territorial levels. This includes sharing knowledge and experiences in working in intercountry adoption. IAS

chairs a federal interdepartmental committee on intercountry adoption. (Daniels, 2006)

Canada is a signatory to the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, which is an attempt to regulate international adoptions and provide some minimum standards to protect the best interests of the adopted children; therefore, the federal government has accepted the responsibility for determining the potential need for post-adoption services. Article 9 (c) of this agreement states that

Central Authorities shall take, directly or through public authorities or other bodies duly accredited in their state, all appropriate measures in particular to: promote the development of adoption counselling and post-adoption services in their states. (Hague Convention, 1993, Chapter 3, Article 9c)

The agreement is less clear on the need for authorities, either at the federal or the provincial or territorial level, to prepare families before the adoption is finalized. The agreement only states in Article 5(a) that

An adoption within the scope of the Convention shall take place only if the competent authorities of the receiving State have determined that the prospective adoptive parents are eligible and *suited to adopt*. (Hague Convention, 1993, Chapter 2, Article 5a, emphasis added).

Our research indicates that many parents are not prepared for the challenges of helping their adopted children negotiate the difficult minefields of being a racial minority. To avoid the problems that arose involving transracial adoptions of Aboriginal children in the Sixties Scoop, we firmly believe that the federal government should play the lead role in knowledge transfer by adopting the following:

Policy Recommendation # 1:

- A. *That since Intercountry Adoption Services (IAS), housed within the federal department of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC), is mandated to facilitate communications and strong working relationships among*

adoption officials in Canada at the federal, provincial, and territorial levels, IAS should review its current work in this area and consider increasing its efforts to share best practices and address common problems associated with transracial adoption.

- B. That IAS organize a workshop similar to the roundtable it organized in 2004 as a first step in sharing best practices. One primary outcome of such a gathering could be to begin work developing national standards in a number of areas of the adoption process.*

Implications for Social Work

Before any adoption, all prospective parents must undergo a home study to assess their skills as potential adoptive parents. Practice varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction on how much emphasis, if any, should be placed during this assessment on the unique challenges of adopting children of a race different from that of the prospective parents. Post-adoption services to help parents and children deal with issues that arise also vary widely from province to province, particularly in centres outside large metropolitan areas, which typically lack services and support to help families manoeuvre through these challenges.

Of our study participants, 90% reported that their home study included a discussion of the unique challenges of parenting a child of a different race. However, only 63% indicated that their home study process offered guidance on how to address those challenges. One parent wrote “Home study practitioner had no knowledge or experience of post-adoption resources or groups.” Another parent noted that the PRIDE (Parent Resources for Information, Development and Education) course, mandatory in some provinces during the home study process, did not specifically address the unique challenges of transracial adoptions. Another parent reported “We had to do all the research ourselves before adoption. We recently started a support group.”

Social workers' lack of skills

Parents in our study emphasized their belief that many people within their broader adoption community are either not conscious of race issues or not willing to acknowledge that they even exist. One woman who coordinates an online support group for children adopted from Africa expressed one way in which she is frequently challenged by other adoptive families:

You're being too sensitive. Oh my goodness, would you just shut up about the racism. ... This isn't going to be such a big deal because all my friends love the baby, my family loves the baby, and they all embrace this black child, and race is not going to be an issue in our community even though they are the only black child in the community (survey participant).

Another participant, the mother of two daughters from China, recalled a recent conversation with a woman early in the adoption process who said that she would consider Asia only because she didn't want to deal with discrimination. She would not consider Ethiopia because then she would have to deal with race issues.

She obviously missed the whole boat in any of her pre-adoption sessions with her social worker ... Maybe her kid is going to be Vietnamese, Korean, Chinese, whatever. That doesn't mean he's going to be brilliant in math. It doesn't mean he is going to be a virtuoso pianist. There's reverse expectations because they are Asian ... positive discrimination. ... It is not fair if they are not educated before they come down this road. (survey participant)

This participant emphasized that the woman she was referring to was not unique but that she regularly meets other families who have adopted from Asian countries who do not believe their children will ever face discrimination. Racism is something, she says, many adoptive parents believe is reserved for people who have adopted Black or First Nations children.

Another parent who completed our survey and volunteered to be interviewed more fully on these issues was passionate that not just the content of pre-adoption

programs, if they are offered, needs to be reviewed but also the education of the people facilitating them. After attending a workshop coordinated by her province's adoption authorities, she was dismayed when misleading, and even false, information was provided about the adoption process:

We have a problem with educating social workers, and I think that there needs to be some mandatory racial and adoption sensitivity training for social workers.
(interview participant)

Another parent was even harsher in her assessment of social welfare officials involved in the adoption process. Active in the community of adoptive families with children from Africa, she was dismayed that families who had recently chosen to switch countries from which they would be adopting were provided no guidance or preparation for their change. She related a story about a woman who had come to her two or three days before she was traveling to Africa to receive her new daughter and had no idea that her African-born daughter would have any different hair or skin needs than her Chinese-born daughter.

You live in an urban city with a huge black population, and your social worker never even brings this up? You're not living in a rural population where it's 97% white. She was living in Toronto, and her social worker never brought this up.
(interview participant)

Skin and hair care needs, this parent suggested, are "just level one of the issues". This parent firmly believed that

The social workers and the agencies ... are failing miserably. They are not supporting the parents, and I think a lot of it is that the social workers don't know... the difference between raising an Asian daughter and a black son. ...
(interview participant)

Policy Recommendation #2:

- A. *That IAS, together with provincial authorities, adoption researchers, and representatives from national non-profit organizations, work towards developing national standards for the training and assessment of credentials and experience*

of individuals conducting home studies and others involved in various aspects of the adoption process.

- B. That IAS, together with provincial authorities, adoption researchers, and representatives from national non-profit organizations, review training programs already available in formats that could easily be made available online and those with the potential to be developed into such a format. These resources could then be made available, depending on resources, either free or on a cost-recovery basis.*

Pre-adoption educational needs of parents

Some U.S jurisdictions, notably Minnesota, have put in place tools to educate families in the pre-adoption stage by assessing their degree of understanding of and ability to cope with the unique challenges and special needs of children placed cross-racially (Minnesota Department of Human Services, n.d.). In Canada, practices vary widely from province to province as to how much, if any, emphasis is placed on preparing Canadian families for these challenges before adoption. Also like in the U.S., Canada offers a patchwork quilt of services for families post adoption.

One study participant was very frank in assessing her own adoption readiness.

I'm not condemning international adoption. I support transracial adoption. That is obviously how I got my family, but I think people need to go into it with their eyes a lot wider open than I did. (interview participant)

One recent initiative in Canada holds tremendous promise for better preparing individuals to adopt transracially. The Halton Multicultural Council received funding from Ontario's Trillium Foundation to develop and pilot a Canadian-based pre-assessment education and training tool for families considering adopting or fostering children from a race or culture different from their own and to address the unique needs of children and parents involved in transracial adoption. The curriculum helps participants identify their strengths and limitations for parenting transracially; challenges them to think critically about race,

culture and privilege for themselves and their child; offers them the opportunity to reflect on their motivation for and commitment to raising a multiracial/cultural family; and offers tools and strategies to help them navigate the transracial parenting journey (Halton Multicultural Council, 2010).

Policy Recommendation #3:

- A. That IAS schedule a session with the Halton Multicultural Council to hear more about the Transracial Parenting Initiative and attend one of its training sessions.*
- B. That IAS work with the Halton Multicultural Council to promote this training initiative to provincial ministries responsible for facilitating adoptions and to departments of social work and psychology at Canadian universities, which are training the next generation of people who will be working in the adoption field.*

Expansion of services

Most of what I've learned has been self taught by reading books and the Internet.
(survey participant)

When services *are* available, nearly one-third of parents in a recent study in British Columbia said that those services did not meet their needs, and more than one-quarter said it was difficult to gain access to them (Dhami, Mandel, and Sothmann, 2007). In our study, 49 parents (82%) indicated they attended educational workshops/conferences/ seminars; 48 (80%) belonged to a support groups; 27 (45%) attended culture/language classes; and 15 (25%) had participated in counseling. For those who did not access adoption services, the primary reason seems to have been unavailability. It is important to note that 47 respondents (73%) lived in urban centers where these services are more likely to exist than in rural settings. Also, 71% of parents living in a rural setting reported that they considered moving to a larger urban area to access more adoption services.

A number of very positive comments were made about the agencies that facilitated adoptions. However, these same parents knew many other families that did not get the same type of support either before they adopted or once their children were in their homes.

Our agency did a very good job of training us. We had a three-day seminar, and they brought in lots of guest speakers and lots of families that were living in adoption right now, and so getting to hear from kids and from adult adoptees and from adoptive parents was very beneficial. I know a lot of agencies in town just have a workbook that you have to go through on your own. (interview participant)

Another participant, who lived in a major metropolitan area, realized how fortunate she was to have chosen the adoption agency she did only after meeting a family that chose a different one that had provided them very little training before their adoption. This family appeared to be experiencing quite severe attachment and bonding problems with their adopted daughter, yet their agency had provided no post-adoption services for them to deal with these problems. The first they learned about bonding and attachment was from a family still in the pre-adoption phase. The family with the daughter had no idea who to turn to for support even though they lived in one of Canada's largest metropolitan areas where, at least theoretically, they should have had more access to services than people in more remote locations.

They didn't know about bonding. They didn't know about attachment. We thought this was very basic. This was hammered home to us by the course that we took through our agency. (interview participant)

Alberta, Ontario and Quebec are the only provinces with health clinics that purport to have specific expertise in adoption, and even these facilities may not be offering services directly related to some of the more complex psychosocial issues related to transracial adoption. One participant believes her clinic is underfunded and

understaffed and is not meeting the needs of the adoption community because, she believes, many families are not even aware that their clinic exists because it does little promotion.

We started to do some advertising about seven or eight years ago when we got started, and we stopped because we were creating a wait list and were not able to meet demand without opportunity for getting more resources. ... and resources not only meant getting money it meant finding the right [staff]. (interview participant).

By the “right” staff, she was referring to health care professionals trained in child development and early intervention, as well as being knowledgeable about how adopted children may or may not fit the recognized norms for physical development, attachment and bonding, and other measurable indicators.

“Development,” she says, “is not integrated into social work school. It’s a different field.” She believes that better efforts are needed to do cross training in professions or develop multi-disciplinary teams.

“If I can have multiple pairs of eyes and we can do this in a very structured, safe way, I think that we could get a better picture of the whole child than we are now.” (interview participant).

One mother who participated in our study was clear in her belief that the medical community had failed her child and her family.

Medically we had a very hard time with our son. He came with a lot of unknowns about him ... We were able to get a pediatrician and one of the top pediatricians in [our city] who was the gateway to all of their services who in my opinion was very poor at his job. I think he was greatly overworked and there was not enough support services. (interview participant).

Policy Recommendation #4:

- A. *That provincial health authorities be made aware of the unique health and psychosocial needs of adoptive families and make every attempt possible to ensure that adequate services are made available. This necessitates assessment of*

the knowledge level of health care professionals of the adoption-related needs of families and if necessary, further training for these medical professionals.

- B. That further research is necessary to evaluate the efficacy of services provided by adoption clinics (in Alberta, Ontario and Quebec--the only provinces offering access to publicly funded adoption clinics). The Edmonton Adoption Clinic appears to offer the most extensive range of services within a multi-disciplinary environment, which includes a pediatrician, nurse, social worker, and occupational therapist, and this might be a model for best practice.*

Post-adoption services: Whose job is it?

Most post-adoption services provided to families, even those officially run through adoption agencies, have been developed by parents themselves because they identified the need for, and took the initiative to organize, them. One parent-activist who took the lead in organizing support groups and educational workshops for the adoptive community said she is burned out and does not know if anyone else will step into her shoes if she stops volunteering in this capacity. Furthermore, she expressed resentment that this type of service falls on the shoulders of volunteers.

It shouldn't be my job to go to a conference ... to get really excited about a video that can help other families. That should be the social worker getting really excited about a video that she can show her families. ... (interview participant)

Another parent-activist expressed even stronger feelings that child welfare officials “facilitating” adoptions rely too much on adoptive families to provide needed services.

*I would like to see the Province get serious about providing appropriate pre-adoption and post-adoption support for families. Currently, there is no programming and no funding available for [the] development of programming by parent-led groups for adoption support. The funding requirements for a program to meet the needs of adoptive families in this province would not be great. However, there does not seem to be any *will* on the part of provincial adoption officials to even recognize these services as desirable or necessary. Families are expected to support one another, which we try to do. As for the role of the Province... once families are approved for adoption and the legal formalities are completed, they wash their hands of us... and I believe this is the case for families who adopt domestically, as well as internationally. (survey participant)*

One mother expressed frustration trying to find professionals to support her family post adoption.

I have found a lack of help for the emotional needs of my child. Few professionals have even the basic knowledge of issues involved for a transracially internationally adopted child. Our social worker is among the more ignorant of service providers. She is cheerful and willing to learn but ultimately up to date only on domestic adoption. (survey participant)

Another of our study participants added,

Of the services received, none came from the provincial department which "helped" to facilitate our child's adoption. These services were provided by our adoption agency located in another province. (survey participant)

Some participants in our study felt the government's role should be to provide guidelines for the agencies facilitating the adoption and regularly monitor them to ensure they are offering adequate pre- and post-adoption services.

I think if they [adoption agencies] are going to facilitate an adoption and take money for the adoption, they should put some work into it and offer some of those services as well and support for families who run into trouble when they come home, whether it's sleep issues or health issues or something. Those parents should have a resource that they can go to. (interview participant)

Policy Recommendation #5:

That IAS, together with provincial authorities, adoption researchers, and representatives from national non-profit organizations, develop minimum standards for the delivery of pre- and post- adoption services that all adoption agencies must meet to satisfy the terms of their operating licence.

Expansion of web-based resources and training opportunities

The internet has vastly increased the access to information that adoptive families, as well as individuals and organizations helping to facilitate adoptions, can use. A number of parent participants in our study adopted their children before such advances in technology, lamenting that they did not have the same opportunity as parents do now

who, with a click of a mouse, can find information, resources, and advice and connect with other families experiencing similar challenges. The sheer volume of information available on the web, however, can also be overwhelming, making it difficult to determine which sources provide the most accurate and up-to-date best practices. The challenge is more difficult in that many organizations making the most noble attempts to provide this information are chronically underfunded or dependent on the assistance of volunteers and have a difficult time keeping their sites updated because they lack the option of assigning staff to keeping the sites updated. Even the federal government's Intercountry Adoption Services website is not revised regularly. For example, IAS says its mandate includes "acting as a clearing house on adoption legislation, policies and practices of 'sending' countries, research, data and statistics," yet its link to research and publications related to adoption is extremely limited, with its most recent publication being in 2006 (HRSDC, 2010)

Many parents who participated in our study, even those who lived within a couple of hours of a larger metropolitan centre where, theoretically, programming is more readily available, indicated they found it difficult to access workshops and training programs that would help them parent their children. Those living in more remote locations found it even more difficult to participate in such programming. However, breakthroughs in communications technology have made the web more accessible and more sophisticated, making it possible to use video or animation and deliver innovative training programs online.

Policy Recommendation #6:

- A. That IAS convene a committee of adoption researchers, provincial and federal policy makers, and representatives from national non-profit adoption*

organizations to do a needs assessment of Canadian-focused, web-based adoption resources and training materials with an eye to eliminating duplication of efforts and creating one common site. One possible outcome of such an effort could be that each province and territory would contribute funding on a per capita basis to a service provider, such as the Adoption Council of Canada, which is already attempting to provide a comprehensive web resource for the adoption community.

- B. That the same committee of adoption researchers, provincial and federal policy makers, and representatives from national non-profit adoption organizations review training programs already available in formats that could easily be made available online and those with the potential to be developed into such a format. These resources could then be made available, depending on resources, either free or on a cost-recovery basis.*

Integration into the School System

It goes without saying that teachers have a major influence on children's understanding of the world around them and of themselves and that what goes on at school has pivotal importance for children (Corbin Dwyer & Gidluck, 2009). School experiences help shape children's self-images, their peer relationships, and the way others view their competence. They also learn many of their values at school, accumulate much of their knowledge, and develop the skills to equip them to succeed as adults. Further, it is not until children enter the school system that they become aware of their differences of being part of a non-traditional family (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2006).

We argue that schools can and *should* be an important resource for families in coping with the issues of becoming a multiracial family. The challenge is that teachers are often not equipped with the knowledge to support such families and can share the same misconceptions about adoption and prejudices due to racism as the general public. This often results in the use of language, lesson plans, and attitudes that can hurt children's feelings, perpetuate inaccurate stereotypes and send the message that some

families (i.e., those formed through biology) are more acceptable than others. (Evan B. Donaldson Institute, 2006).

Clearly the school system needs to take this challenge seriously because while racial diversity in Canadian schools has increased, it is seldom reflected among students enrolled in faculties of education, which have a continued over-representation of white, female, middle class, heterosexual candidates. Solomona et al.'s 2005 study of teacher candidates demonstrated that the next generation of Canadian educators has difficulty understanding the notion of race and white privilege in schools. A number of troubling themes emerged from their research, including that many teacher candidates did not understand the broader context of racism, construing it to mean only individual aberrant acts. Candidates' definitions of racism did not reflect comprehension of the systemic and institutional structures that reinforce inequality. Participants in Solomona et al.'s study also clearly positioned themselves within liberalist notions of social structures and firmly believed in individualistic and meritocratic views of education – that people who work hard enough can overcome any obstacle. They demonstrated very little understanding of either the larger social context that denies minoritized parents access to the resources that enable them to provide for and support their children, such as adequate employment opportunities, or of the historical context of systemic racism in Canada.

As parents in our first study explained, "*The world sees all of our girls the same.*" "*As gifted China Dolls.*" While this stereotype might initially seem to be positive and beneficial, it has negative effects (Pon, 2000). For example, it conceals the needs and problems of those Asians in North America who have not experienced success by obscuring the reality of racism in their lives and then encourages their silence about it

(Tatum, 1997). Tatum points out that “the process of finding oneself in the face of invisibility, silence and stereotypes is not an easy one” (p. 164). Therefore, she adds, “if educators and parents wish to foster these positive psychological outcomes for the children in our care, we must hear their voices and affirm their identities at school and at home. And we must interrupt the racism that places them at risk” (p. 166).

Parents in our earlier study expressed concern that their children did not fit the commonly held stereotypes of Chinese people and that their child’s personality and family background were often overlooked. As one parent emphatically noted, perceptions like “You’re Chinese, so you’re brilliant” are particularly difficult to deal with when you have a child with a learning disability. Another parent said, “I’ve worked with kids with special needs for many years.” She expressed concern that some Asian adoptees “are taking longer to be diagnosed than the average ‘Canadian kid’ because they fit the stereotype where they expect them to be brilliant.”

Teachers working with transracial students often wish they had a simple set of guidelines to follow, but race is complex, and adoption into a dominant race further complicates the issues. As such, teachers need to be able to tolerate ambiguity, communicate respect, be non-judgmental, display empathy, and be flexible in working cross-racially (Saskatchewan Instructional Development Research Unit, 1996).

One parent in our present study wrote “Primary school is small, and there is only one other adoptive family, and they are not transracial. School put on the musical *L’il Orphan Annie*, and my spouse and I objected. School thinks we overreacted and are being overprotective of our children. They have listened, however, and agreed to set up teacher meetings for us to help teachers get a better sense of adoption issues.” Another wrote

about her daughter's assignment in social studies in which she had to "check off resemblances" between photos of her and her parents. The parent knew about the assignment and had spoken to the teacher before it was assigned, asking her to modify it for her transracially adopted daughter, but the teacher did not.

Another parent interviewed for our present study expressed similar concerns about common school assignments but also emphasized that the focus on diversity and multicultural programming in the schools needs to be broadened beyond recognition of holidays like Chinese New Year and designated months like Black History Month, which she feels singles out minority children and, in her words, is "patronizing exoticism." She was firm in her belief that

I don't need my kid reading yet another book about Harriet Tubman or Martin Luther King or those struggles. I can teach them that. I need them just to read a plain old ordinary book that stars a black kid so he can be a plain ordinary black kid. He doesn't have to carry the weight of social justice on his shoulders.

Policy Recommendation #7:

- A. *That IAS, through a committee of provincial authorities, adoption researchers, and representatives from national non-profit organizations, review already existing adoption teaching resources and make this material available to educators through provincial teaching associations, faculties of education, and other organizations that provide services to teachers (such as the Canadian Teachers' Federation). Most provincial teachers associations send newsletters to their members that could summarize a few key points about this resource and advertise where it can be obtained.*
- B. *Resources like this should also be made available at adoption clinics and adoption resource centres.*

British Columbia: A model of service delivery unique in Canada

The Province of British Columbia decided to develop a partnership with a non-profit organization to provide pre- and post-adoption services to adoptive families. After going through a request for proposals process, the Ministry awarded the umbrella

contract to the Adoptive Family Association of British Columbia (AFABC). Each year, the Ministry negotiates specific services and deliverables, but one requirement for this contract is that the organization have regional representatives in areas throughout the province. Each office has a toll-free line so parents in that area can call and the representative will provide some crisis support and make referrals. AFABC runs a number of parent support groups, hosts pre-adoption information sessions, provides workshops on transracial adoption, and hosts cultural events. The organization also provides adoption-specific parenting courses, maintains a comprehensive website with a searchable database, and has a lending library.

We [Ministry of Children and Family Development] are trying to encourage families to get the majority of their support from the AFABC rather than coming back to their social worker. So we provide a free year's membership. (interview participant)

While British Columbia appears to offer a much wider array of services than other provinces, a number of people who participated in this study from that province said much more can still be done in BC for adoptive families.

It's fortunate that we have the AFABC as a resource. They are really fantastic. ... [But] when I got home I suddenly realized that there's actually no support group that I can go to and here I am in an urban centre. ... two streets down there's four transracially adopted families on one street and there's no group meeting even on a monthly basis. (interview participant).

Another parent in our study said that the courses their adoption agency offered were much better than those they attended organized by the AFABC. They were aware, however, that while the AFABC is funded by the province, like other non-profit organizations, it is underfunded and likely has similar problems recruiting and retaining competent staff. They also believed the organization's focus seemed to be primarily on domestic adoption and children who were wards of the province.

Another participant acknowledged that resources are obviously an issue with AFABC.

It's a great service, but there's not enough, particularly in the north where travel is an issue and we have three part-time people who work 10 hours a week. If you have one family that is struggling, that 10 hours could be gone on that one thing. So my preference would certainly be to have full-time people. (interview participant)

Another participant who has worked in cultural planning for indigenous children adopted by white families believes those working in international adoption should look to the work being done domestically in transracial placements:

We have the Convention on the Rights of the Child that speaks to identity as a right for children, and I don't think it's exclusive to indigenous children. It certainly highlights the rights, the identity rights, cultural rights for indigenous children, but it is not exclusive. (interview participant)

Policy Recommendation #8:

That despite limitations, the British Columbia model for providing pre-and post-adoption services is still worthy of study by other provincial jurisdictions interested in improving and expanding the services they provide to adoptive families.

Policy Recommendation #9:

That policy analysts working in the international adoption should look at the best practices developed for Aboriginal adoptions to develop similar policies for international placements. British Columbia and other provincial jurisdictions in Canada have developed policies around cultural planning and race relations and help non-Aboriginal families adopting Aboriginal children to develop a cultural plan.

Impacts on the Family of Treatment by Government

Interview participants raised two issues about their frustrations trying to negotiate federal government policies: those of maternity benefits and immigration.

Maternity benefits

Adoptive mothers are not eligible for the 15 weeks of "maternity" benefits through the federal government. As a result, parents of biological children receive 52

weeks of maternity and parental benefits, while adoptive parents receive 37 weeks. A federal government employee explained that the 15 weeks' difference was for biological mothers to recover from the physical process of giving birth. However, this rationale is not widely known and potential adoptive parents think they will automatically receive 52 weeks of leave.

Of this discrepancy, one mother in the present study noted "It's really important not just because of the financial piece but because of what it says about you as a family. Right from when you come home you should feel supported in your efforts... There's a little subtle messaging that happens all along that kind of undermines your legitimacy as a family." Further, the adoption literature builds a case for equal leave benefits. Some families may have older children at home who will require adjustment and transition time. Providing more time for parents to be at home with their new child supports the family in fostering their child's psychosocial development, which may prevent problems later. One adoption issue that receives much attention is bonding and attachment because of its importance for healthy development (e.g., Cogen, 2008).

Some parents and children may experience attachment and bonding challenges, particularly with children who are not infants at the time of adoption. "A bond is the initial tie of trust the child has in his parent. The bond is established when the bonding cycle, which involves repeatedly meeting the infant's needs, is successfully completed on an ongoing basis" (van Gulden & Bartels-Rabb, 1993, p. 17). Attachment is defined as a "process whereby infants and young children develop confidence in their parents' protection" (Goldberg, 2000). Attachment does not happen instantaneously. It also takes more time than bonding because it requires more interaction between parent and child. It

is a process that develops during the *first year* parent and child are together (Goldberg, 2000). Also, when the child does not respond to the parent, the parent may not bond with/attach to the child.

The attachment process impacts a person's whole development. Infants with a relatively secure attachment tend to become resilient, competent toddlers with high self-esteem. As preschoolers, they exhibit more persistence, curiosity, self-reliance and leadership and have better peer relations. In middle childhood, they display better social skills and have richer friendship networks than children who lacked a secure attachment during infancy (Weiten & McCann, 2007). Children who experience loving, secure relationships with their parents develop unconscious working models for secure, trusting relationships as adults.

Policy Recommendation #10:

That HRSDC, the federal department responsible for policy development and implementation of the national employment insurance program, recognize the unique challenges that often come with adoptive parenting and expand the EI program to provide equal benefits to all Canadians who choose to stay at home during the first year of their child's life with their family.

Citizenship and immigration

Citizenship was another issue some parents raised. If a Canadian woman gives birth to a child in another country, the child automatically becomes a Canadian citizen. Until late 2007, however, parents who adopted outside Canada first had to sponsor their child to come to Canada as a permanent resident and then seek citizenship through a regular grant (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2009).

On December 23, 2007, the law was changed so that children born outside Canada and adopted after February 14, 1977, could be granted citizenship without first

having to immigrate to Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2009). As Northcott (2008) points out, while Bill C-14's intent was to help adopted children become citizens faster and easier, this has not been the result. She states that rather than become an automatic process in terms of citizenship availability to a child adopted abroad, the legislation has only brought into place a new application process with its own time line, fees, and complications. She recommends applying for permanent residency first as it appears to be the fastest way to get the child home to the family and will make the child eligible for "automatic" citizenship once in Canada.

Until changes came into effect on April 17, 2009, Canadians could pass on their citizenship to endless generations born outside Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2009). Further, there is much misunderstanding in the adoption community regarding this "first generation limitation." This means that children born to Canadian parents in the first generation outside Canada will only be Canadian at birth if one parent was born in Canada or became a Canadian citizen by immigrating to Canada and was later granted citizenship. These rules may also affect children adopted by Canadian parents outside Canada, depending on the way in which the child obtained, or will obtain, his/her Canadian citizenship.

Children adopted outside Canada who take the direct route to citizenship will be treated just like any child born outside Canada to a Canadian parent. This means that if that adopted person has, or adopts, a child outside Canada, their child will not be Canadian at birth or eligible for a citizenship grant using the direct route, unless the other parent was born or naturalized in Canada.

Children adopted outside Canada who come to the country as permanent residents and obtain citizenship through a regular grant are subject to the same rules as anyone born or naturalized in Canada. This means that any children they have outside Canada would automatically acquire Canadian citizenship, and their

children adopted outside Canada would be eligible for a grant of citizenship through the direct route, without having to first become permanent residents.

(Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2009, p. 17-18)

Adoptive parents and their children will face these issues in the future. In 2008, 1,208 adoptions went through the permanent residency route, while 700 were tracked in direct citizenship (Adoption Council of Canada, 2009).

Policy Recommendation #11:

That Citizenship and Immigration Canada initiate efforts to introduce amendments to Bill-C37 to make citizenship benefits the same for internationally adopted children as for biological children born in Canada.

Conclusion

Adoption practitioners, including social service providers, profess to know what is best for transracially adopted children and their families without any or little education about transracial adoption, including that of race theory, anti-racist practices, and cross-cultural counselling. Therefore, asking parents who created their families through transracial adoption what they want and need is a critical first step in providing consistent, accessible and responsive pre- and post-adoption services. The federal and provincial governments need to acknowledge the inconsistencies and gaps in service provision so they can work together with parents and practitioners to provide appropriate services.

“It takes a village to raise a child.” Every family’s situation is unique, but while transracially adoptive families “still have to blaze their own trails,” it is important to “help each other build bridges and shelters” (Kirk, 1984, p. 123). Acknowledging the importance of pre- and post-adoption services in parenting a transnationally or transracially adopted child is imperative but only a first step. These resources have to be

available and accessible to all families, regardless of the province in which they live, the size of their community, or their socioeconomic status. As the diaspora of transnationally and transracially adopted children matures into adulthood, they, like other adoptee diaspora before them (e.g., Bishoff & Rankin, 1997; Koh, 1993), will have much to teach us. However, in the meantime, governments must respond to research that describes families' needs for supports to foster the development of socially, physically and emotionally healthy Canadian citizens.

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