

*The Flight of the Thunderbird:
Applying Traditional Indigenous Values to Contemporary Global
Challenges*

By William White and Philip Cook

Draft Outline

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Background

The purpose of this paper is to share, ‘echo’ if you will, the traditional Indigenous teachings learned through the collaboration, cooperation of colleagues and friends over three decades. The paper describes a rich journey, an intellectual partnership, navigating cultures and a voyage of friendship, to understand and apply age-old wisdom to contemporary social challenges. This journey starts in the traditional territory of the Coast Salish people of the Pacific North West Coast of Canada. It is rooted in the teachings and values passed down by Salish Elders, *sulsalewh*, to Bill White (Xelimulh/Kasalid) and through him to Philip Cook. Philip Cook, a Western academic, also born on Canada’s West Coast, who has lived and worked with his family on programs for vulnerable children in various traditional communities around the world. During this period, he too, saw the application of songs, prayers, teachings and stories associated with helping young people know the strength of their Ancestors for a new time and place. The partnership between Bill and Philip started with a mutual desire and trust to breathe new life into traditional Indigenous social knowledge. At the very beginning because the elders felt safe, welcomed and sure, their words, prayers, songs and actions helped framed the coming together of young people, who in turn felt comfortable to continue to practice their teachings. In their own words the elders believed this too would strengthen or make strong/*k’wamk’wum* their words.

They too knew it would, after a century and a half of systemic discrimination, not be easy....they constantly spoke about, or offered the teaching associated with being strong, or *k’wamk’wumstuhw tun swhqwaluwun* /make your mind strong and make the best of both worlds. This is part of a new time and place. The reason for this process is two fold. First it is consistent with Dan George’s teaching about writing:

“..we must write about our ways, our beliefs our customs, our morals, how we look at things and why, how we lived, and how we live now.” (George, 1974)¹

The second reason is that during our time with *sulsalewh* we learned that their words had power and like prayers and songs can persist over time and space. In short, they taught us that when working with young people ‘they are the gifts of the Creator’ and that ‘they must be treated with great respect.’

¹ Chief Dan George [My Heart Soars](#) 1974:55

The paper is written for those who are responsible for delivering and developing programs for children, youth and families. We hope as with those who passed before us, you too can echo the old peoples' teachings. In the seventies we were asked "to use the best of both worlds". During the reading of the paper and the time with us as we together for the YouLEAD Thunderbird course, it would be great if you could begin to think of what that might mean for you as a professional and as a unique human being?

Within each of your communities you have seen examples or reflections of these things. Bertha Dan, of Swinomish Washington, State shared, "it is not what is happening today that is as important as our history." In keeping with classic ways of being strong, becoming strong. She added, "we have to know our history to keep our identity as a People alive." (Dan, 1998).²

This is especially true for those values that strengthened who we are and ways in which the old people knew and practiced that 'children were gifts of the Creator.' In each of our territories at community and or family meetings it is likely eight or so elders, who spoke the language and lived the teachings, would rise and talk about our relations with each other and all living things. Today this does not happen as often as we would like and then add to that the reality that people under twenty-five constitute the largest portion of our communities.

Laying the ground

After their first series of workshops with various elders and on their first flight to Paris, France for meetings with UNESCO on Indigenous Peoples rights, Bill talked about the power and importance of the collaboration and spoke of it as feeling like the flight of a great bird going against steady and heavy winds. That energy was understood as a signal to continue to work hard at the various projects and to continue to work with the old people/*sulsalewh*. Over the years this trend has continued as they recognized the importance of supporting elders voices for a new time and place, and in promoting the rights of children and youth through the application of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Their work began in 1993 at the University of Victoria, when Bill was the Aboriginal Liaison Officer, with Philips' request to open a workshop on children's resilience. Bill brought Dr. Samuel Sam, OC and Coast Salish Elder, to open that session with a prayer, followed immediately by advice. Philip immediately noticed Sam's ability to speak to the hearts and minds of the youth with whom they worked as well as practitioners participating in Dr. Cooks courses at the University of Victoria's School of Child and Youth Care. Bill and Philip drew on this process with several *sulsalewh* including Agnes Pierre, Katzie Nation- until the present. It is that process, that is understood to be a

² Dr. Samuel Sam. Tsartlip Retreat Jan 9 – 10th 1998 Personal Interview with Chris Cook, International Institute for Child Rights and Development.

voice of the old people, the voice of the Thunderbird, a sacred process deemed to be a 'gift'.

This story was initially inspired by the program to work with *sulsalewh* and to apply and support their teachings. That journey and the application of age old teachings was then understood as 'sacred'. We began with thinking merging our thoughts around the old peoples' voices and the flight of the Thunderbird a mythical Salish and Kwakwakawak, and Nuuchahnulth winged creature that creates the sound of thunder with its wings and sends lightning from its eyes. The Thunderbird signifies change and transformation and was gifted to White and Cook as a symbol of their work together, and later the International Institute for Child Rights and Development (IICRD), now affiliated with Royal Roads University. While Thunderbirds are feared for their terrifying power, they are also revered as protective spirits who will emerge in times of community danger and bring safety and protection through change great and the faith of the *sulsalewh* and those who taught them that to apply these teachings we announce our love for the sacred, our love for each other, and that we belong.

The concept and feeling of the flight of the Thunderbird is used as a guiding metaphor for this paper as it captures the transformative process of traditional Indigenous values in various complex global challenges. These include: social programming addressing issues of support for vulnerable Indigenous children, youth and families in Western Canada; strengthening tribal South African communities' capacity to recover from the scourge of HIV/AIDS; providing a strength based narrative to assist "two spirited" Indigenous men and women find meaning amidst social isolation and stigmatization; and, reinforcing community capacity for social cohesion and child protection in West African Sahel communities experiencing ongoing civil war and conflict.

Let us bring this together in another way, bearing in mind our old people watched us, listened to us, and perhaps framed the teachings in another way. The traditional values, that guide the teachings of the Thunderbird and other aspects of Indigenous teachings which in Salish are called *Sinyews*. They have been applied for at least 10,000 years, remind us we have value, belong to an extended family both natural and supernatural and are reflected in prayers, songs and the spoken word – often referred to as Sacred or *Xaxa*. The eminent actor/writer, *sulalewh*, Dan George, like many others said, "each day brings an hour of magic, listen to it!" How many of you for example recall hearing the old people/*sulalewh* speak about the importance of silence and listening for children. Release of darkness allows for flight of the heart and soul. Of the choices we make in our lives more so when we are younger, to establish a process in part affected by racism and discrimination 'will not be easy.'" In this regard the old people believed our lives to be hard, with challenges that needed to be met with personal and collective strengths, lived through cultural values. Like many others of Dan Georges' generation and likely many of your own old people/*sulsalewh* in their hearts and souls they knew to apply the gifts of their ancestors, often through songs, prayers, talk, ceremonies our lives hearts and souls would be protected and surrounded. They understood, through this process we would be strengthened, to know we belong and begin a new life for this day and

time. They also knew that to hold onto darkness (sorrow, hurt, sadness etc.) prevented new teachings, protective teachings, ancestral love from strengthening itself.

The conceptual thread running through this paper begins with the early work carried by the authors with a key group of West Coast Indigenous Elders. The core values of kindness, respect, well being, balance, and protection from harm arising from this work are then presented, followed by some examples of how the values have been brought to life in the flight of the Thunderbird. In our respective areas sacred and or powerful beings such as the Thunderbird appeared in different forms from the northeast portion of our province as the flight of the swan. To the old people the powers associated with the Thunderbird, the flight of the Thunderbird, the voices of the Thunderbird like songs, prayers, talk represented the power of the Creator and of the Ancestors and thus it too was real and could be seen when rites and ceremonies opened more and more with each song, with every prayer, with the application of great love and respect for each other. Remember k'wamk'wum!

The sections of this paper are described according to the key sections of the Thunderbird's flight: *Preparing to fly; Spreading the wings; Taking flight.*

Preparing to Fly

The first origins of the values emerged from discussions with eminent Choctaw Elder, Native American scholar and education specialist, Floy C. Pepper, or Dr. Pepper as she affectionately liked to be called. In her professional life she reviewed and developed innovative native education approaches in Canada and the US. She later referenced a list of key values that, while needing adaptation in local contexts, could be used to guide Indigenous educational policy, curriculum development and pedagogical styles. Her paper on 'Indian Values" (an American term of the 70's), likely influenced by her training as an Adlerian Psychology student, her own understanding of our world, later teacher used terms, lessons that were consistent with the way our old people deemed important, such as belonging, helping one another, working with values that strengthened young and old. Her paper and group work with young people at the vulnerable grade 7 level when they were most likely to drop out of school – quietly, gently, said you are important, you belong, we should listen to you. We did not know it then, but the process of understanding in a Western way, that words too had power, that is what our old people had been speaking about and hearing since they were children, emerged for a new time and place.

These values were further refined by Floy and William in the early 1990's in conjunction with a cross-cultural review of School and Child Youth Care Programs at the University of Victoria, chaired by Philip. As an academic he had to trust that this approach was significant and could lead the way to many trails of thought and actions.

That paper has been slowly evolving with subsequent changes and attempted to 'echo' values/*Sinyews* from many *Sulsalewh* from the Coast Salish and Kwagiulth regions including Sammy Sam/*Qwexwyalaluc*, Theresa Sam/*Xwe-ulwut*, Agnes Pierre/, Kim Recalma-Clutesi/*Ogwilogwa* and Chief Adam Dick/*Kwaksistalla*. Over the past twenty-five years the two authors have worked to apply these values to programs in Canada and around the world, from programs for children, youth and families living in communities in Canada and South Africa, to policy discussion with regional and national governments as well as with the United Nations. The following text describes this journey.

The Thunderbird Spreads it's Wings

The following is a list of the key values, classic teachings that emerged from the discussions with Dr. Floy Pepper in 1994, and was later modified with other West Coast *Sulsalewh*/Elders. Each section is introduced with words spoken as though coming from time spent with the old people or heard at traditional gatherings that they understood in the Coast Salish region as *Sinyews*. This process over time and like standing on a cliff over looking the ocean, constantly, constantly feeling the wind move through your body and soul. As you brace yourself with the winds from the ocean over time it is as if coating the listener with their teachings. This process of constantly standing with the old people, hearing the songs, training for protective rites is understood by our people as 'the sacred'. The *Sulsalewh* believed because of lessons provided to them that words have power and must be treated carefully with respect so as not to harm the speaker or the person with whom they are being shared. In this way the focus shifts, the energy of transformation builds, the values bring teacher and student together in a blessed way.

1. "Children are gifts of the Creator..."



It is likely in your respective areas the old people/traditional leaders had their own ways of talking about our teachings as being sacred, in the same way that children are held as a “sacred bundle”. It took us awhile to find ways in which this was visible, apart from the ritual and ceremonial activities which visibly showed this relationship. The old people understood and talked about our relations with the natural and supernatural worlds. They often used the phrase, “we are related to all living things.” Of this complexity the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples said:

“For the ‘all-around’ thinker, the natural and supernatural intertwine. Past, present and future mesh in the life of an individual. The realm of the sacred becomes part of everyday experience.”³

In each of our territories, and we hope this document sheds light on ways in which these connections might be made showing regalia is meant to protect and to surround and helps guide young people through the stages of life. After working with our elders for twenty years we learned that the headpieces worn by the youth in this photo were made 100 years ago and were primarily used for naming young people. The traditional ceremonial hat maker Mr. Steve Sampson Sr. when shown an archival photo knew exactly what they were used for and he named them. He said they were used to protect young people when they were being given a traditional name. Sixty youth who led tribal delegations for the Opening Ceremonies for the Commonwealth Games, which took place in Victoria in 1994, wore these traditional headpieces. Mr. Steven Sampson/Tzuminus and Grace Horn/Saanich made their headpieces, applying the value that “children are sacred” too protect them during this powerful public event.

This process of knowing how the teachings protect the young and preparing them for our world, is how we would work with the elders/sulsalewh. The making of headpieces reinforced teachings, which said “young people are to be treated with great kindness.”⁴ Overall, we learned that with the application of love, kindness, reinforcing our values beginning early in life and continuing this process across the lifespan, were given by the Creator. After interviewing Elders across the country the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples said, “As learning continues throughout one’s life, so life itself is a sacred ceremony.”⁵

Key Points:

- Children are the gifts of the creator and of our ancestors. For these reason alone they are to be treated with great kindness.⁶

³ Volume 4 Perspectives and Realities Report of The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996:

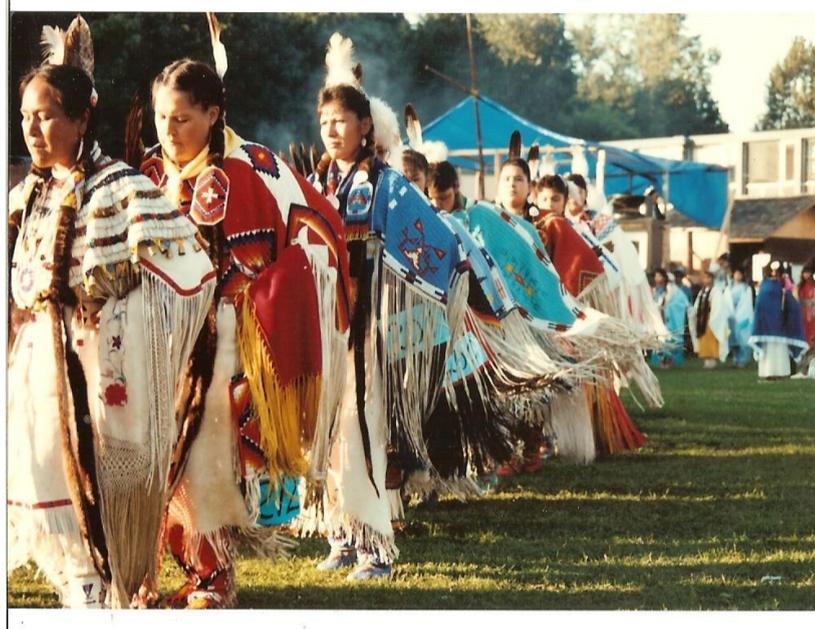
⁴ Children are believed to be gifts of the Creator and they are meant to carry the teachings to the next generation. The application of strict rules is understood as necessary to protect and surround the young who not as strong as old people. Without the traditions they are believed to be vulnerable. This rule is especially considered important when the first child is born.

⁵ Perspectives and Realities Vol. 4 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. 1996: 113 - 114.

⁶ Children are believed to be gifts of the Creator and they are meant to carry the teachings to the next generation. The application of strict rules is understood as necessary to protect and surround the young who

- Children who are shown great love by their families grow to be strong as adults.
- Children who are loved and gently shown how we treat others are less likely to feel threatened when they are quietly told to keep still and to be quiet. The old people/mothers and fathers showed great kindness to their children. This process is understood as essential in terms of helping to learn, to watch, to pay attention.

2. “Teach your children the importance of keeping still, watching and listening carefully.”



In most of our areas our old people might have taught children the importance of being quiet and keeping still? Part of the reason for that is to set their lives, to ensure they know how to keep still, to watch, to listen and to learn, ultimately knowing they too belong. When they actually begin to participate in family and community they will begin to see how the rules are applied.

The value of listening and watching, does not conflict with the guiding principle of meaningful child participation, enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12. Rather it underscores, how participation begins in learning the complex web of relations that anchors a child to their family, community and ancestral culture, including the natural and supernatural worlds.

It might be a good idea to ask your participants to speak about their own experiences with being taught or if they were asked to keep quiet, “who did that?” They will also begin to see how families work together. For these activities, our old people spoke about ‘our ways, by saying “we should sit with each other, support each other, speak

not as strong as old people. Without the traditions they are believed to be vulnerable. This rule is especially considered important when the first child is born.

kindly and lovingly with each other.⁷ In our longhouses we saw families, dancers, singers sitting with each other.

We are hopeful when you look at these beautiful women with full beaded leather regalia you might ask young people with whom you are working the following questions. What is the first thing you think of when you see these women? For those of you who know, who is responsible for teaching them the rules for preparing to dance, to move? They all have serious looks on their faces, what does that mean? As a presenter, perhaps with your own images, you might comment about the serious looks on their faces? If you do not know the background asking an old or traditional person might help and the same time begin a practice of collaboration. The rules for 'being strong' and or working with the traditions are not easy. When change occurs and or when darkness comes, the rules are to be applied systematically. In this way strength can be returned and young and old protected.

Key points:

- The rules for 'being strong' and or working with the traditions are not easy. When change occurs and or when darkness comes the rules are to be applied systematically. In this way strength can be returned.
- At an early age children are taught to keep still, to watch intently and to learn. When ceremonies are underway they will begin to see how the rules are applied. They will also begin to see how families work together. For these activities immediate families should sit with each other, support each other, speak kindly and lovingly with each other.⁸

3. "Remember to treat people with respect, with kindness. Be careful, words have power and can hurt as well as heal."



⁷ Immediate family members are required for their own cultural and spiritual safety, because the darkness of death is present, to speak kindly with each other. There are strong rules about not raising your voice, speaking harshly otherwise further harm might occur.

⁸ibid

- If we are to move together with the teachings and to strengthen our communities it is important to treat others with respect and kindness.
- Families that meet together to plan ceremonial events with the advice of traditional leaders/elders learn the importance to listening to others and ultimately to work together.
- The old people have brought forward songs, ceremonies, prayers and speeches to strengthen who we are and where we have come from. The creator has called for deep respect of each other.
- Songs have power. Prayers have power, Ceremonies have power and because they contain words. Words to have power. When speaking with each other these actions too are sacred.

4. “See who is standing with you! The traditions teach us you are not alone and you come from a large family.”

- When ceremonies are being planned families are expected to meet together, to talk with each other, to love each other and to prepare for the ‘great event.’⁹
- When change occurs, ‘being strong’, means working together, taking the advice of those who know the rules.
- The creator and the ancestors left us ceremonies and teachings to help create stronger families and stronger communities. We learn to work with each other. We learn to rely on each other. We learn to support each other.
- When we work with ritual and ceremony often our families become larger with the addition of traditional leaders/elders.
- Children are recognized through their parents, and grandparents.
- In this way the past becomes the present, and when they apply the teachings, the present becomes the future.
- **It is for these reasons the Creator and the old people have asked us to be strong and to be clean.**
- Our teachings and ceremonies (rights/regalia/songs/prayers etc.) are not new but are at least 15-20 generations old. They are put in place as

⁹ A memorial potlatch normally held four years after the passing of a family member is held four years after a death. This time is understood as one in which the family gradually prepares to host Salish relatives/families from throughout the region and to begin saving money, blankets and at least a year before to hire singers, cooks, specialists to help the family. A memorial is deemed signify the end of mourning.

cleansing and or healing instruments /ceremonies meant to strengthen and heal.¹⁰

5. “It is important to help out. It is important to help others; this is how our communities are strengthened. This is how we learn to rely on each other”

- When a young boy hunts and or fishes for the first time his catch is given to the oldest person in the community.
- When a young girl is asked to sing for the first time, the blanket she receives as payment is given to the oldest person at the gathering. When a young man uses the Mask for the first time, blankets and money he is provided is distributed to older members in the longhouse/bighouse. It is understood that this process ensures they will continue to be hired to help others. It is also a visible reminder that they have been taught well. The same process is followed for the first time a boy or a girl is initiated to use the rattle called Shulmuxstes.
- Through this process, young people are taught the importance of sharing, of generosity of helping others.
- While a family is giving out quarters, paying cooks, men who watch the fire, or cut wood, singers or dancers as they line up to do these things...the people sitting around the longhouse also look to see if the family is talking with each other, helping one another, moving with one another etc. If the family is split, arguing, fighting, standing separate from the others, this is seen as a very bad thing and understood to set a pattern for the rest of their lives.¹¹
- When a naming or initiation ceremony immediate and cultural families help each other out with food, money, blankets, wood. These actions teach children the importance of helping others. These actions also strengthen our relations with the creator and our ancestors. Ultimately, our families and communities become stronger.
- When ‘darkness’ comes generosity helps the immediate family with the grieving process and assists with healing. Moving together, helping each other, speaking kindly to each other strengthen our ceremonies

6. “The old people brought songs, prayers, and ceremonies for a purpose, these are to bring strength. These are to be upheld, they are to be moved with on a regular basis (values). It is your responsibility to carry these teachings. Not just for today

¹⁰ One of the classic teachings from Sulsalewh/elders is that the memorial and or funeral with the use of specialists is a process to help the deceased relative with their journey and no more grieving should occur otherwise the weak and the vulnerable are placed in jeopardy.

¹¹ The repercussions from fighting, arguing, standing separately is deemed harmful and I am not sure if there are any teachings to correct that energy or if it is lasting.

but for all days. When darkness comes, the teachings must move closer, families must move closer....”

- Whenever a family/community moves to name a person, to initiate another, to pass along a ceremonial right all of the values are applied, often in unison. The combination of which enhances the capacity of individual to learn they belong to a larger community. In essence, they are not alone.
- Old people within the community watch the young of their communities to see ‘if they carry themselves properly.’
- The obligation to apply the values or training, called *Sinyews*,
- For the next year or two after the formal ceremony is the most challenging. However it is during this time that additional teachings are likely to flow.
- The great gift of the elders is they visibly show that applying *Sinyews* can be done.
- Good personal and community health usually depends on the consistent application of values and activities which drive them.
- Ritual specialists/elders/teachers may use prayers and songs/ceremonies to restore balance and healing to individuals.

7. “Our Ancestors named places where berries could be found, where the best hunting and fishing sites were. Where people were cleaned, where reflection occurred and where the people lived. They also named places which were dangerous.”

- It is for these reasons that the land is believed to be sacred.
- The land provides a connection to our ancestors/our ceremonies, the creator. And is the most visible reflection of our connections to the natural and supernatural worlds.
- It is for these reasons that the old people said that we should take care of these things. Songs, teachings, memories have been left on the land for the benefit of those who follow.
- The land is a part of our history, our connection to the past.
- It is for these reasons that the past is important to our understanding of the present.
- It is for these reasons that the past and present determine the strength of our future.

8. “We do not rush because things should happen when we are ready. The energy/teachings of our ancestors prepares to move for a new time and place. There are strong rules associated with being ready and understanding what we are doing.”

- Lessons learned from yesterday, last week, last month are considered before actions are undertaken in the present. When the cumulative effects are understood then plans are developed for the future.
- The time to begin an activity or event occurs when people are ready – when everyone arrives.
- The rules associated with getting ready for a formal ceremony and to apply the teachings however are not as flexible. The old people are fairly strict about being prepared.

9. “Know where you have come from, when *darkness*¹² comes draw on the teachings of the old people!”

- Traditionally trained elders understand the rules and regulations associated with *being strong*. It is for this reason traditional families might begin a family or community meeting with a prayer in order to protect and to surround. After years of listening and being spoken to by their elders they have learned to apply ‘living traditions’ and are the ones’ who advise what ceremonies are best.
- They remember that songs are to protect and to surround.¹³ To bring strength.
- When *darkness* comes or when change occurs they remember that ceremonies are meant to strengthen, to block further darkness and to bring light, healing and strength.
- Traditionally trained elders carry the gifts of the ancestors and of the Creator. It is for this reason they are treated with respect and that it is the old and trained who would speak at a function.

10. “Humour helps bring families together and find strength”. Our formal rites and ceremonies are sacred and involve change for self and our community. Often great danger exists which is why the old people are strict during these events. Following sacred ceremonies, however, families often use humor and tease each other as another form of protection. When the time is right this is believed to

¹² Darkness is understood as significant change within the family that affects not only the immediate family but the larger community as well. Public speakers, or elders would not normally name for example ‘death’ or the name of the person who has recently passed away. They might be referred to as our brother, our sister, our cousin etc.

¹³ We are likely to see this process when Masked Dancers called Sxwaixwe are hired to brush the deceased on the morning of the funeral. We also see this when members of the Shaker Church standing on each side of the casket at a Funeral Service, in two rows of men and women, 4 each side, to bless the deceased to prepare for the next part of their journey.

help remember there is joy in our lives as well, and this is another way to support each other.

- Humour acknowledges acceptance of each other and also serves the purpose of enhancing our ability to cope during times of stress.
- Often one of the first acts of acceptance within a traditional community involves a willingness to tease others.
- Old people and or community elders who are acting as speakers (what do you call these in your community?) might often end their formal talk with a funny story or humorous song. Perhaps as a lesson for 'keeping well' and an actual demonstration showing the importance of laughing or taking care of each other.

1. Examples of the application of the values

- Echoing of the Elders: Working with Coast Salish Youth
- Protection of families from violence (gathering at TsaKwaluten Lodge, UN Committee on the Rights of the Child)
- Work in Mexico (not sure if we have enough for this but we can see)
- Circle of Care: Community Support for Children Affected by HIV/AIDS in South Africa (including the collaboration with the Dingaka)
- Bill's work with the gay community (contemporary)
- Philip's work in war affected communities in Africa (contemporary)

The Thunderbird takes Flight

Over the past 25 years there have been a number of significant applications of the traditional values by the two authors in collaboration with Elders, governments, UN agencies and community organizations. Some of these involved gatherings in which Elders from Indigenous cultures shared their teachings on living in balance, placing children at the centre of community, managing conflict and drawing on the power of the natural and spiritual world through ritual ceremony and prayer. These teachings were shared with Indigenous youth who spoke of contemporary challenges facing their communities and between these two groups recommendations were developed.

Claiming our Place in the Circle: An International Gathering Promoting the Rights of Indigenous Children

One example of these meetings was the Claiming Our Place in the Circle: Indigenous Children's Rights gathering on Láu-Wel-New, the Coast Salish sacred mountain on the outskirts of Victoria. The Coast Salish cherish this site as the place where their communities took shelter during the great flood and it was considered a fitting place to gather again with Indigenous peoples from across the Americas to take stock of the flood of challenges challenging communities including poverty, family breakdown, youth suicide, substance misuse and forced migration caused by environmental degradation and state and communal violence.

Various strategies were developed during this unique international gathering that brought together indigenous elders and youth from 20 nations to discuss an intergenerational Indigenous action plan for the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Specific goals of this gathering, chaired by Bill and Philip and hosted by the Saanich Salish Nations, were to (a) explore traditional values and teachings that nurture children, and (b) identify ways in which the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child might support indigenous peoples in developing programs for strengthening the rights of indigenous children. The workshop applied traditional methods of mediation and dispute transformation to discussions of key child-rights issues relevant to indigenous children.

One of the young people at the gathering expressed the theme of the meeting this way:
The vision created on this sacred mountain can become the dream carried forth by the young and the old to work together for children today. In this way we create the guardians of the children for the future (Zuli, 1996)

These words from the youth are echoed in the following quote from Wayuu (Venezuelan) matriarchal leader, Noeli Pocaterra.

According to our vision of the world it is impossible to speak of the family without reinstating our Elders as spiritual guides for our behaviour, the women as advice giver, fighter, producer of life and backbone to the preservation of our peoples' identity; the youth as our future generations and the children as our community of our peoples, because they are our own lives (Pocaterra, 1996).

The rights addressed in the CRC, all of which are relevant to Indigenous children, include rights to health, education, protection, and participation. The Convention also refers specifically to the rights of Indigenous children, in Articles 17, 29, and 30. Article 30 states that:

... a child ... who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her culture, to profess and practice his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language. (CRC Article 30)

Article 30 outlines the need to support the rights of Indigenous children in ways that uphold Indigenous cultures. This pertains especially to Indigenous children who are considered vulnerable due to racism and discrimination, which contributes to the breakdown of culture, community, and family. Article 8, which refers to the right to a name, nationality, and identity, seems pertinent to this issue as well. This is because of the importance placed on self-identity by Indigenous peoples and because of the loss of identity experienced by many Indigenous children and youth. The spirit of both Articles 30 and 8 seems reflected in Article 12, which relates to the children's right for their views to be meaningfully heard and considered. Article 12 emphasizes the importance of children's participation in the dialogue on culture and identity.

New partnerships among Indigenous Elders, youth, and community-based child-rights advocates can “breathe life” into the Convention by applying traditional Indigenous values of healing and balance to current issues that may place young people at risk. In this way, children’s rights strategies are developed inter-generationally and from the “ground up” rather than being imposed from the “top down” by governments, international organizations including UN agencies.

The CRC can also be used as a framework for Indigenous peoples, governments, and non-governmental organizations (NGO’s) for devising, implementing, and evaluating community-level children’s programs in a culturally appropriate manner. This process is supported by the work of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, which is the treaty body responsible for reviewing periodic State Party child rights reports. These are submitted every five years and should contain, for countries with Indigenous populations, explicit information on a variety of issues facing indigenous children and their communities.

The 1996 gathering resulted in an action plan that was shared with governments, UN agencies, including UNICEF and UNESCO and other international organizations working with children and youth. The plan was based primarily on the perceived links among Indigenous cultures, children’s rights, and priorities for human development. It was intended to be used as a rough guide for multi-level discussion of the rights of Indigenous children and was later implemented by UNICEF and Indigenous organizations in Mexico and Venezuela and by local Coast Salish communities and the University of Victoria in Canada (Halldorson, Bramly, Cook, & White, 1997).

Strengthening tribal South African communities’ capacity to recover from the scourge of HIV/AIDS

From 1999 to 2004, the Child and Youth Care Agency for Development (CYCAD), a South African Non-Government Agency (NGO), worked in partnership with the International Institute for Child Rights and Development (IICRD) and University of Victoria, Aboriginal Liaison Office (ABLO) to identify and reinforce community and cultural assets in supporting child and family resilience. The project, entitled *Circles of Care: Community Support for Children Affected by HIV/AIDS*, developed and piloted a model for reinforcing community capacity that supports traditional African community values, beliefs and governance structures (in the local Sotho language understood as *Setso*) in reinforcing child resilience through child rights based advocacy that partners children and traditional leaders (identified in Sotho as *Morena*) and healers (called *Dingaka*).

At the time of the project from 1999 - 2005 the world was witnessing one of the greatest human calamities of all time in the AIDS pandemic. The disease had cut the largest and deepest human swath across the countries of sub-Saharan Africa, where the majority of the 40 million persons were then infected by HIV/ AIDS.

Amongst the countries most affected by this disease, South Africa was at that time experiencing the crushing burden of having the highest number of persons living with AIDS of any country in the world. In 2003 this accounted for five million persons out of a

total population of 43 million. The number of orphans expected to result from this high level of mortality eventually reached three million by the year 2010 (UNICEF, 2010). Many elders were being described as the “second generation of orphans,” due to the added child care burden assumed by seniors who would typically be cared for by their children, and were taking on the care of children left orphaned by their own adult children. Not surprisingly, government policy and programming was unable to keep pace with the scale of this epidemic and the burden it placed on communities, families, and above all children.

Perhaps the most insidious aspect of HIV/AIDS is the capacity of the disease to sever the human bonds and social ties that children need to survive and thrive. Across southern Africa, and at that time particularly in South Africa, we were witnessing not only the reversal of development trends but also the very destruction of age old patterns of traditional family, community and social supports for children. In taking those members of society who are most crucial for children’s immediate developmental needs (e.g., parents, relatives, teachers, nurses, social workers) AIDS slowly unravelled the delicate web of human relationships that has sustained humanity since time immemorial.

It was a terrible irony that this human pandemic had taken root in the very cradle of humanity. Southern Africa contains some of the oldest social traditions and values of the human family. Better understanding and building on traditional African values, beliefs and practices supporting children and families remained an untapped well of collective human potential that should be drawn upon to address the social aspects of HIV/AIDS and the crushing poverty that fuels and accompanies this disease.

Circles of care: reinforcing resilience in the context of African children’s rights. The Circles of Care project aimed to implement participatory research strategies by building on the inherent African (in this case Sotho) resilience, or coping capacity of children, their elders, their families and communities. It also sought to draw on the strength of traditional African cultural values, beliefs and practices supporting children’s survival and full and healthy development. Finally, Circles of Care attempted to reverse the negative development trend caused by HIV/AIDS, in helping empower communities to identify and draw on existing human and cultural capital, especially traditional African Indigenous values, as a first step in facilitating innovative and responsive local government reaction to supporting those children most affected by HIV/AIDS.

Many other interventions at that time targeting children affected by HIV/AIDS applied a deficit model in which risks associated with HIV/AIDS and the social dysfunction associated with the disease are the centre of attention. This instead drew on resilience practice and theory by focusing on ways in which children and their communities successfully cope in the face of adversity. Factors that promote children’s resilience under conditions of adversity have been identified in a number of studies (Werner and Smith, 1982; Garmezy, 1993, Garmezy, Masten and Tellegen, 1984; Unger, 2005; Masten 2014). Factors that promote resilience and protect children from negative outcomes include capacities that are part of the child’s physical and psychological make-up as well as features of the social ecology in which the child lives, including local values of healing, balance, and drawing on local strengths to overcome challenges.

These factors were further strengthened by linking them with traditional values identified by Sotho/African traditional Elders

The Circles of Care project was located in several communities in the *Batlokwa* traditional *Sotho* tribal governance areas located in the Free State of central South Africa. Each area contains anywhere from three to nine communities that are governed by a local council of elders or chiefs (*Morena*). These councils sit periodically to hear local complaints and they are frequently the first line of informal dispute resolution on many community issues prior to someone formally approaching the municipal or provincial governance structures. The entire area is ruled by a hereditary royal family, headed by a matriarchal Queen Mother, who is advised by the *Morena*.

Results from the project were applied to South African policy change in discussions with the provincial government regarding the targeting of individual child-care grant payments. Traditionally, these payments were allocated to individual children with little or no community consultation with respect to risk (children being abused or exploited for the grant) or resilience (local elders helping support the proper allocation of the grant). In the Circle of Care project, community payment scheme was designed in which *Morena* and children's groups played a key role in helping to identify the most vulnerable children and ensure that their child-care grant is administered effectively. In doing this they drew on existing values emphasizing *the extended family as a key strength, the importance of kindness and generosity to those in need, drawing on Elders with knowledge for resolving conflict, working with traditional birth attendants as well as specialists in helping children and families manage grief, and placing children's well being at the centre of community decision making*. These values echo and contextualize the values identified by Pepper and White.

Community development has a stronger chance for success when social work staff are able to help reinforce traditional values associated with *Setso* in collaboration with community members who have a working knowledge of these traditions. In such contexts, traditional leaders, *Morena*, and social work staff have a common set of values with which to develop and implement programs. In Circle of Care, local social workers, Elders and the IICRD team met and discussed the implementation of local initiatives based on the values identified. These programs were overseen by the community leaders and funded and monitored by the provincial government. When challenges emerged the *Morena* were called on to provide guidance and help resolve any disputes that emerged.

In addition *Sotho* tribal values identification and subsequent values training could assist with the preparation and training of core community and social work staff, which in turn strengthens collaboration with *Morena* and the women healers, *Dingaka*. Renewed collaboration and dialogue between young and old with regard to the intent and scope of traditions, values and ceremonies could serve as a powerful role to renew a community's understanding of balance, healing, and working together all necessary components of *Setso*.

The application of values and traditions in a new time and place, built on the rationale for *Setso*. It helped facilitate the capacity for problem solving, community dialogue and

ultimately develop community mechanisms meant to strengthen children, families and whole communities. In this way, the *Morena* were assured of their role and ability to develop, if necessary, new mechanisms in conjunction with the young. In this way, the contemporary children's rights programs become a living, breathing entity moved by partnership between children, community members, government practitioners (e.g. social workers) and Elders and driven by thousands of years of understanding why traditional mechanisms were put in place by the ancestors/creator. Imagine the great cultural worth and respect paid to the *Morena* and *Dingaka* by following through with their suggestion to bring forward songs from the ancestors, thus opening up their capacity to safely discuss issues and training. And then, as one Elder so eloquently stated, "To say to the *Morena* and *Dingaka* (and through them their ancestors), there is great darkness in the world today. However, they (the young and old) are the light, the past becomes the present, the present becomes the future."

Providing a strength based narrative to assist "two spirited" Indigenous men and women find meaning amidst social isolation and stigmatization

Our relatives and friends who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer and Two-Spirited (LGBTQT) are ever so slowly coming out of a great darkness causing premature death, HIV/AIDS. It is still around but nowhere near as much an immediate death sentence since first making its appearance in 1981 in New York and Los Angeles. Prior to this period, 'coming out' was understood to be the most challenging life decision. Although, within many pre-contact communities, this energy was believed to carry with it powerful ritual and ceremonial energies.

Finding a powerful process to consult with our old people would be substantially assisted if terms and or descriptions are to be found which describe any relationship and more importantly terms which apply being clean, being strong etc. A review of Coast Salish ethnographies and to a lesser degree Kwakwakawak and Nuuchahnulth could not reveal the use of the term two-spirited or gay within any of these groups. Not finding this speaks to the issue of our ancestors speaking about relations with others as opposed to formally committing to a lifestyle. Recently, for my work amongst the Cowichan I was surprised to learn of married men who also slept with men. This in contrast, to living a wholly gay life, although there are incidences of those who are clearly living a life of being gay. Amongst the Coast Salish there is no term for two-spirit or gay. Recently, I asked a mother fluent in language, "what do you call men who slept with men?" This was a challenge and I changed the question a bit saying, "if our old people were sitting around talking with each other and two men entered the room, who were (gay). Immediately, she replied, "they would say, they sleep together" Her reticence I suspect is associated with the classic nature of Coast Salish culture in which sexual matters are not discussed openly. Perhaps quietly? In another instance, I did ask another teacher, Kwagiulth what would you say in Kwakwaka in about men who were gay? He refused at first but later when it was just the two of us, said "it is about a man who also has a women inside him." We never talked about that any further. The point here, I suspect is there is no designation but rather talk about behavior. These questions are for you to continue talking about in your professional experience. I suspect for example that there are few pre-contact terms which make use of gay or

two-spirited. Both are of modern origin and may not provide inroads to the application of traditional values. We have learned there is however success with applying terms, asking about terms which speak about taking care on one another, helping one another, being clean, and or being strong, knowing you belong etc. This was the basis for the research with elders in the Cowichan region and my role as an Elder attached to a monthly meeting group of those affected by HIV/AIDS.

Several significant developments occurred with the recent Vancouver based Community Based Research Centre for Gay Men's Health Summit (CBRC) and their acknowledgement of Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action. They saw the need to educate and provide skills-based training for those working in gay men's health on Indigenous health and cultural safety Summit meetings. The advantage for the western driven organization is that values and traditions about belonging are going to assist with working within the community altogether.

For the first time, the 2017 Gay Men's Health Summit opened with a Rites of Passage Ceremony co-hosted with our indigenous partners at the Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Executive Council (MVAEC), Rocky James, Florence James, Bill White (Coast Salish Sulsalewh/Elders). Traditionally, the purpose of this ceremony is to acknowledge the community member's life and to provide them with the social skills and tools to guide their relationship development with their family, community, and First Nation.

Two other sessions which highlight the health, history, and culture of First Nations' people was provided for participants. These included.

1. "It Will Not Be Easy To Know What Is Best." First Nations Teachings: An Interactive Workshop for Service Providers/Allies - Led by Bill White, this interactive workshop is meant to strengthen who we are and to develop dialogue with those who work with us. ilhe' nem' ya:ys! / let's go to work.

2. Two Spirit Resilience Through Coming Out Narratives - A plenary presentation by John R. Sylliboy, highlighting the experiences of Two Spirit individuals in Atlantic Canada. This will showcase research findings surrounding sources of strength, support, and resilience which makes the case for stronger commitments for the health of Two Spirit and indigenous LGBTQ youth.

Finally the Community Based Research Centre for Gay Men's health said, "We all have a role in reconciliation. The lessons from these sessions can and must be incorporated into our work and communities as an important first step."

Reinforcing community capacity for social cohesion and child protection in West African Sahel communities experiencing ongoing civil war and conflict.

To be continued

References

