

The Educational Attainment of Children in Care in British Columbia

Wayne Mitic

Formerly with the Office for Children and Youth, Province of British Columbia

MaryLynne Rimer

Children's Commission, Province of British Columbia

ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a difference in academic performance between children in care (referred to in British Columbia as children in continuing custody (CCC) and the general population of students in Grades 4, 7, and 10 in the areas of writing, reading, and numeracy. Data for the study consisted of merging information on children in continuing custody with the Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) scores on all students in the public school system in British Columbia. Academic performance among CCC was found to be significantly lower than in the general population of students. This finding occurs across all grades studied and across all subject categories. Implications of the findings are discussed and a comprehensive strategic model is presented.

KEY WORDS: children in continuing custody; educational attainment; children in care.

Introduction and Purpose

Research has consistently indicated that children in care (CIC) tend to perform below the national average for their age group, even when in long-term placements (Smucker, Kaufmann & Ball, 1996; Dubowitz et al., 1994) and are more likely to leave school earlier than the general population of students (Kufledt, 1995). As a result, once these youth reach adulthood and leave care, it is difficult for them to maintain stable employment, and the earnings of those who are employed are low (Dworky & Courtney, 2000).

Few Canadian studies have examined the educational performance of children in care, and those that have been conducted relied upon

Correspondence should be directed to Dr. Wayne Mitic, Office for Children and Youth, PO Box 9207, Stn Prov Govt Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, V8W 9J1. The authors acknowledge Hendrik Roelants for assistance with data analysis and Les Foster and Barry Anderson for content advice.

small samples (Flynn & Biro, 1998), or have provided only limited information on student performance in specific academic areas. Earlier work primarily describes educational outcomes of CIC without comparing their achievements with the general student population, making it difficult to understand how a child's custody experience is associated with educational performance.

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a difference in academic performance between children in continuing custody and the general student population of students in Grades 4, 7, and 10 in the areas of writing, reading and numeracy. The academic performance of a particularly vulnerable population, aboriginal children in continuing custody, was also examined.

Background and Context

The term "children in care" applies to a large group of children who are no longer in the care and custody of their parents, and who are cared for by state. During 2001, approximately 10,000 children aged 0 to 18 years in British Columbia were in care at any one point in time. Half of these were children in temporary care, while the other half were children in continuing custody (CCC). Over 65% of children and youth in care are from families on Income Assistance at the time of admission (Foster and Wright, 2002) and 60 percent are from single-parent families (British Columbia Provincial Health Officer, 1998).

About 40 percent of children and youth come into care because there is evidence that they have been physically, emotionally, or sexually abused. Another 40 percent are in care because their parents abandoned them or were unwilling or unable to care for them. The remaining children and youth are in care for a variety of reasons, usually because of emotional, behavioural, physical, or developmental needs that their parents could not meet (Office of the Provincial Health Officer, 2001).

Almost half of children and youth taken into care are able to return home or leave care within six months, while approximately 70% leave care within one year (British Columbia Ministry of Children and Families 1999/2000 Annual Report). Some children and youth require longer term care, and are considered children in continuing custody or continuing custody wards. These children remain in custody of the Province, which acts *in loco parentis* on behalf of the child, usually until their 19th birthday. Approximately 5,000 children were in continuing custody in 2000 (Children's Commission Comprehensive Plans of Care Reviews, 2001).

While research on this population is limited, we do know that overall, children and youth in care experience poorer health and do less well in

school than other children (British Columbia. Children's Commission, 2000). For example Flynn and Biro (1998) compared the developmental outcomes of 43 children cared for by a Canadian child welfare agency and those of an approximate comparison group of 1600 children from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth. On several indicators of educational success, the CIC group were found to be seriously disadvantaged relative to the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) surveyed children: 41% (vs 9%) had repeated a grade in school, and 43% (vs 7%) were currently receiving special education. Also, the CIC children had changed schools (for reasons other than natural progression) almost twice as often as the Canadian sample (means = 3.9 vs 2.0). Kufeldt et al. (1998) concluded that: little data is held by education departments on children in care; few opportunities for liaison between education and social services departments exists and little cooperation between teachers, social workers and foster parents occurs; provision for continuity of schooling in placement decisions is inconsistent; and, school resources that might be directed to children in care are inadequate.

Methods

Data for this study consisted of merging information from the Ministry for Children and Family Development (MCFD) on children in continuing custody with the Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) scores collected by the Ministry of Education, in April/May 2000, on all students in the public school system in the Province of British Columbia. The FSA is an in-school questionnaire, administered by teachers to students in grades 4, 7, and 10. In each school, three 45–60 minute class periods were devoted to completing the questionnaires—one class for each of the three components (reading, writing and numeracy). Students who were not present on the day of administration were provided with an opportunity to complete the test the following week.

A detailed description of the administration protocol and the components of the instrument are available at <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/assessment/fsa/>

Limitations

No single measure can accurately portray a student's educational attainment in school. The Foundation Skills Assessment is only one test at one point in time and therefore only an approximation of a child's educational ability. While this standardized test is not the sole gauge of academic ability, it does provide a reasonably sound method by which to assess a student's relative educational achievement. The

test is uniform across the province, it is administered at approximately the same time to all students, and is validated against Ministry of Education benchmarks.

This study did not evaluate any particular programs or interventions to assist CCC perform better academically. Instead, it is limited to assessing the gap that exists between these children and the general student population. However, by drawing attention to possible inequities in educational attainment, and determining where these differences may exist, provides a means by which suggested modifications can be made to better support the educational needs of children who are in care.

The sample of Aboriginal students is limited to those students who attended public schools. Aboriginal students who attended band schools were not included in this study.

Findings

During the 1999/2000 school year, 692,670 persons were receiving services through the Ministry of Education. Fifty-one percent were males, while 49% were females. Approximately 45,000 to 60,000 students were enrolled in each grade from Grades 1 to 12. Approximately 6.9% ($n = 47,935$) of the total student population were Aboriginal. Of the 4690 CCC, 3523 were between the ages of 6 to 19 and enrolled as students receiving services provided through the Ministry of Education. Figure 1 presents the numbers of Aboriginal and non-aboriginal CCC students enrolled in each grade. Students in the elementary and secondary upgraded categories signify they are taking courses at a number of levels and school personnel do not consider them to be in a specific grade.

Most students attended standard school. For example, more than 98% of CCC and non-CCC students in Grades 4 and 7 were enrolled in standard classroom settings. However, approximately one in four (24.9%) Grade 10 CCC students were enrolled in Alternate Programs, as compared to 4.1% of non CCC Grade 10 students.

Alternative Programs are offered to students who have difficulty learning in a traditional (standard) classroom. They provide a more flexible learning environment to students who are either disruptive in a traditional classroom setting or have special learning needs. About half of the CCCs in Grade 10 and 12 were behind at least one grade (see Table 1). This compares to approximately 1 in 5 and 1 in 3 of non CCC students in Grades 10 and 12 respectively.

Table 2 presents the CCC and non-CCC Grade 4 student performance in reading, writing and numeracy. Higher proportions of CCC showed outcomes below expectations in reading, writing and numeracy. For

Figure 1
Numbers of CCWs by Grade and Aboriginal Status (n = 3523)

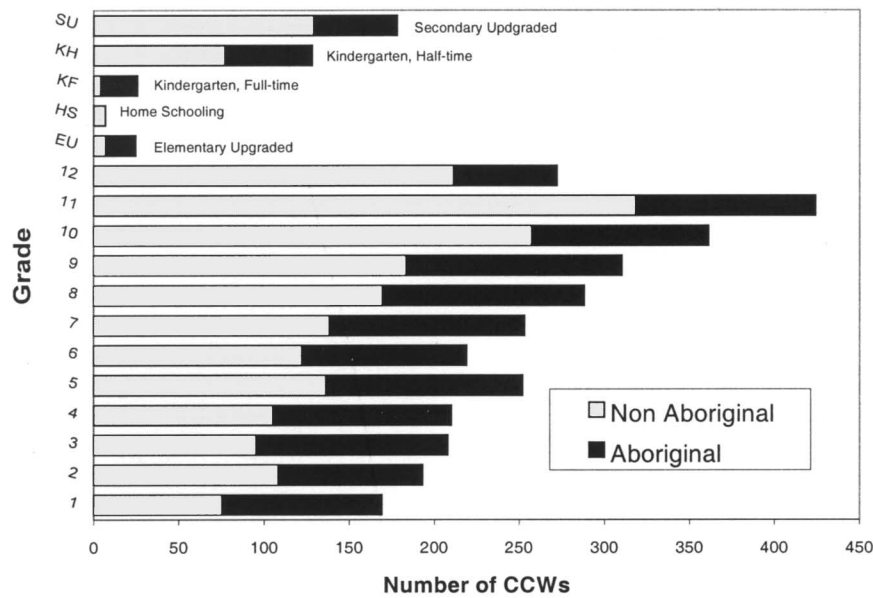


Table 1
Number and Percent of CCC and Non-CCC Students in Grades 10 and 12 Who Were Behind a Grade

Status	Grade 10 ^a		Grade 12 ^b	
	CCC	Non-CCC	CCC ^c	Non-CCC
Behind a grade	205 (56.8%)	12803 (22.3%)	148 (54.4%)	20583 (34.5%)
Not behind a grade	156 (43.2%)	44648 (77.7%)	124 (45.6%)	39006 (65.5%)
Total	361 (100.0%)	57451 (100.0%)	272 (100.0%)	59589 (100.0%)

^aχ² = 249.91; df = 1; p < .001.

^bχ² = 46.35; df = 1; p < .001.

^cSome former CCC now in Grade 12 may not appear here since they have reached the age of 19 and are no longer eligible to be CCC.

Table 2
Educational Attainment by Legal Status (Grade 4)

Outcome ^a		Reading ^b		Writing ^c		Numeracy ^d	
		Non-CCC	CCC	Non-CCC	CCC	Non-CCC	CCC
Below	%	20.3%	38.3%	8.8%	18.1%	20.2%	42.4%
	n	9318	70	4053	33	9168	73
Meets	%	71.8%	57.4%	89.8%	80.8%	71.3%	56.4%
	n	32996	105	41232	147	32298	97
Exceeds	%	7.9%	4.4%	1.4%	1.1%	8.5%	1.2%
	n	3652	8	654	2	3845	2
Total	%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	n	45966	183	45939	182	45311	172

^aScaled scores were developed by using Item Response Theory, which provides for the weighting of each item in relation to the item's overall difficulty and discrimination (the ability of the item to discriminate between lower and higher performers). This was done by having a panel of teachers review each test, first item by item and then by clusters of items and then by the whole test to set a raw score cut based on definitions of minimally meeting expectations and exceeding expectations that were provided to them. Tests of association were conducted by combining scores from students who met and exceeded expectations and comparing them to those students who were below expectations.

^b $\chi^2 = 31.69$; $df = 1$; $p < .001$.

^c $\chi^2 = 18.32$; $df = 1$; $p < .001$.

^d $\chi^2 = 50.92$; $df = 1$; $p < .001$.

example approximately one in four CCC students performed below academic standards in reading (38.3%) and numeracy (42.4%). CCC and non-CCC Grade 7 student performance in reading, writing and numeracy appears in Table 3. Higher proportions of non-CCC as compared to CCC students met or exceeded academic standards in reading, writing and numeracy. Approximately 40% of CCC students performed below academic standards in reading (40.8%) and writing (40.2%) while almost half of CCC students were below standard in numeracy (49.7%). Table 4. presents the number and percentage of CCC and non-CCC Grade 10 student performance in reading, writing and numeracy. Higher proportions of non-CCC as compared to CCC students met or exceeded academic standards in reading, writing and numeracy. Approximately 1/3 of CCC students performed below academic standards in reading

Table 3
Educational Attainment by Legal Status (Grade 7)

Outcome	Reading ^a		Writing ^b		Numeracy ^c	
	Non-CCC	CCC	Non-CCC	CCC	Non-CCC	CCC
Below	% 19.1%	40.8%	19.2%	40.2%	20.0%	49.7%
	n 8734	80	8787	80	9071	93
Meets	% 73.0%	56.6%	76.3%	59.3%	70.4%	47.6%
	n 33464	111	34848	118	31914	89
Exceeds	% 7.9%	2.6%	4.5%	.5%	9.6%	2.7%
	n 3634	5	2065	1	4358	5
Total	% 100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	n 45832	196	45700	199	45343	187

Note: Tests of association were conducted by combining scores from students who met and exceeded expectations and comparing them to those students who were below expectations.

^a $\chi^2 = 58.28$; $df = 1$; $p < .001$.

^b $\chi^2 = 54.58$; $df = 1$; $p < .001$.

^c $\chi^2 = 100.53$; $df = 1$; $p < .001$.

(36.5%) while almost half of CCC students were below standard in writing (46.7%) and numeracy (50.6%).

Tables 5, 6, and 7 present the number and percent of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in and not in continuing custody who met or exceeded academic standards in reading, writing and numeracy in Grades 4, 7 and 10 respectively. Omnibus tests of model coefficients, blocking for non-CCC/CCC and non Aboriginal/Aboriginal status, indicated that these predictors accounted for a significant proportion ($p < .001$) of variance in reading writing and numeracy among all three grades. At all three grade levels, non-Aboriginal children and youth scored higher than Aboriginal children and youth in reading, writing and numeracy (odds ratios ranged from 2.64 to 3.46, $p < .001$) and non CCC exceeded CCC (odds ratios ranged from 1.40 to 2.41). With few exceptions, reading, writing and numeracy scores were lowest in Aboriginal CCC, as compared to all other groups.

Table 4
Educational Attainment by Legal Status (Grade 10)

Outcome	Reading ^a		Writing ^b		Numeracy ^c		
	Non-CCC	CCC	Non-CCC	CCC	Non-CCC	CCC	
Below	%	20.3%	36.5%	31.5%	46.7%	25.0%	50.6%
	n	9187	65	14107	77	11019	82
Meets	%	70.8%	60.1%	66.2%	52.7%	66.2%	48.8%
	n	32059	107	29671	87	29151	79
Exceeds	%	8.9%	3.4%	2.3%	.6%	8.8%	.6%
	n	4048	6	1010	1	3880	1
Total	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	n	45294	178	44788	165	44050	162

Note: Tests of association were conducted by combining scores from students who met and exceeded expectations and comparing them to those students who were below expectations.

^a $\chi^2 = 27.84$; $df = 1$; $p < .001$.

^b $\chi^2 = 16.29$; $df = 1$; $p < .001$.

^c $\chi^2 = 8.83$; $df = 1$; $p < .001$.

Discussion and Policy Implications

Low educational attainment among children in care is not easily explained by a single factor (Burley & Halpern, 2001). A variety of interrelated factors may affect the child's school performance including:

- Pre-care experience—the experiences of children prior to care placement can have lasting and profound effects (Sawyer & Dubowitz, 1994). Approximately 40 percent of children and youth in British Columbia come into care because of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse.
- Poverty—poor children are over-represented in the care system. Kerckoff et al. (1989) found that a family's socioeconomic status contributes to a youth's success in adulthood more than education, skill level, or personal initiative. Low socioeconomic status has been associated with school failure, partly because children from this background do not receive the same level of early education as children

Table 5
Educational Attainment by Aboriginal and Legal Status (Grade 4)

	Meets or Exceeds	Reading		Writing		Numeracy	
		Non-CCC	CCC	Non-CCC	CCC	Non-CCC	CCC
Aborig.	%	57.0%	51.1%	79.2%	80.5	57.4%	53.1%
	n	1786	45	2478	70	1737	43
Non-Ab.	%	81.4%	71.6%	93.0%	83.2%	81.4%	61.5%
	n	34862	68	39408	79	34406	56
Total	%	79.7%	61.8%	91.2%	81.9%	79.8%	57.6%
	n	36648	113	41886	149	36143	99

$\chi^2 = 913.7$; $df = 2$; $p < .001$
OR Non-CCC/CCC 1.51*
OR Non-Ab/Ab 3.25***

$\chi^2 = 448.3$; $df = 2$; $p < .001$
OR Non-CCC/CCC 1.40
OR Non-Ab/Ab 2.95***

$\chi^2 = 867.3$; $df = 2$; $p < .001$
OR Non-CCC/CCC 1.84***
OR Non-Ab/Ab 3.19***

Notes: χ^2 's are based on binary logistic regression analysis and provide the ability to predict the presence or absence of an outcome (meets or exceeds educational expectation) based on values of a set of predictor variables (Non-CCC/CCC and Non-Ab/Ab).

OR (Odds ratio) provides the ability to estimate the degree differing levels of an independent variable exhibit the outcome variable.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 6
Educational Attainment by Aboriginal and Legal Status (Grade 7)

	Meets or Exceeds	Reading		Writing		Numeracy	
		Non-CCC	CCC	Non-CCC	CCC	Non-CCC	CCC
Aborig.	%	56.9%	57.3%	61.0%	56.0%	55.2%	50.0%
	n	1645	51	1758	51	1539	42
Non-Ab.	%	82.6%	60.7%	82.1%	62.9%	81.6%	50.5%
	n	35453	65	35155	68	34733	52
Total	%	80.9%	59.2%	80.8%	59.8%	80.0%	50.3
	n	37098	116	36913	119	36272	94

$\chi^2 = 931.0$; $df = 2$; $p < .001$
OR Non-CCC/CCC 1.75***
OR Non-Ab/Ab 3.46***

$\chi^2 = 658.8$; $df = 2$; $p < .001$
OR Non-CCC/CCC 1.82***
OR Non-Ab/Ab 2.86***

$\chi^2 = 974.5$; $df = 2$; $p < .001$.
OR Non-CCC/CCC 2.41***
OR Non-Ab/Ab 3.51***

Notes: χ^2 's are based on binary logistic regression analysis and provide the ability to predict the presence or absence of an outcome (meets or exceeds educational expectation) based on values of a set of predictor variables (Non-CCC/CCC and Non-Ab/Ab).
OR (Odds ratio) provides the ability to estimate the degree differing levels of an independent variable exhibit the outcome variable.
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 7
Educational Attainment by Aboriginal and Legal Status (Grade 10)

	Meets or Exceeds	Reading		Writing		Numeracy	
		Non-CCC	CCC	Non-CCC	CCC	Non-CCC	CCC
Aborig.	%	59.6%	53.3%	48.2%	34.1%	48.2%	42.5%
	n	1268	24	990	14	959	17
Non-Ab.	%	80.7%	67.0%	69.4%	59.7%	76.2	51.6%
	n	34839	89	29691	74	32072	63
Total	%	79.7%	63.5%	68.5%	53.3%	75.0%	49.4%
	n	36107	113	30681	88	33031	80

$\chi^2 = 382.1$; $df = 2$; $p < .001$
OR Non-CCC/CCC 1.83***
OR Non-Ab/Ab 2.64***

$\chi^2 = 302.8$; $df = 2$; $p < .001$
OR Non-CCC/CCC 1.49*
OR Non-Ab/Ab 2.29***

$\chi^2 = 570.1$; $df = 2$; $p < .001$
OR Non-CCC/CCC 2.28***
OR Non-Ab/Ab 3.17***

Notes: χ^2 's are based on binary logistic regression analysis and provide the ability to predict the presence or absence of an outcome (meets or exceeds educational expectation) based on values of a set of predictor variables (Non-CCC/CCC and Non-Ab/Ab).

OR (Odds ratio) provides the ability to estimate the degree differing levels of an independent variable exhibit the outcome variable.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

from a higher socioeconomic background (National Center for Children in Poverty, 1990)

- **Emotional Challenges**—Leaving one’s family and being taken into care can lead to feelings of abandonment and low self-esteem among children (Aldgate et al., 1992). Youth in care have been found to be more prone than their peers to experience withdrawal, anxiety, depression, inability to concentrate, and lack of social skills (Ayasse, 1995). Each of these factors can influence a student’s ability to focus and do well in school (Aldgate et al., 1992)
- **Instability**—Children in care experience a great deal of instability when they are moved from placement to placement. Extensive research by Burley and Halpern (2001) concluded that repeatedly changing schools disrupts the educational process and hinders a child’s ability to learn and succeed academically. Calvin (2001) estimated that “. . . when students change schools, they lose an average of four to six months of educational progress.” School records may be lost or their transmission may be delayed leading to a lack of continuity and possibly difficulty in receiving needed services for special needs students (Altshuler, 1997)
- **Fragmentation of Aboriginal Communities and Culture**—Leslie and Storey (2000) believe that the colonial experience in British Columbia has led to chronic assaults on the cultural identities of Aboriginal youth. The impacts of this political and social experience has, in turn, contributed to the difficulty these youth have envisioning a future that holds any acceptable place for them, their culture and community (see also Chandler & Lalonde, 1998). Thus, disconnection from a viable future has led to the over-representation by Aboriginal youth in mainstream social, health, and corrections services, and the under-representation of Aboriginal youth in the mainstream education and economic systems

The implications of the findings outlined in this study are many and varied. Following are strategies that exemplify the kinds of actions that could begin to address the apparent inequality in academic performance between CCCs and the general student population.

(a) *Limiting Relocations.* In a recent study completed by the National Youth in Care Network (NYCN) (2001) that surveyed 100 Canadian youth in care, stability and safety emerged as the two greatest concerns. A major obstacle to stability involves being relocated not only to a different home but also a new school. According to Durr and Osborne (2000) stability of placement was the single most important factor in influencing children’s progress in all aspects of their lives. Moreover they concluded that “. . . maintaining a child in their school should be

a key priority for social services departments when looking to make changes in care arrangements.” One youth in the NYCN study stated:

“School was the most consistent thing in my life. I moved around a lot and I went to nine different elementary schools. But I always knew that my teacher was going to be there when I got there every morning, and I don’t have that at home.” (p. 5)

The Office for Standards in Education in the U.K. concluded that, “If an appropriate foster placement is available, possibly with a member of the extended family or an effective carer, and no change of school is necessitated, progress in learning may not be seriously affected” (Raising Achievement of Children in Public Care, 2000). Every attempt should be made to enhance the stability of children and youth’s lives by lessening the number of moves to different schools. If a move is necessary provisions should be in place to integrate the child into the new school environment as smoothly as possible (e.g. ensuring that school records are transferred promptly). According to the NYCN study this is more likely to occur if both the youth and the foster parents have input in the decision.

(b) Teacher and School Support. Teachers and school counselors play a critical role in the provision of support and guidance to students. Not only can they be important mentors to students, they are also able to provide much needed information and support to students who might be experiencing massive changes in other parts of their lives. “Teachers should be informed of the issues and living situations of youth in care so that they can understand how to support and advocate in favor of youth” (National Youth In Care Network, 2001). Youth in the CYCN study stated that they were frequently discriminated against based on their status as wards of the child welfare system. Resnick et al. (1997) upon surveying 90,000 youth across the U.S., found that of all the measures of school environment examined, only two made a significant difference for adolescents’ mental health: feeling connected to school; and believing students at school to be prejudiced. Both older and younger students who felt connected to their school reported lower levels of emotional distress; or attempted suicide. Students who perceived other students to be prejudiced reported higher levels of emotional distress. What seems to matter most for adolescent well-being is that schools foster an atmosphere in which students feel fairly treated, close to others and a part of the school.

This agrees with findings from research in the United Kingdom. Durr and Osborne (2000) concluded that schools need to develop an inclusive approach and environment that encouraged children and young people to fulfil their potential. Teachers should be provided with training and

support to increase their sensitivity to the needs of children in care within their classes to avoid often unintended, stigmatizing effects. However, teachers cannot do this in isolation. The best examples of inclusive school environments, according to Durr and Osborne, are where other agencies and professionals work alongside teaching staff to provide support and specialist services. Forham (2000) identified two key factors that would enhance the educational life chances of children in care and improve multi-agency co-ordination. These were: personal education plans (PEP) and designated teachers. Schools should designate a teacher to act as a resource and advocate for children and youth who are in care and they should be suitably trained.

The sense of consistency may be further compromised for Aboriginal CCCs who may be experiencing not only multiple schools but also a lack of cultural identity within the school environment. According to Leslie (2002) Aboriginal children and youth need to see themselves in the school system—schools need to be culturally relevant. He postulated that one practical approach to enhancing cultural continuity among Aboriginal youth might be the “. . . development and implementation of a general academic curriculum, at all grade levels, which strives to provide a balanced view of Canada’s colonial relationship with the First Peoples (RCAP, 1996) from contact to the 21st Century.” This curriculum could provide information on the ongoing contribution by First Peoples to the development of Canada as we know it today and might, as a result, lead to Aboriginal youth being “. . . more predisposed to view the education system as having something of value to offer, even though it is not their (culturally appropriate) educational institution” (Leslie, 2002).

(c) Involvement of Foster Parents. According to Freagon (1999), one of the best predictors of a foster child’s success in school is an interested and involved parent. Durr and Osborne (2000) concluded that foster parents, as one partner in the process of providing the most appropriate care environment possible, need to ensure that they get young people to school on time, attend parents’ evenings, support extra-curricular activities, provide help and support with homework tasks, maintain a regular stream of communication with the school so that problems can be identified early, and make decisions with the young person about his/her education and future. As such they are the logical choice to become the child’s “surrogate educator” (Freagon, 1999).

Foster parents often require support from the child welfare system and the schools in advocating for children and navigating school district policies and programs and special education provisions. These supports could be in the form of training and resources available to parents that are relevant, timely and accessible.

(d) *Youth Involvement in Decision Making.* Many youth in the NYCN (2001) felt that they were not given the opportunity to be active participants in decisions regarding their schooling. Moreover, it was discovered that there was a major difference, “. . . between what the youth believe they need in order to make decisions and what they are being provided with” (p. 8). One youth summed-up the discussion on participation and being heard by saying: “Just because we are youth does not mean that we are incompetent! Adults need to recognize kids and what they are capable of” (p. 8).

McKnight and Kretzmann (1993) state that youth in our society tend be victims of negative stereotyping and as a result are viewed as, “. . . incompetent individuals who will wreck havoc on the established society if they are not tightly supervised and controlled” (p. 29). As a result, some youth are labeled as “at risk,” which serves to “. . . immobilize youth within the community by defining them in terms of their perceived deficiencies, rather than their potential capacities” (p. 29). Defining youth exclusively in terms of their problems or deficiencies creates barriers that make it exceedingly difficult for them to become connected to their schools and communities.

How can youth be supported to maximize their potential? Ensuring that they have access to relevant information and resources to plan for their futures and involving them actively in decisions that impact their schooling. This requires that knowledgeable and skilled school guidance counselors, child and youth workers and social workers are on-hand to act as catalysts to the learning needs of these children.

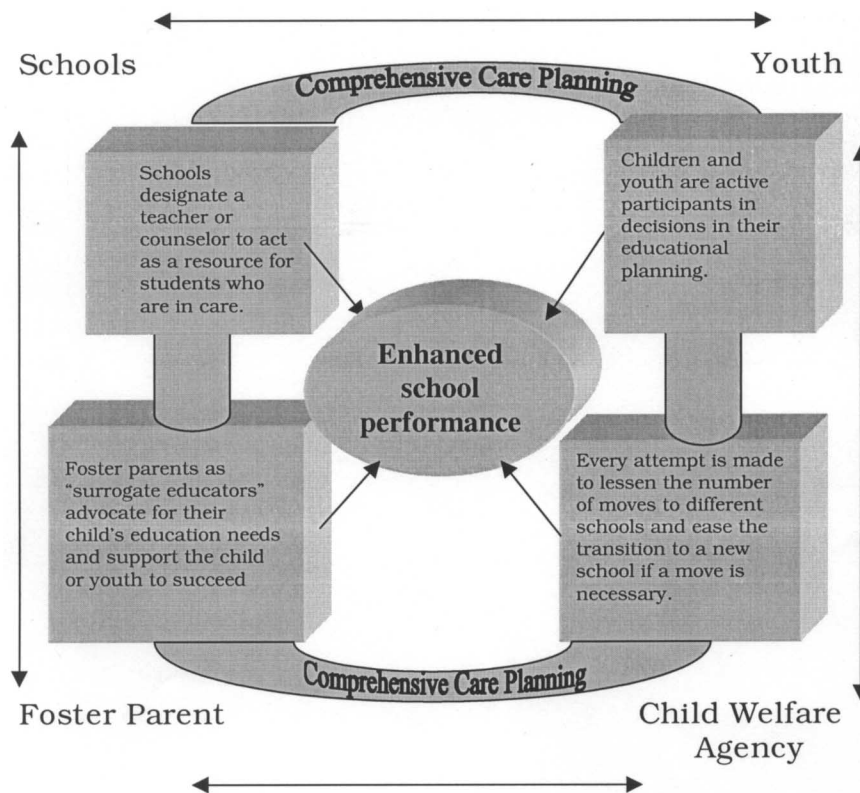
(e) *Comprehensive Care Planning.* In British Columbia, children in care are expected to have a comprehensive plan of care that identifies the child/youth’s current status, an assessment of their needs and the services to meet those needs in each of the following areas: placement, health and health care, education (if applicable), emotional and behavioural development, family and social relationships, cultural heritage, religious instruction and activities, social and recreational activities, self care skills, and any other needs of the child. Additionally the plan of care needs to identify: the overall goal of the plan of care; the views of the child, parent and community regarding the plan; that the child’s rights in care and the MCFD or First Nations Agency complaints process have been explained; and, that the child was seen individually or privately within the past 90 days.

In the case of an aboriginal child the care plan must also identify: the steps to be taken to preserve the child’s cultural identity and to comply with section 71(3) of the Child, Family and Community Service Act, which speaks to the placement of aboriginal children; the name of the child’s Indian band or aboriginal community; and, the involve-

ment of the child's Indian band or aboriginal community in the development of the plan of care, including its views, if any, on the plan.

Because no single agency or professional is exposed to all of the above dimensions at the same time, ensuring that the child's plan is completed and kept up-to-date is critical to providing needed guidance to the child and allowing all parties to share perspectives and plan cooperatively on how to reach agreed upon goals. As well, a comprehensive written plan enhances the possibility of continuity should professional staff change or the child moves and also identifies areas in which joint training possibilities might exist. Figure 2 provides an example of how schools, foster parents, agencies and the child in care, by adopting a collaborative approach, can enhance the academic performance of children in care.

Figure 2
A Collaborative Approach to Enhancing School Performance of CCCs



Further Research

This study represents an initial step to understanding the intricate web of issues that influence the educational attainment of children in care. Other questions wait to be answered, for example: does the gap between children in care and those not in care increase as grade level increases; what factors lead to children in care dropping out of the school system before graduation; and, what are the resiliency factors that provide children in care with the ability to succeed academically?

References

- Aldgate, J., Colton, M., Ghate, D., & Heath, A. (1992). Educational attainment and stability in long-term foster care. *Children & Society*, 6, 92.
- Altshuler, S. (April, 1997). A reveille for school social workers: Children in foster care need our help. *Social Work in Education*, 123.
- Ayasse, R. (1995). Addressing the needs of foster children: The foster youth services program. *Social Work in Education*, 17, 209.
- British Columbia Children's Commission (2000). Weighing the evidence: A report on BC's children and youth. 1999 annual report. Victoria, BC. The Children's Commission. <http://www.childservices.gov.bc.ca>.
- British Columbia Children's Commission (2001). Children's Commission Comprehensive Plans of Care Reviews, Province of British Columbia.
- British Columbia Ministry for Children and Families 1999/2000 annual report. Victoria, BC. Ministry for Children and Families. http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/publications/annual_report/99-00/index.htm.
- British Columbia Provincial Health Officer. (1998). Report on the health of British Columbians: Provincial Health Officer's Annual Report 1997. Feature report: The health and well-being of British Columbia's children. Victoria, BC. Ministry of Health and Ministry Responsible for Seniors. <http://www.hlth.gov.bc.ca/pho>.
- British Columbia Provincial Health Officer. (2000). Health Status of Children and Youth in Care in British Columbia, What do the Mortality Data Show? Ministry of Health and Ministry Responsible for Seniors.
- Burley, M. & Halpern, M. (2001). Educational attainment of foster youth: Achievement and graduation outcomes for children in state care. Washington State Institute for Public Policy. Olympia, Washington.
- Calvin, E. (September, 2001). Make a Difference in a Child's Life: A Manual for Helping Children and Youth Get What They Need in School. Team Child and Casey Family Programs, 1.
- Chandler, M. J., & Lalonde C. (2001). Cultural continuity as a hedge against suicide in Canada's First Nations. Department of Psychology, University of British Columbia.
- Dubowitz, H., Feignelman, S., Harrington, D., Starr, R., Zuravin, S., & Sawyer, R. (1994). Children in kinship care: How do they fare? *Children and Youth Services Review*, 16 (1-2), 85-106.
- Durr, P., & Osborne, C. (2000). Raising the educational attainment of children in care. The Children's Society response. Social Exclusion Unit, UK.
- Dworsky, A., & Courtney, M. (2000). Self-sufficiency of former foster youth in Wisconsin. Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. US Department of Health and Human Services.
- Flynn, R. & Biro, C. (1998). Comparing developmental outcomes for children in care with those for other children in Canada. *Children and Society*, 12, 228-233.
- Fordham, S. (2000). Education for Children in Care. Just for Teachers. http://www.justforteachers.co.uk/Career/Legal_Issues/Articles/Children_in_Care.htm.

- Foster, L., & Wright, M. (2002). Patterns and trends in children in the care of the Province of British Columbia: Ecological, Policy, and Cultural Perspectives. In Hayes, M. & Foster, L.T. (Eds). *Too Small to See, Too Big to Ignore: Children's Health and Wellbeing in British Columbia*. Western Geographical Series, University of Victoria.
- Freagon, S. (Spring 1999). Educating Foster Children. An insider's view of educational issues, answers, and support for foster parents. *Fostering Illinois*. Chicago: Illinois Department of Child and Family Services. <http://www.state.il.us/defs/fpsp2.pdf>
- Kerckhoff, A., Campbell, R., Trott, J., & Kraus, V. (1989). The transmission of socioeconomic status and prestige in Great Britain and the United States, *Sociological Forum*, 4, 156.
- Kufeldt, K. (1995). The School and Child Welfare: Connection and Disconnection? Paper presented at the National Conference of the Canadian Guidance Counseling Association. St. John's Nfld.
- Kufeldt, K., Baker, J., Bennett, L., & Tite, R. (1998). Looking After Children in Canada Project: Interim Report, St. John's Nfld. Memorial University.
- Leslie, B. (2002). Personal Communication. Ministry of Community, Aboriginal, and Women's Services. Province of British Columbia.
- Leslie, B., & Hare, Francis. (2000). Improving the outcomes for youth in transition from care. *OACAS Journal*, 44, 3.
- Leslie, B., & Storey, F. (2000). A perspective on the fragmentation of services to Aboriginal youth. *Lifenotes: A Suicide Prevention and Community Health Newsletter*, Mheccu, University of British Columbia, 5, 1.
- McKnight, J., & Kretzmann, J. (1993). Building Communities from the inside out. Centre for Urban Affairs and Policy Research. Evanston, Illinois.
- National Center for Children in Poverty. (1990). Five Million Children: A Statistical Profile of our Poorest Citizens. Columbia University School of Public Health, 60.
- National Youth In Care Network. (2001). Who will teach me to learn? Creating positive school experiences for youth in care. Ottawa, Ontario. www.youthincare.ca.
- Raising achievement of Children in Public Care. A Report from the Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools. Office for Standards in Education. (2000).
- Resnick, M., Bearman, P., Blum, R., et al. (Sept. 10, 1997). Protecting adolescents from harm: Findings from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health. *JAMA*.
- Sawyer, R.J., & Dubowitz H. (1994). School Performance in Kinship Care. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 18, 594.
- Smucker, K., Kauffman, J., & Ball, D. (1996). School-related problems of special education foster-care students with emotional or behavioural disorders: A comparison of other groups. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioural Disorders*, 4 (1) 30-39.