MODULE 7

Integrating Culture

Kirkness and Barnhardt's (1991) four R's of Research with First Nations Communities states that ongoing research (and potentially, program development), must be completed in a way that is:

1. Respectful to cultural values, beliefs, and relationships within the organization

2. Relevant to the specified needs of organization and subsequent communities

3. Reciprocal in such a way that all partners or stakeholders within the organization have a vested interest in the process

4. Responsible to the community and completed in a way that aligns with cultural values.

Although these 4 R's are a useful way to begin the process of cultural adoption of programming to an Indigenous population, they are only a guideline. Contextual and cultural considerations remain specific to each community and region, and therefore must be applied in a way that best meets the stated needs within each domain. Despite many methods using a shared term of "Indigenous", it is likely that many of the cultural adaptions made in the HOP-C North program would differ for other Indigenous groups in this region.

The relational nature of this work must be emphasized. Throughout program development, project stakeholders from the original HOP-C team met with the Indigenous mental health service delivery organization multiple times in person and via teleconferencing. Team building sessions through face to face meetings helped ensure that teams understood each other needs and design roles within the partnership. Within Indigenous research methods, including evidence-based program development, often the first year of a project is about relationship building, including development of trust and positive working relations. An excellent example of the relational nature of community-based research is Castleden, Morgan, and Lamb's (2012) paper entitled, *"I spent the first year drinking tea: Exploring Canadian university researcher's perspectives on community-based participatory research involving Indigenous peoples."*

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When designing a program that prioritizes culture as treatment, there is almost always a question during program conceptualization on whether to build a new program based entirely from community values or adopt an existing program to better incorporate cultural and contextual needs.

The HOP-C North program used an adaptation model that tailored content to best meet the needs of Indigenous youth living in Thunder Bay. This allowed much of the original framework of HOP-C to be retained, with some content formatted to better meet the individualized needs of the Thunder Bay Indigenous youth population.

Many of the cultural adaptions made to the original program were based from Bernal, Bonilla, and Bellido's (1995) guide relating to cultural program adoption. These included eight specific considerations for adoption of a previously existing program to a new context:

1. **Language Use** (using language that is easily understood by the youth)

2. **Persons** (matching program content to the youth-specified needs)

3. **Metaphors** (using cultural examples to facilitate learning of content, including stories, symbols, and grandfather teachings)

4. **Content** (adopting content that is consistent with cultural knowledge and prioritizes teachings)

5. **Concepts** (centering program activities in a way that aligns with the belief system of the youth, and overall values; intervention-specific targets are those that youth consent to changing)

6. **Goals** (designing the program targets to align with youth goals, and ensuring that clinician goals are those that youth have specified)

7. **Methods** (using the best way to deliver the program that will ensure youth participation and best facilitate youth learning)

8. **Context** (considering the broader influence of contextual processes and other broad-basted systemic needs that could help or hinder youth participation)

SWEET GRASS

Sweet grass with its sweet scent attracts good spirits and positive energy to people, objects, and areas. Usually braided in three sections, it has mental, physical, and spiritual meanings. Sweet grass can be placed in homes to help purify and bring in good spirits.

Why Do We Smudge?

- We cleanse our eyes so that they will see the truth, beauty and gifts of the Creator.

- We cleanse our mouths so that all we speak will be in a truthful, empowering and positive way.

- We cleanse our ears so that we will hear spiritual truths given to us by the Creator and Grandfathers.

- We cleanse our hearts so our hearts will feel the truth, harmony and compassion for others.

- We cleanse our feet so that our feet will seek to walk the true path, seek balance and love.

The use of a two-eyed seeing approach (or simultaneously holding both non-Indigenous and Indigenous knowledge together) within program development can ensure that cultural adoptions to a program are made, but also that agents of change within a program are retained. The two-eyed seeing approach incorporates Indigenous and non-Indigenous world views to generate programming that is evidence based in both frameworks. This can provide programming that best meets the needs of youth.

Youth in this program experienced a range of mental and physical health concerns, and were overall, quite vulnerable. When they chose to participate in mental health programming and case management, the interventions provided to them were those that used the best available evidence to support the intervention. The best available evidence was determined through strategies that have demonstrated effectiveness in Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of knowing.

HOP-C North Example: Specific Program Adoptions

The adoptions of the original HOP-C program for Indigenous youth occurred both an organization/ systemic level, at a staff level, and an individual level. Examples of specific modifications and cultural considerations to the program are provided below.

Organizational Level

The organizational level consisted of managers and program directors within the partnering First Nations mental health service delivery organization. Given that the organization is Indigenous led, self-governed, and rooted in cultural traditions and values, program adoption of HOP-C was expected to align with these mandates. There are many policies and practices that were in place prior to HOP-C programming that helped the program flourish. For a non-Indigenous organization without this specialized training may have additional challenges implementing a culturally-appropriate HOP-C program. A few examples of cultural considerations provided at an organizational level are as follows:

- All staff members receive standardized training related to Indigenous experiences of health and wellbeing, including histories of colonization and discrimination present within the community. Annual training is provided to all staff members.

- The agency adopts the First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework (FNMWCF; Health Canada, 2015) as a framework to guide programming. This prioritizes programs and policies that bolster Indigenous hope, belonging, meaning, and purpose within the community.

- The organization recognizes reciprocity of knowledge sharing. Clients, staff, and non-affiliated community members are welcome and encouraged to attend cultural events such as smudges, sweats, and land-based activities.

- The organization coordinates and provides multiple types of physical and mental health services and has multiple years of experience within the community. The organization strives to promote health and wellbeing through client-centered care. By understanding the needs of their clients, the organization is better able to promote engagement in health services for community members.

Staff Level

The HOP-C North program staff were hired by the partnering First Nations mental health organization, with many of them previously employed there in various services. Cultural considerations and training for staff at this level included:

- Staff are trained to have a good understanding of cultural values and knowledges.

- Many staff personally participate in cultural and spiritual activities. Those knowledgeable of these practices and comfortable to do so, shared experiences with youth. Many staff

shared cultural activities (for example: smudging) with youth, as a way to reintroduce them to culture, in a way they were comfortable doing is. This was a way to foster a sense of belonging, but also share embedded staff cultural knowledge.

- Staff were chosen who were deemed to be a good fit to work with youth. Many strengths of the staff members within the HOP-C program included personable natures, acceptance of the youth, nurturance, and a good sense of humor.

- There was an Elder on staff, who continues to retain a specialized profession within the organization. This role facilitated guidance to teachings and provided specialized cultural support. HOP-C participants had access to either a male or female Elder, depending on their preference.

- The organization provides multiple services to the Indigenous community, which can mean an overlapping of staff roles to a youth. Sometimes youth were known to staff members prior to participation in the program, which could both help or hinder program participation. At times, youth held negative views of the organization or specific staff members that had to be addressed prior the program participation. Staff worked to build trust and either build or repair relationships.

- Staff were often available to youth outside of traditional meeting times and worked to check in with youth frequently between meetings. This helped build relationships with youth, as staff were perceived to be available when needed. Youth felt they were cared for and understood by staff members.

- Many staff attended cultural events with the youth, and thus had to manage their dual relationships. There is no client/clinician hierarchy at cultural events, as knowledge remains shared by all, in a reciprocal manner.

- Staff were quite personable and showed to youth when they made mistakes. They shared personal experiences (in an appropriate, helpful way), to be relatable to youth. Staff dressed casually and used language that was relatable to youth. Staff adjusted plans to how youth were feeling that day.

Individual Level

For individual clients, there were specific adaptations that were incorporated to make the program more accessible to the youth, and also increase the relevance of the content for them. Many of these were actions taken by staff members that were designed to facilitate client autonomy. Youth were vocal in how they wanted services to be delivered, and through staff and organizational management, services were adopted to meet those needs. Some examples of these modifications included:

- Providing rides to and from programming when requested by youth, particularly if it was a challenging bus route for the youth to navigate.

- Providing counselling in places where clients requested, including homes.

- Changing the location of the group to be at a more convenient location for clients, including providing it outside when requested.

- Focusing on activities that build autonomy and independent, such as building positive identifies of self. Youth could take on natural roles in communities, regardless of initial levels of cultural knowledge.

- Facilitating friendships within the housing building, and fostering relationship building between clients. Clients held themselves and other group members accountable to build an environment of respect, trust, and understanding

- Building rites of passages for client's children, including making skirts, building and birthing drums, and naming ceremonies.

- Adopted cultural identity through ceremony and discovering clan/spirit names.

- Consistency of using words/cultural knowledge embedded in a cultural way through language, beliefs, and values.

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