

# Navigating Between Rigour and Community-Based Research Partnerships: Building the Evaluation of the Uniting Our Nations Health Promotion Program for FNMI Youth

Claire V. Crooks and Angela Snowshoe

*CAMH Centre for Prevention Science, and The University of Western Ontario*

Debbie Chiodo

*CAMH Centre for Prevention Science*

Candace Brunette-Debassige

*Thames Valley District School Board*

## ABSTRACT

Our team has worked closely with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) community partners and our local school board over the past 9 years to develop a range of strengths-based health promotion programs for FNMI youth. This article begins with a brief description of our school-based programming to provide context. Next, we identify challenges in conducting rigorous program evaluation and highlight the requirements of community-based research partnerships. Finally, we identify a number of factors that have helped us achieve

---

Claire V. Crooks, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) Centre for Prevention Science, and The University of Western Ontario; Angela Snowshoe, CAMH Centre for Prevention Science, and The University of Western Ontario; Debbie Chiodo, CAMH Centre for Prevention Science; Candace Brunette-Debassige, Thames Valley District School Board.

The authors wish to acknowledge all of the community partners, youth, and educators who have contributed to making the Uniting Our Nations programming and research a success. They also wish to acknowledge Ray Hughes and Laura Elliott for their input on earlier drafts of this paper. This work is supported by an Innovations Strategy grant awarded to C. Crooks by the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Claire Crooks, CAMH Centre for Prevention Science, 100 Collip Circle, Suite 100, London, ON N6G 4X8. Email: ccrooks@uwo.ca

a balance between the frameworks of rigour and community-based research partnerships. Throughout the paper we use examples from our projects to illustrate issues.

**Keywords:** community-based research partnerships, health promotion, Aboriginal youth, program evaluation

## RÉSUMÉ

Au cours des 9 dernières années, notre équipe a travaillé en étroite collaboration avec les partenaires communautaires autochtones et le conseil scolaire local afin d'élaborer une gamme de programmes de promotion de la santé fondés sur les forces à l'intention des jeunes autochtones. Dans le présent article, nous décrivons brièvement nos programmes en milieu scolaire afin de présenter le contexte. Nous précisons ensuite les défis auxquels nous avons été confrontés durant l'évaluation rigoureuse des programmes et soulignons les exigences liées aux partenariats de recherche communautaires. Enfin, nous révélons différents facteurs qui nous ont permis d'atteindre un équilibre entre les cadres de la rigueur et les partenariats de recherche communautaires. Tout au long de l'article, nous illustrons les enjeux au moyen d'exemples tirés de nos projets.

**Mots clés :** partenariats de recherche communautaires, promotion de la santé, jeunes autochtones, évaluation de programme

There has been a call for culturally sensitive interventions (CSIs) that take a target group's values, norms, beliefs, and practices into account in the design, delivery, and evaluation of programs (Resnicow, Soler, Braithwaite, Ahluwalia, & Butler, 2000). The rationale behind CSIs is that programs that reflect the social and cultural realities of the group they are intended for will be more accessible, congruent, and effective than programs that do not (Kreuter, Lukwago, Bucholtz, Clark, & Saunders-Thompson, 2003). Over the past 9 years, our team has worked closely with FNMI (First Nations, Métis, Inuit)<sup>1</sup> youth, educators, community members, and our local school board to develop a number of CSIs to promote healthy youth development. We refer to our initiatives as Uniting Our Nations: Relationship-Based Programming for First Nations Youth. The primary objectives of these initiatives have been to promote healthier relationships and develop youth leadership skills in order to increase youth engagement, school connectedness, and overall well-being.

This article begins with the rationale behind our strengths-based approach to programming with FNMI youth in schools. Next we discuss two opposing forces in the evaluation of FNMI programming, namely, rigour and community-based research partnerships (CBPR). We identify a number of challenges in establishing rigour and meeting the full promise of CBRP. Finally, we identify eight factors that have helped us achieve a balance between these two goals. Throughout we use examples from our program evaluation work in southwestern Ontario, our research partnership with Northwest Nations Education Council in Saskatchewan, and our involvement with a statewide program evaluation in Alaska. We also draw from the literature in both Canada and the United States. We recognize that there are significant differences across First Nations / Native American groups, but there are also significant similarities (especially in cultural and language groups of Indigenous peoples who cross the Canada/U.S. border) both in the colonization experience and its after-effects, and in some of the core values and worldviews.

## STRENGTHS-BASED PROGRAMMING WITH FNMI YOUTH

Strengths-based approaches have the advantage of building competencies that lead to increased well-being and adjustment, and also help protect youth against a range of negative outcomes. A strengths-based approach is especially important for FNMI youth, because it takes the Canadian historical context into account. One cannot talk about strategies to promote the mental health of FNMI youth without discussing the severe impact of colonization on families and communities (Mussell, Cardiff, & White, 2004). By placing the high rates of violence, substance abuse, and poverty experienced by FNMI families into the appropriate context of colonization and assimilation policies, we shift the perceived deficits away from the individual and focus instead on the resilience many of these youth have demonstrated. Within this broader context, it can be seen that the deliberate suppression and elimination of culture and tradition led to intergenerational trauma, the impacts of which are visible today in the elevated levels of social and mental health problems observed in many FNMI communities (Elias et al., 2012; Esquimaux-Wesley & Smolewski, 2004; Kirmayer, Simpson, & Cargo, 2003).

Our multidisciplinary research and programming team began working with FNMI youth in 2004 by bringing a group of youth together to develop video resources for our curriculum programs. The videos depicted common peer and dating conflicts faced by youth and a range of possible responses to those situations. The participants in that first project included urban and nonurban First Nations youth, representing several schools and communities. It was this first group of youth who chose the name *Uniting Our Nations*. Since that initial video project, our initiatives have expanded to include peer and group-based mentoring, two credit courses (Aboriginal Perspectives Fourth R and Aboriginal Peer Leadership), a small-group program (called *Healthy Relationships Plus*), and a Grade 8 transition conference. The range of programming ensures that different schools and communities can find a program or combination of programs that fits for them. For example, some schools offer peer mentoring, a credit-based leadership course, and a small-group program, while other schools might only provide the opportunity for their FNMI youth to attend the transition conference. The programming was also designed to cover a range of years on either side of the transition to high school.

Although our program components differ in terms of format, setting, and duration, they share numerous features. All programs were developed in conjunction with FNMI partners and were revised on the basis of numerous pilots. They were designed to be culturally sensitive with attention to both surface and deep structures (Resnicow et al., 2000). The programs share an emphasis on skills development and healthy relationships, within a culturally relevant context. Furthermore, regardless of whether it is a mentoring program, credit course, or conference, all of the programs include opportunities to bring Elders and other community members into the group process.

The success of the *Uniting Our Nations* programs has been apparent through the adoption of the programs by different sites. For example, the *Aboriginal Perspectives Fourth R* has been adapted and implemented in Saskatchewan, Alaska, and Northwest Territories (in addition to the initial Ontario site). Our programs have also received recognition from organizations whose mandates include identifying promising programs. Most notably, the *Uniting Our Nations* programs have been identified as a promising practice on the Public Health Agency of Canada's Best Practices Portal and as an innovative practice in Aboriginal education by

the Canadian Council on Learning. A more detailed description of the programs, successes, and challenges is available elsewhere (see Crooks, Chiodo, Thomas, & Hughes, 2011).

While the programming aspects have flourished and achieved some degree of sustainability, our program evaluation efforts have lagged behind for a number of reasons. To date, we have years' worth of satisfaction surveys from various stakeholders (including youth, educators, and administrators), as well as preliminary evidence that the programs increase youth engagement (Crooks, Chiodo, Thomas, & Hughes, 2010). It is only recently, however, that we have begun a more rigorous longitudinal evaluation. Our lack of a clear outcome study is consistent with the current state of the field. A 2010 review of program evaluations for CSIs with Native American youth found only 11 published studies, several of which were rated quite low in rigour (Jackson & Hodge, 2010).

### **CHALLENGES IN ESTABLISHING RIGOUR WITH FNMI PROGRAM EVALUATION**

Rigour is the foundation for scientific research that allows valid conclusions to be drawn from findings. It is also a central evaluation criterion for obtaining funding for research projects. There are many ways to operationalize the concept of rigour. Some researchers have used a scale based on criteria developed by the American Psychological Association (APA) for assessing empirically validated interventions (Gingerich & Eisengart, 2000; Jackson & Hodge, 2010). This scale identifies six criteria for rigour, such that evaluation studies can be rated or compared on their overall scores. The six dimensions include (a) randomization of sample; (b) comparison with other treatments, standard services, or wait-list control; (c) definition of specific problem or population; (d) use of validated and reliable outcome measures; (e) use of treatment manuals or curricula; and (f) large sample size (i.e., 25 or more per group). In the discussion that follows, the challenges of achieving each of these dimensions is highlighted.

#### **Challenges With Randomization**

The first APA guideline for rigour is randomization, and indeed, randomized controlled trials remain the gold standard for program evaluation, despite concerns about their ethical constraints and real world applicability (Donaldson, Christie, & Marks, 2009; Greenberg, 2004). For school-based programming such as ours, theoretically we could randomize at the individual student or school level, but both options present serious ethical issues. Randomization is not ethical for our strengths-based, low-risk intervention because many students, parents, and other stakeholders believe that the program has made a significant difference in youths' school experiences and overall adjustment. It makes no sense to deny youth the opportunity to join the mentoring program, for example, when there are youth (and their parents) who feel that involvement in that program is what keeps them coming to school. Our partners at the school board also have strong objections to randomization for the same reasons.

#### **Challenges With Determining an Appropriate Comparison Group**

The second APA guideline promotes comparison either to another intervention or to a control or wait-list group, but there are difficulties with all three of these scenarios. The dearth of school-based CSIs for

promoting resiliency among FNMI youth renders a comparison between programs impossible. Using a whole school that does not have our programs as a comparison group has its own challenges, in that the schools where we have implemented the program were chosen for composition of the student body. In our district, our programs are offered in all secondary schools where more than 5% of the student body is FNMI. Using comparison schools from another district adds considerable logistical complexity and the confounding factor of significant community differences, particularly among different First Nations communities.

### **Challenges Defining a Specific Problem or Population**

Defining a specific problem to measure and prevent is a challenge for health promotion programs in general, where the goal is building a range of skills and competencies and not merely stopping or preventing a single problem behaviour (Friesen et al., 2011). Specific problem-based evaluation outcomes are a poor fit with the strengths-based approach we have taken and also with the holistic worldview of FNMI peoples. In many cases, outcomes identified by researchers might be of secondary importance to the community (Fisher & Ball, 2005). Furthermore, in our urban, school-based work (compared to our work in reserve communities), it is difficult even to identify a specific population. With our school board, we offer programs to all FNMI students. The school board has implemented a Self-Identification of Aboriginal Students Policy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007), but we recognize that many FNMI families choose not to identify for political or personal reasons. Therefore relying solely on formal FNMI self-identification information is not our approach to targeting FNMI youth participants for programming or research. Developing research identification and recruitment strategies that include both formally identified and non-formally identified FNMI youth has required careful consultation with partners.

### **Challenges Finding Validated Outcome Measures**

Typically, measures are considered valid because they have strong psychometric properties, including norms or applications that reflect the characteristics of the population under study. There are few standardized scales that have been developed for or used with FNMI youth. Some scales have been slightly modified for use with FNMI youth, but in many cases the changes are superficial, such as minor changes in terminology. Doyle (2001) raises the concern about the nonequivalence of ideas and items designed for the dominant culture: "There may be profound differences in how respondents interpret survey questions, in how they filter and express their opinions, and in what their opinions really mean" (p. 513). Furthermore, it is not clear that pencil and paper surveys are the most culturally relevant means of collecting information. Using culturally established ways of communicating has been suggested as a minimal requirement in evaluation approaches with Aboriginal peoples (Johnston, 2010). Indigenous methodologies such as interviews, storytelling, narratives, sharing circles, or participant observation may be more appropriate and sensitive than survey data (Archibald, 2008; Graveline, 1998).

Beyond the psychometric and adaptation issues, there is the tougher conceptual issue of how to determine culturally appropriate constructs to measure as outcomes in the first place. Much research has ignored the tribal cultures and traditions that may protect FNMI adolescents from adverse outcomes (Friesen et al., 2011; Pridemore, 2005). For example, although cultural connectedness has been identified as a major protective factor for FNMI youth and is a central objective of many programs, it is rarely measured. A final outcome

consideration is whether the impact of a program will be at the individual or community level and whether those are distinct domains for measurement.

### **Challenges in Using Treatment Manuals or Curricula**

Although all of the Uniting Our Nations programs have manuals, they were designed with the intention that further adaptation would be undertaken to meet individual communities' traditions and culture, as well as to match the preferences of the educators implementing the program. For example, in the current statewide evaluation underway in Alaska, some educators have chosen to use the original non-FNMI Fourth R course, some are using the FNMI version that was adapted in Saskatchewan, and still others are using an Alaskan version. Having these variations creates a challenge to rigour—a dynamic tension between the delivery of a manualized treatment in its purest form to ensure program fidelity and the delivery of a modified version of the program to meet the unique needs of a specific group (Castro, Barrera, & Martinez, 2004). In such a research design, it is not possible to know whether one version of the program produces superior effects to other versions, or whether it is the match between the version and the participants that is important.

A related issue to a standardized intervention protocol is the issue of “dosage,” which is neither standardized nor randomized among our participants. For example, our students can participate in a variety of FNMI programming ranging from attending a one-day transition conference to being part of the peer mentoring program for multiple consecutive years. Because recruitment for the programs occurs through a variety of avenues including FNMI counsellor encouragement, administrator recommendation, self-referral, or hearing about the program from a sibling, cousin, or friend, youth in a particular program may demonstrate a wide range of skills and needs (i.e., dosage is not matched to need, as is the case in many other programs). As a result, it is difficult to account for the range of involvement in programs in designing a program evaluation.

### **Challenges Achieving Large Sample Sizes**

Obtaining large sample sizes can be difficult, depending on the geographical location and setting of the program. Although the APA guideline arbitrarily defines an adequate sample as 25 per group, there may be important groups to study that do not meet that guideline. For example, in Alaska, the community stakeholders felt that it was important to include village schools in our evaluation due to their unique characteristics; however, there may be only a few students in the program at any particular school. The extent to which students across village schools could be aggregated is unclear due to distinct differences across communities. For our longitudinal evaluation in southwestern Ontario, we are following an entire cohort of FNMI students from Grade 8 to Grade 10. Although the district has 75,000 students, the entire Grade 8 cohort of FNMI students is between 120 and 140 students. Because we are using a within-group design, we will want to compare different segments of the group (i.e., high-, medium-, and low-engaged youth who are involved or not involved with our programming), and it is possible that some of the cell sizes could be fewer than 25.

In summary, there are numerous philosophical, conceptual, and logistical challenges in conducting program evaluations with rigour as defined by the APA. Many of these concerns have been identified in program evaluations of community-based programming with non-FNMI youth. Indeed, it has been argued that over-focusing on efficacy in well-controlled settings has resulted in a plethora of evidence-based programs

that are not acceptable, feasible, or sustainable in the real world (Langberg & Smith, 2006). In contrast to the notion of rigour at all costs, there has been a shift toward CBRP when academic and other external researchers seek to conduct research with FNMI communities.

### **THE HISTORY OF RESEARCH WITH FNMI COMMUNITIES AND THE EMERGENCE OF COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS**

The contemporary institution of formal education within which researchers are trained is a Euro-Western construction and is thus viewed by many FNMI people to be inextricably linked to imperialism and colonialism. There are myriad ways in which researchers have disrespected, exploited, and/or harmed FNMI peoples (Schnarch, 2004, for example). The tension between academic and FNMI ways of knowing was exemplified by the “parachuting model” previously employed by researchers, whereby the Euro-Western researcher typically came onto the reserve, collected data, and left, never to be heard from again (Montour & Macaulay, 1998, as cited in Scott, 2010). In many cases, researchers have either disregarded local knowledge and input, or merely appropriated it (Scott, 2010), which has led to skewed illustrations of FNMI communities and stereotypical conceptualizations of FNMI peoples (Waldram, 2004). As a result, many FNMI peoples and their communities meet research with distrust and resistance (LaFrance & Nichols, 2010; Smith, 1999).

Issues such as a mistrust of government agencies, the resentment of processes imposed from the outside by expert-driven research, a sense that the evaluator does not really understand the community or respect their ways of knowing, and the feeling of being overresearched are all factors that come into play during the partnership process (LaFrance & Nichols, 2010; Minkler, 2005). It is important for evaluators to recognize this context and to become advocates for the community by taking a strengths-based approach to the evaluation, respecting and prioritizing community values and concerns, and justifying these to mainstream grant agencies (Grover, 2010). Rather than conveying judgment, evaluation should be viewed as an opportunity to highlight communities’ resilient capacities (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008). Community-based research partnerships have emerged as a new model for achieving an equitable, respectful approach to research that honours the autonomy of the FNMI community and leads to clear benefits for Indigenous people.

Community-based research partnerships are characterized by the OCAP principles of ownership, control, access, and possession (Schnarch, 2004)—principles that can be difficult to implement in practice. For example, there is a tension between the principle of ownership and the knowledge-mobilization expectations of funders. Typically, funders expect the results of an evaluation to be made available in various formats; however, it may be difficult to determine who has the authority to share the knowledge gained by youth and with which audiences. At the individual level, adherence to good qualitative research practices can help, such as double-checking whether participants want particular quotations to be shared and whether they want to share those anonymously or not. But at a larger level, there are additional considerations about how secondary data are shared, with whom, and for what purposes, and these questions can be difficult to navigate. The stronger the relationships are among research and community partners, the better these challenges can be negotiated.

The most serious consideration for building meaningful and sustainable research partnerships with FNMI communities for the purpose of conducting evaluation research is the assurance by the evaluators

that they will be able to uphold their personal responsibility and accountability for the *impacts* or *outcomes* of the research on the community of interest and its members (Weber-Pillwax, 2004). With this in mind, the evaluation research should benefit the participating FNMI community, as well as extend the boundaries of health promotion knowledge (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2010). To benefit the participating FNMI community, evaluation research should be (a) relevant to community health needs and priorities with the potential to produce valued outcomes for the community and its members, (b) conducted with respect for community codes of practice and cultural protocols for acquiring knowledge, and (c) culture-enhancing by taking a strengths-based approach to the evaluation. Evaluators must therefore be able to interpret these foundational principles from the perspective of the community and to navigate between the often conflicting worldviews of the academic setting and FNMI communities.

### **SUCCESSSES IN NAVIGATING BETWEEN RIGOUR AND COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS**

In this article we have highlighted numerous challenges in developing an evaluation strategy that navigates between scientific rigour and the requirements of a CBRP. In the past 2 years, we have embarked on a 3-year longitudinal evaluation of Uniting Our Nations programming in southwestern Ontario. Our evaluation approach employs a strengths-based, multimethod design. We are using a within-cohort design to identify protective factors that increase the well-being and academic success of FNMI youth as they transition to high school, and to assess the impact of our programming on these protective factors and outcomes. Through this evaluation, we have had the opportunity to reflect on the factors that have supported our progress. In this section we identify eight success factors and highlight funding implications inherent to these issues.

#### **Recognizing and Engaging Complex Authority Structures**

Evaluators should not assume that approval of an evaluation project by formal authority structures or administration necessarily guarantees the advancement of the project in FNMI communities, despite such approval being a typical and sufficient route for research in non-FNMI communities. In some FNMI communities and within specific domains of knowledge, the authority to permit and monitor research rests with community members designated by traditional custom and codes (e.g., traditional Elders or knowledge keepers) rather than by election or appointment. In First Nations settings, a confederacy council spanning several communities may be recognized as having official jurisdiction over research initiatives involving its members. In other communities, or even within the same community, an informal organization of traditional Elders and knowledge keepers may have overlapping moral authority and expertise with respect to the knowledge being sought (e.g., language, culture camps). The preferred course for evaluators is to secure approval for research from both formal council and moral authority members of a community. Researchers should engage community processes, including the guidance of moral authorities such as Elders, to prevent potential conflicts and ethical dilemmas that may arise during the partnership process. In our evaluation work, despite obtaining official authorization from the CEO of the Northwest Nations Education Council to collect data in community schools, collective approval was required from Chief and Band Council members along with other informal stakeholder groups (e.g., traditional Elders) before evaluators could proceed with



the initiative. An existing relationship between a traditional Elder from the community and the First Nations research associate was integral for identifying members and arranging a formal meeting to obtain unanimous support from this traditional authority structure.

### **Recognizing the Importance, Diversity, and Complexity of the Elder Engagement Process**

Although the importance of engaging Elders in research is largely recognized, it is a complicated process in that different communities vary in their expectations of traditional Elders (Hill, 2003). Some FNMI communities have traditional Elder advisory committees and councils that specifically serve to facilitate consultative practices with FNMI stakeholders and researchers. Other communities' Elders focus strictly on preserving traditional culture and sacred knowledge through ceremony and spiritual healing methods and may perceive researchers' presence or intentions as inappropriate and a threat to cultural continuity (Smith, 1999). The engagement of traditionally knowledgeable community members throughout the research process is necessary because the process of identifying (and even selecting or electing) moral authority structures such as Elders is largely community-driven (Ellerby, 2001; Hill, 2003). Adding to the complexity, the cultural protocols for approaching Elders and accessing their services vary by community, organization, and individual. Evaluators have an obligation to become informed about, and to respect, these cultural protocols (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2010). This requires adherence to processes that may take considerable time but that are valued by the community members, such as respecting the unique ways of knowing among FNMI peoples, being flexible about time commitments, and appreciating culturally established ways of communicating (Johnston, 2010).

### **Engaging Culturally Competent Messengers as Mediators of the Partnership Process**

To communicate effectively, evaluators must be able to operate from an FNMI worldview when necessary and to interpret collaborative principles from the perspective of the FNMI community and its members. Culturally competent messengers serve as translators by being well-versed and immersed in two cultures: the academic and the FNMI (Scott, 2010). Bridging the categories of academic and traditionalist, culturally competent messengers play a dual role in mediating attempts to satisfy a "culture of rigour" for the academic setting and a "culture of application" for the FNMI community. They articulate the shared sense of collective purpose and use concepts and terms gained from their experiences in navigating through both worldviews (Scott, 2010, p. 76). Ideally, both sides of the partnership utilize culturally competent messengers who can navigate from both academic and FNMI worldviews. These messengers can come together to foster a mutual interest and commitment on behalf of their respective organization or structure and begin exploring strategies for satisfying the interests and needs of both cultures. Our current evaluation has benefited from having culturally competent messengers both on our research team and in significant roles at the school board. In addition, our community partners have varying degrees of experience with other research endeavours.

### **Anchoring Our Work in the Tri-Council Policy Statement (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)**

The Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al. (2010) has recently revised the guidelines for research involving the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples of Canada. The purpose of the *Tri-Council Policy*

*Statement* is to ensure that research involving FNMI peoples is premised on respectful relationships. It includes a number of detailed articles that go beyond principles to provide specific guidelines and requirements for partnerships. This statement has provided a crucial blueprint for our work with FNMI youth and communities, and a common language for stakeholders to use as a starting point in outlining responsibilities. It has also provided an important legitimization of some of the softer work that such partnerships entail. In particular, it legitimizes allotting significant funds to partnership-building activities in grant proposal budgets.

### **Using a Strengths-Based Approach to Evaluation**

Many FNMI and non-FNMI researchers have advocated for a reformulation of mental health research and service delivery strategies to reflect positive adaptation rather than pathology, and cultural continuity rather than decimation (e.g., Gone, 2009). Taking a strengths-based approach to programming requires a strengths-based program evaluation (Crooks, Chiodo, Thomas, Burns, & Camillo, 2010). Such an approach is more acceptable to our community partners, all of whom have identified the overresearching of problem behaviours among FNMI youth as a negative and pervasive experience. An important external shift that has facilitated our ability to conduct a strengths-based evaluation is the emergence of funding initiatives emphasizing positive mental health and well-being. Previously, we often had to emphasize a specific deficit angle (e.g., victimization, bullying) to meet the mandate of a particular funding call to obtain resources for our programming. With the significant resources that the Public Health Agency of Canada is putting into promoting mental health through its Innovation Strategy, we have obtained funding to develop and conduct strengths-based evaluation, consistent with the objectives of the programming.

### **Developing Capacity With FNMI Research Assistants**

According to the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2010), research projects should support capacity-building through enhancement of the skills of FNMI personnel in research methods, project management, and ethical review and oversight. Since starting our programming over 8 years ago, we have employed eight FNMI research assistants. Some have gone on to pursue other career and educational goals that have improved the capacity of their communities to implement community-based initiatives. The capacity-building opportunities offered by our program for all staff include training in research methods and ethics, and meaningful involvement in stakeholder and advisory meetings. These efforts to build capacity have contributed to the overall success of our programming to date.

### **Looking at a Longer Timeframe for Partnership Development and Program Evaluation**

An important shift for the academic researchers on our team has been changing our timeframe to a longer view of program development and evaluation than we typically use (Fisher & Ball, 2005). Even the partnership building is a process that occurs over a span of years, and each joint project success further strengthens the partnership. In outlining the various tasks and stages of partnership building for their project, a CBRP consisting of academic researchers and community members from the Mohawk Nation of Akwesasne identified seven stages in developing a genuine and trusting relationship (Santiago-Rivera, Morse, Hunt, & Lickers, 1998). Each of these stages requires time to develop. Furthermore, the program components are

constantly evolving and expanding, making it difficult to reach a point of program stability typically required for summative evaluation. In some ways this shift from a linear program implementation and evaluation process to an iterative cycle of continuous program innovation and ever-evolving evaluation is consistent with the concept of development evaluation (Patton, 1994). Developmental evaluation is particularly useful in situations marked by high complexity or early stages of social innovation (Gamble, 2008).

A main challenge for being able to take this long view is that at the beginning of a project like ours, funding tends to be modest and based on a 1- or 2-year timeframe, at the end of which some type of evaluation is required. We addressed these constraints by building process evaluations into all of our short-term funded projects and looking for ways to document progress and success without a formal program evaluation before we were ready. The reality is that the only way we were able to create sufficient momentum to launch a longitudinal evaluation was through obtaining overlapping grants and leveraging significant resources from our other projects, particularly in the early days.

### **Committing Significant Time and Resources to Measures Development**

A final factor that has helped build the foundation for our current longitudinal evaluation is the investment of significant resources into developing culturally relevant measures. In particular, we have spent a lot of time and effort developing a measure of cultural connectedness. In doing so, we were committed to finding a balance between FNMI worldviews and scientific rigour through a combination of reviewing the literature, developing a domain grid, and consulting with Elders, a youth focus group, a community stakeholder focus group, and expert raters. The expert rater portion of the development exemplified the ongoing balance we strive to achieve; while some experts were comfortable rating the pilot items for appropriateness (to enable us to calculate a Content Validity Index), other experts preferred to give their feedback through conversation either by phone or in person. In one case, the lead on the measure development spent several days with an Elder in Saskatchewan at the Elder's request to take her on a spiritual journey to better inform the work. At each step we have worked to find ways for different partners to provide meaningful input into the project through the modality that fits best for them. The cultural connectedness measure was subsequently piloted with more than 300 FNMI youth in Saskatchewan and Ontario and revised on the basis of empirical (i.e., factor analytic) and rational (i.e., stakeholder judgments about the importance of including particular items and themes) approaches. It is currently undergoing longitudinal validation. We are confident that we will end up with a solid measure of cultural connectedness that is specific for FNMI youth; nonetheless, this process of developing a measure (as opposed to making minor modifications to an existing one) has added a year to the overall evaluation process.

In summary, navigating the tensions between rigour and CBRP in conducting program evaluation with FNMI youth is a challenging but critical endeavour. An awareness of the demands of both rigour and CBRP is an essential starting point in engaging partners and planning an evaluation. In this article we have identified numerous lessons and success factors from our own work in developing an evaluation of our school-based programming with FNMI youth; however, we recognize that each CBRP will unfold differently based on the unique circumstances of the partners and evaluation objectives.

## NOTE

1. We have chosen to use the term FNMI (First Nations, Métis, Inuit) because it is congruent with what our partners prefer, consistent with the policy framework of the school setting we work in, and inclusive without overstating the similarities among First Nations, Métis, and Inuit youth.

## REFERENCES

- Archibald, J. (2008). *Indigenous storywork: Educating the heart, mind, body and spirit*. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.
- Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. (2010). *Tri-council policy statement: Ethical conduct for research involving humans*. Ottawa, ON: Interagency Secretariat on Research Ethics.
- Castro, F. G., Barrera, M., & Martinez, C. R. (2004). The cultural adaptation of prevention interventions: Resolving tensions between fidelity and fit. *Prevention Science*, 5, 41-45.
- Crooks, C. V., Chiodo, D., Thomas, D., Burns, S., & Camillo, C. (2010). *Engaging and empowering Aboriginal youth: A toolkit for service providers* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Bloomington, IN: Trafford Press.
- Crooks, C. V., Chiodo, D. C., Thomas, D., & Hughes, R. (2010). Strengths-based programming for First Nations youth in schools: Building engagement through healthy relationships and leadership skills. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 8, 160-173.
- Crooks, C. V., Chiodo, C., Thomas, D., & Hughes, R. (2011). Strength-based violence prevention programming for First Nations youth within the conventional education system. In D. Pepler, J. Cummings, & W. Craig (Eds.), *Creating a world without bullying* (pp. 43-62). PREVNet Series, Vol. 3. Ottawa, ON: National Printers.
- Donaldson, S., Christie, C., & Marks, M. (2009). *What counts as credible evidence in applied research and evaluation practice?* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Doyle, K. O. (2001). Opinion research in Indian country. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 25, 511-530.
- Elias, B., Mignone, J., Hall, M., Hong, S. P., Hart, L., & Sareen, J. (2012). Trauma and suicide behavior histories among a Canadian Indigenous population: An empirical exploration of the potential role of Canada's residential school system. *Social Science and Medicine*, 74, 1560-1560. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2012.01.026>
- Ellerby, J. H. (2001). *Working with Aboriginal Elders: An introductory handbook for institution-based and health care professionals based on the teachings of Winnipeg-area Elders and cultural teachers*. Winnipeg, MB: Native Studies Press.
- Esquimaux-Wesley, C., & Smolewski, M. (2004). *Historical trauma and Aboriginal healing*. Ottawa, ON: Aboriginal Healing Foundation.
- Fisher, P. A., & Ball, T. J. (2005). Balancing empiricism and local cultural knowledge in the design of prevention research. *Journal of Urban Health: Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine*, 82, iii44-iii55.
- Fleming, J., & Ledogar, R. J. (2008). Resilience, an evolving concept: A review of the literature relevant to Aboriginal research. *Pimatisiwin*, 6(2), 7-23.
- Friesen, B. J., Cross, T. L., Jivanjee, P. R., Gowen, L. K., Bandurraga, A., Bastomski, S., ... Maher, N. J. (2011). More than a nice thing to do: A practice-based evidence approach to outcome evaluation in Native youth family programs. In E. C. Chang & C. A. Downey (Eds.), *Handbook of race and development in mental health* (pp. 87-106). New York: Springer.
- Gamble, J. A. A. (2008). *A developmental evaluation primer*. The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation. Retrieved May 28, 2012, from [http://www.plexusinstitute.org/resource/dynamic/forums/20120210\\_111107\\_20889.pdf](http://www.plexusinstitute.org/resource/dynamic/forums/20120210_111107_20889.pdf)
- Gingerich, W. J., & Eisengart, S. (2000). Solution-focused brief therapy: A review of the outcome research. *Family Process*, 39, 477-498.
- Gone, J. P. (2009). Encountering professional psychology: Re-envisioning mental health services for Native North America. In L. J. Kirmayer & G. G. Valaskakis (Eds.), *Healing traditions: The mental health of Aboriginal peoples in Canada* (pp. 419-439). Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.
- Graveline, F. J. (1998). *Circle works: Transforming Eurocentric consciousness*. Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing.

- Greenberg, M. T. (2004). Current and future challenges in school-based prevention: The researcher perspective. *Prevention Science*, 5, 5-13.
- Grover, J. G. (2010). Challenges in applying Indigenous evaluation practices in mainstream grant programs to Indigenous communities. *The Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation*, 23, 13-31.
- Hill, D. M. (2003). *Traditional medicine in contemporary contexts: Protecting and respecting Indigenous knowledge and medicine*. Ottawa, ON: National Aboriginal Health Organization.
- Jackson, K. F., & Hodge, D. R. (2010). Native American youth and cultural sensitive interventions: A systematic review. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 20, 260-270.
- Johnston, A. L. K. (2010). Using technology to enhance Aboriginal evaluations. *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation*, 23, 51-72.
- Kirmayer, L., Simpson, C., & Cargo, M. (2003). Healing traditions: Culture, community and mental health promotion with Canadian Aboriginal people. *Australasian Psychiatry*, 11 (Suppl.), 15-23.
- Kreuter, M. W., Lukwago, S. N., Bucholtz, D. C., Clark, E. M., & Saunders-Thompson, V. (2003). Achieving cultural appropriateness in health promotion programs: Targeted and tailored approaches. *Health Education and Behavior*, 30, 133-146.
- LaFrance, J., & Nichols, R. (2010). Reframing evaluation: Defining an Indigenous evaluation framework. *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation*, 23, 13-31.
- Langberg, J. M., & Smith, B. H. (2006). Developing evidence-based interventions for deployment in school settings: A case example highlighting key issues of efficacy and effectiveness. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 29, 323-334.
- Minkler, M. (2005). CBRP: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Urban Health: Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine*, 82(2, Suppl. 2), ii3-ii12.
- Mussell, B., Cardiff, K., & White, J. (2004). *The mental health and well-being of Aboriginal children and youth: Guidance for new approaches and services*. Chilliwack, BC: Sal'T'shan Institute.
- Ontario Ministry of Education. (2007). *Building bridges to success for FNMI students*. Toronto, ON: Author.
- Patton, M. Q. (1994). Developmental evaluation. *Evaluation Practice*, 15, 311-319.
- Pridemore, W. A. (2005). A culturally informed developmental approach to understanding risk and resiliency among Native American youth. *Journal of Ethnicity in Criminal Justice*, 3, 111-129.
- Resnicow, K., Soler, R., Braithwaite, R. L., Ahluwalia, J. S., & Butler, J. (2000). Cultural sensitivity in substance use prevention. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 28, 271-290.
- Santiago-Rivera, A. L., Morse, G. S., Hunt, A., & Lickers, H. (1998). Building a community-based research partnership: Lessons from the Mohawk nation of Akwesasne. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 26, 164-174.
- Schnarch, B. (2004). Ownership, control, access and possession (OCAP) or self-determination applied to research: A critical analysis of contemporary First Nations research and some options for First Nations communities. *Journal of Aboriginal Health*, 1, 80-95.
- Scott, S. (2010). Drawing on Indigenous ways of knowing: Reflections from a community evaluator. *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation*, 23(2), 13-31.
- Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*. New York, NY: Zed Books.
- Waldram, J. B. (2004). *Revenge of the windigo: The construction of the mind and mental health of North American Aboriginal peoples*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- Weber-Pillwax, C. (2004). Indigenous researchers and Indigenous research methods: Cultural influences or cultural determinants of research methods. *Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health*, 2(1), 78-90.