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American Indians' Cultures: How CBPR Illuminated Inter-Tribal Cultural Elements Fundamental to an Adaptation Effort

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Abstract

The ever-increasing numbers of ethnic minority populations in the United States seeking social services suggests that a “multicultural paradigm shift” is underway and gaining speed. This shift will increasingly demand that prevention programs and interventions be more culturally responsive. Interventions that are not aligned with prospective participants’ world views and experiences are only minimally effective. Existing models for conducting culturally grounded program adaptations emphasize identifying distinct levels of cultural influences while preserving core elements of the original intervention. An effective adaptation requires competent language translation as well as trained translations of program concepts and principles that will be meaningful to the targeted group, without compromising program fidelity. This article describes how a university research team and curriculum developers worked with American Indian youth and adults in a large southwestern city using a CBPR process to identify cultural elements that became foundational to the adaptation of a prevention curriculum that is a national model program, with the objective of increasing its applicability for urban native youth.

Keywords

Adaptation; Adolescents; CBPR; Cultural Elements; Substance Abuse Prevention; Urban American Indian

The ever-increasing numbers of ethnic minority populations in the United States seeking social services suggests that a *multicultural paradigm shift* is underway, pressuring prevention programs and interventions to be more culturally responsive (Gallardo and Curry, 2009). This article identifies cultural elements and processes essential for adapting prevention interventions for populations outside the cultural mainstream through Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR). It describes how CBPR guided university researchers and program designers in their work with American Indian youth and adults in a large southwestern city. The process utilized their expertise in a systematic cultural adaptation of an existing national model prevention curriculum, with the objective of increasing its applicability for Native adolescents. Details of how the content of the intervention was adapted fall beyond the scope of this manuscript. Instead, this article focuses on the process of engagement that identified population adaptation needs rather than actual content changes made to the intervention.

Cultural Grounding in Prevention

American Indians, also valuing extended family networks, are often reared with an even greater social/affective emphasis on the collective (Pewewardy, 2002). Characteristics of American Indian cultures further from the individualistic (Western) end of the continuum include conformity, respect for authority figures—elders, in particular—spirituality, expressive creativity, and holistic belief systems (Meyer, 2009; Cook-Lynn, 2006). Waller, Okamoto, Miles, and Hurdle (2003) note that, “in Indigenous cultures, individual standing is typically related to the extent to which individuals fulfill their responsibility to be helpful to other members of the family/clan/tribal group” (p. 82). Because relational and communication values influence personal interactions, affirming those values encourages students to learn how to resist substances while feeling culturally comfortable, which enhances the chances of program success (Harthun, Dustman, Jumper-Reeves, Hecht, & Marsiglia, 2008).

Members of marginalized groups do not have identical experiences of disempowerment. This complicates efforts to identify cultural elements shared by diverse urban American Indian communities that may not interpret experiences in uniform ways (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). All identities are historically constructed; consistently in a state of flux in response to evolving statuses, governments, and epistemologies (Tomaselli, Dyll, & Francis, 2008). According to Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, (2008), indigenous knowledge is defined as non-Western world-views that are held, in differing degrees, by any number of cultural groups, whose only commonality is an historical experience of colonization, resulting in loss of traditional languages and de-legitimization of ways of knowing. While conceding that labeling any group of people as *indigenous* assumes a sameness that may not exist, it is important to note more similarities than differences exist when compared to Western epistemologies. As explained by Kincheloe and Steinberg (2008), “Finding themselves in disempowered positions ... [worried] about basic human rights and survival, many indigenous peoples have claimed essential cultural characteristics not only for strategic purposes but also in relation to spiritual dynamics” (p. 144). To uncover those essential cultural elements held in common by urban American Indians that could become part of the adapted curriculum, the research team partnered with the urban AI community.

Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR)

The team relied on a Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach to learn why the *keepin' it REAL (kiR)* curriculum proved less effective for American Indian students (Dixon et al., 2007), learning how to make it more effective by identifying aspects of Native culture with important implications for designing effective prevention messages for urban Native adolescents. In this instance, CBPR was a collaborative approach involving youth, adults, community members, and organizational partners in all phases. It aimed to produce empowering outcomes including increased community capacities, broader stakeholder participation in decision-making, and the promotion of social justice. As an alternative paradigm, it “combines systematic inquiry, participation, and action to address urban health problems” (Minkler, 2005, ii3). Moreover, two assumptions are at the base of CBPR research: “One, that interventions can be strengthened if they benefit from community insight and incorporate community theories of etiology and change; and two, that there is an added value to participation itself for enhancing health” (Wallerstein and Duran, 2006, p. 318). The team began by consulting Native students, parents, tribal elders, and community leaders, asking what aspects of their cultures they believed made them strong and resilient. The process of collaborating with each of these segments of American Indian communities led the team to discover inter-tribal cultural elements that resonate with urban Native youth.

Existing Interventions and Native Youth

Despite extensive evidence of American Indian youth's earlier initiation and heavier use of alcohol, cigarettes, and other drugs compared to youth of other ethnicities (SAMHSA, 2006; Schinke, Shilling, Gilchrist, Asby, & Kitajima, 1989), evidence-based prevention programs seldom have been designed specifically for Native youth, and even more rarely for urban American Indian youth. The few exceptions typically worked to strengthen connections to American Indian values to prevent substance abuse; producing successful outcomes for Native youth on a range of health related issues such as alcohol and substance abuse prevention, self-esteem building, and family cohesion and problem solving (Moran, Fleming, Somervell, & Mason, 1999; Stubben, 2001). Growing evidence illustrates that strong identification with certain aspects of American Indian culture is protective for AI youth (Waller et al., 2003; Kulis, Napoli, & Marsiglia, 2002; Moran et al., 1999; Whitbeck, Hoyt, McMorris, Chen and Stubben, 2001).

Interventions designed for Native students have often been created by teams composed primarily of non-Native preventionists without incorporating appropriate information about students for whom the curriculum is intended (Mail et al., 2005). For example, without careful consideration of students' cultures, learning preferences, or conversational and non-verbal interaction rules, a curriculum relying on one-sided verbal delivery and classroom competition between students may fail miserably. Covarrubias and Windchief (2009) noted that Native students often are taught by “White teachers who champion students who speak up often during discussions” (p. 334), unaware that such expectation runs counter to Native cultural premises regarding appropriate communication. Students faced with conflicting views of learning and classroom performance disengage from process and content (Okamoto et al., 2006). In the face of these conflicting expectations, students do not see themselves in

the prevention messages and, therefore, do not adopt them as part of their behavioral repertoire (Reeves, Dustman, Holleran, & Marsiglia, 2008).

Conflicting Paradigms of Effectiveness

The paradigm undergirding evaluation of program effectiveness by quantitative means is a Western construct (Carvajal and Young, 2009). This approach targets measurement of outcomes (effectiveness) using Western scientific methods as the crucial test of program efficacy rather than measuring cultural resonance (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 2008). In response, there is growing acknowledgement among researchers of the wisdom of integrating substance abuse interventions with culturally relevant practices which appropriately represent “clients whose lifestyles and cultural orientations are strongly anchored to non-Western perspectives” (Carvajal and Young, 2009, p. 207). In the current study, CBPR illuminated significant differences in belief systems, world views, and communication patterns that, together, challenged the appropriateness of the *kiR* curriculum on numerous fronts. Many such inconsistencies were explained by critical and indigenous methodologists as resulting from Western culture ethnocentric ignorance of contradictory value systems and world views (Okamoto et al., 2006).

Community-Embedded Process

Using CBPR, the Southwest Interdisciplinary Research Center (SIRC) worked with three groups of urban American Indians: (a) adolescents; (b) parents and community members; and, (c) a steering committee of Native community leaders to collect data to shape the adaptation. What the team learned from one group helped identify questions and probes for future groups. Combined, these groups represented many different tribal backgrounds and life experiences as well as cross sections of age, gender, and socio-economic status (SES). A critical aspect of the CBPR process involved the conscious transference of expertise from researcher to participant. Participants understand that researchers may be experts within academic cultures, but, when it comes to their own neighborhoods and communities, they possess a greater understanding of interactions and expectations, especially within understudied populations. Those undertaking collaborative research efforts should recognize that both researchers and community partners will struggle with changes in expert-to-novice role perceptions, especially as *participant experts* emerge and become more involved in project ownership (Reeves et al., 2008). Data from participants prompted the research team to develop and utilize existing methods in new ways (Harthun et al., 2009).

Steering group as experts—The team established a steering group, which, when fully formed, consisted of community leaders, K-12 educators, counselors, and the research team. The group: (a) reviewed the curriculum in various stages of development; (b) provided feedback on content, format, and teaching strategies; (c) made recommendations regarding focus group structure, recruitment, activities, format, and objectives; and, (d) established a procedure for distributing findings back to the communities and to the scientific world. Cultural mores that govern how youth demonstrate respect to their community’s valued elders forbade including adolescents on the steering committee. To get their perspectives youth were invited to participate in other ways, described below. Those attending the initial meeting of the steering group voiced concerns about trust based on past research

partnerships between the university and Indian communities. Speaking for the group, one member wanted to hear, in detail, how the team planned to insure that the project would reflect the community's values. How, he asked, were non-Indian partners going to ensure that what was starting out as a "collaboration isn't going to turn into another example of research done *on* Indian people rather than research conducted *with* Indian people?" This question prompted a philosophical shift, requiring the academic partners to consider contradictions in the world view assumptions of Native and non-Native peoples.

Later, this paradigm shift was addressed during the curriculum construction in at least three specific areas. First, in-class and out-of class activities needed to be redesigned from linear to non-linear, holistic learning experiences. Second, learning objectives needed to be redefined as cooperative rather than as individualistic. Third, student mastery of the curriculum concepts through class activities and discussions needed to emerge as collaborative outcomes rather than competition to be *the best*. This paradigm shift is clearly called for by Weaver (1997): "Without culturally specific knowledge integrated with self-awareness and research skills the researcher may have difficulty framing appropriate questions, developing relevant approaches, implementing projects, and interpreting data in a meaningful way" (p. 2).

Focus groups as community experts—To obtain authentic, first-hand data considered relevant to urban American Indians residing in the study area, the research team collected participant responses during focus groups. Community members, including youth, adults, and elders who self-identified as American Indian, and who expressed interest in taking part were invited to participate in the focus groups. The term *focus group* encompasses a rigorously defined method for collecting data that reflects listening to participants describe how they "think and feel about an issue, product, or service" (Mail et al., 2005, p. 99). Research pertaining to the conduct of focus groups with American Indian informants—either adult or adolescent—is rare. If such a group is assembled, its purpose will most likely be to discuss adolescent substance abuse and risk-taking behaviors. Experienced researchers recommend that American Indian groups be constructed to: (a) employ well-known and respected members of Indian communities to make initial contacts and provide prevention services; (b) utilize community members' expertise in data collection; and, (c) incorporate local and "tribally relevant" methods for "delivering the message" (Mail et al., 2005, p. 100). Multiple focus groups, whose members represented a wide range of ages, professional expertise, and community involvement, contributed to the identification of the inter-tribal cultural elements to be embedded in the adapted curriculum.

Adolescents as experts—The research team relied on the results of its American Indian Youth study of 12-15 year olds living in or near reservation communities but attending public middle schools in the urban area (Hurdle, Okamoto, & Miles, 2003; Kulis, Okamoto, Rayle, & Sen, 2006). Researchers learned that some of the drug resistance strategies taught in prevention programs (refuse, leave) did not work for Native students because of situational factors, such as being offered substances by family members (Okamoto, Hurdle, & Marsiglia, 2001). To study how cultural perspectives affect American Indian student drug use and resistance strategies, 32 Native middle school students met in a series of 10 gender-

segregated focus groups to explore situational contexts in which they encountered alcohol, tobacco, and drugs and how they dealt with these situations (Waller et al., 2003, p. 79). The study collected data using semi-structured interview prompts related to perceived risk and protective factors relevant to high-risk behavior, particularly substance use. The study revealed a range of cultural factors influencing Native youth decisions to accept or resist substance use offers. For example, students living on reservations reported extended family relationships and tribal affiliation as strong influences vastly different from those of white students and, in many ways, quite different from their American Indian counterparts living in urban areas (Lobo and Peters, 2001; Kulis and Brown, 2011). These findings demonstrated substantial differences, but did not illuminate how those mechanisms worked. Subsequent studies focused on relationships, types of offers, favored resistance strategies, and ethnic identity to increase the body of knowledge encircling this complex phenomenon. Findings across these studies suggested that a strong, positive ethnic identification with *culture of origin* served as protection against “the adoption of substance use behaviors and pro-drug attitudes” (Hurdle et al., 2003; Okamoto et al., 2001).

Family and elders as experts—According to data collected during interviews and focus groups, family, elders, and the tribe all play an important role in the teaching and learning process. Although family structures differ from tribe to tribe, and the strength of collective values varies among group members, a legitimate generalization can be made that many American Indians consider themselves as extensions of an interdependent system that provides them with security and a sense of belonging (Pewewardy, 2002). Most Indian children are taught to treat adult family members, especially elders, with respect. Elders are a source of wisdom, teaching younger members the stories of the traditions, customs, legends, and values. Grandparents, specifically, have symbolic leadership positions in families and communities. Even as children grow older, commitment to grandparents continues. This interdependence may be seen as a weakness rather than a strength by educators grounded in the value of individualism.

Adults as experts—Four focus groups were held with 12 American Indians adults, Title VII (funded) cultural program coordinators, teachers, and members of local American Indian community agencies. The participants were identified and recruited with the help of the American Indian Steering Group. Focus group facilitators were members of diverse federally-recognized tribes and/or worked with the local Indian center. Adults were advised that they would be interacting as part of a group of 8-10 participants who would meet for approximately three hours, in multiple group sessions. A formal consent process was used. Participants were asked to share their thoughts candidly, in response to: (a) What do you want your kids to know or to be able to do when they run into a dangerous or risky situation? and (b) What are the most important elements of AI/NA culture that should be embedded in a program for Native kids?

At meetings, note-takers recorded group interactions, providing a comprehensive record of the proceedings. Facilitators emphasized the importance of transparency between researchers and community members. Researchers’ commitments to using practices that honor and preserve Indian culture were discussed. Participants shared their understandings

of the cultural specifics that keep Indian youth safe while gaining a greater comprehension of the additional challenges and risks that affect urban Native youth.

Locating Common Ground

Discussion topics ranged from the history of the *kiR* curriculum with a brief overview of the lessons, to the differences/similarities between American Indian urban and rural/reservation youth, to the important differences between space and place. Also discussed were the concepts of *home*, as interpreted by participants; examples of positive and negative school experiences; and, appropriate ways to weave Native values into the curriculum. Advancing from these discussions, participants were asked to evaluate specific aspects of *kiR*. When particular lessons, activities, teaching strategies or illustrations were determined to be culturally inappropriate or less than effective, group members were asked to suggest more culturally appropriate alternatives. Moving beyond superficial changes, we wanted all parts of the adaptation to be consistent with and aligned to deep structural values of the multiple Native cultures represented by urban focus group members.

Coding Focus Group Discussions

Qualitative data analysis of the focus group discussions was designed to identify emergent themes rather than *a priori* categories (Corbin and Straus, 2008). After responses to focus group prompts were compiled, several members of the research team worked independently to identify and code themes, grouping highly similar responses to reach saturation (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Raters then defined categorical themes based on team consensus. After coding, responses were tallied within thematic categories and analyzed. Intercoder reliability was ensured by all teams rechecking and adjusting initial coding decisions (Kulis, Reeves, Dustman, & O'Neill, 2011). Final coding decisions relied on consensus of all coding teams. Responses to open-ended focus-group prompts generated a consistent set of recurring themes, including: (a) the importance of emphasizing Native values, cultural traditions and connectivity; (b) the opportunities or pressures urban Indians have to fit in with dominant, mainstream cultural values, as well as how the decision to live in an urban area is so often associated with weakened cultural ties; (c) the importance of creating opportunities for in-depth learning about traditional cultures; (d) the concept of *home*; (e) the ways culture and tribal identity protects children; (f) the cultural elements common across tribes; and, (g) the difference between religion and spirituality.

Identifying American Indian Cultural Elements

Specific comments served to unify and clarify member meanings and led to recognition of an integrated set of cultural elements. Those cultural elements were pivotal to the deep structure adaptation. Among those, in answer to: *What aspects of your culture protect your youth?* responses ranged from (a) participating in ceremonies to (b) knowing the stories to (c) being spiritual/in balance and to (d) having adults and elders model appropriate behavior. These ideas seemed unrelated until a group member stated his belief that, "People are safer when they feel like they belong." Prompting the group to elaborate created a synergistic exchange that coalesced into one coherent summary provided by a member: Being taught to do certain things the same ways and at the same times as countless generations before,

because people around you believe those things are important, secures your place in that line of generations. From moments such as these, the elements that became (a) *traditional beliefs*, (b) *ritual*, (c) *ancestry*, and (d) *respect* emerged.

A discussion about the importance of Indian people teaching children about clans and the roles of clans morphed into a conversation stressing elders' responsibility for modeling behavior tribal members deemed appropriate for their youth, from which the discussion moved to a conversation of disrespectful ways information is presented in Western classrooms. From the latter, the team began to perceive how student-teacher relationships differ in Native students' learning contexts. Dialogues regarding the importance of learning tribal language as a protective aspect of culture led to identification of *traditional language* as a cultural element. Some discussions served to clarify focus group member attitudes regarding the importance of spirituality, kinship, and honoring all life as sacred, while others identified oral traditions and connection to the land as values common to all indigenous peoples.

Surface vs. Structural Approaches

Surface level approaches to adaptation might include only accented language, name choices, specific foods, clothing styles, and socialization preferences (Castro, Berrera, & Martinez, 2004). For example, a surface-level approach that uses features such as names, foods, and family patterns that are considered representative of the ethnic group in question to appear more culturally recognizable may, in fact, contribute to stereotyping because the program itself is not grounded in the deep-structure elements of participants' cultures (Reeves et al., 2008). Instead, the team adopted a structural design based on an understanding of social, environmental, psychological, and historical influences. It is a much more complex process to incorporate these elements into a program (Holleran-Steiker et al., 2008). To do so effectively requires a comprehensive understanding of the contextual ways the group as well as individuals within the group were changed through interactions of processes as they developed within the larger framework of the dominant society (Castro and Nieri, 2009). Although impossible to compile a list of all cultural values held by all tribal groups, important shared characteristics often trivialized by outsiders include respect for elders, cooperation, coexistence with nature, spirituality, traditional practices, a strong tribal social hierarchy, and an emphasis on learning to live a balanced life, all deeply rooted in the teachings of elders across tribal cultures (Kincheloe and Steinberg in Denzin, Lincoln and Smith, 2008). These are examples of significant cultural factors that warrant careful consideration.

By asking *key informants* to consider each of the themes that emerged from the focus group meetings, a set of common cultural elements representative of all participating tribal groups was tentatively identified. Each of those elements was intrinsic to some specific phenomena considered important within the diverse cultural groups. Working backwards, we examined the elements to learn how they revealed corresponding values of individuals within cultural groups. That investigation led to an understanding of the acceptable range of variation for adherence to the deep structure constructs which were, again, embedded within each of the cultural elements.

Common Experience to Cultural Element

The focus of our analysis was to uncover those cultural elements that Native people living in urban areas held in common. From these extensive analyses, 10 specific cultural elements emerged as common across diverse tribal backgrounds of the urban American Indians: Ancestry, including matriarchal affiliation or patriarchal affiliation; Clans or Bands and the notion of kinship; Spirituality; Storytelling; Home, often synonymous with Reservation; Sacred History; Ritual; Respect; Traditional Language; and Traditional Beliefs. For example, community members thought it important that youth know how to tell a story well to instill oral traditions. Through oral tradition, strongly correlated with patterns of indigenous learning, youth would become part of the chain that transmits the history of their people. Regardless of age or group, participants identified spirituality as one of ten essential cultural elements. As defined by participants, spirituality represents the animation present within all things combined with respect for the value of life forces. As part of Traditional Beliefs, generational roles—the expected positions or functions assigned or ascribed to tribal members according to age—identify an individual's place within the community. Participants identified elders as keepers of the wisdom; being those who teach youth *who they were* and how to be a proper member of the community. Ancestry is also based on the traditional beliefs of the tribe. A child's identity is passed through the mother's (matrilineal) or father's (patrilineal) side of the family. Traditional introductions include ancestry information as part of who you are when you meet someone new. The 10 elements became the foundation of the adaptation.

CBPR and the Importance of Cultural Grounding

There is something extraordinarily valuable about utilizing CBPR to generate multiple perspectives. If we had not assembled a cross cultural team, we would have missed so much. We kept going back to the student interviews because they are the experts on their own experiences. We asked adult focus group members what they wanted their youth to know and be able to do to ensure cultural values as the center of the adaptation. Steering group members made sure we did not trivialize revered traditions and practices. Local experts gave us the *near* perspective of urban Native culture. Participant discussions and feedback gave structure to conversations we had with each group and to the questions we asked.

Insiders and Outsiders

As members of a research team, cultural *insiders* need to be aware of and comfortable with their culture of origin while becoming immersed in the process of rigorous scientific investigation. Insiders reflect the unique characteristics of their communities of origin while *outsiders* may intervene by identifying commonalities across communities. Although comprised of both insiders and outsiders, the research team recognized the need to frame assessment and research questions differently because of their lack of understanding of the urban American Indian community (Marsiglia and Kulis, 2009). Using a cross-cultural team approach, including Native American researchers, created an atmosphere open to persistent in-depth questioning about how to integrate American Indian cultural elements into contemporary urban society.

Identifying common characteristics—Our queries also allowed us to become aware of an array of commonly held concepts and characteristics that we eventually labeled inter-tribal cultural elements; those components of culture that served to protect and strengthen Native families and communities. Although each group had its own historical perspectives and distinct practices, many evident commonalities emerged among them. As we were introduced to the variety of indigenous beliefs and value systems in evidence across the spectrum of tribal groups represented by our community experts, we searched for the beliefs, practices, and characteristics that appeared to be common to all. We needed to find common ground to use as foundation for an adaptation that focused on strengthening resilience in this diverse urban American Indian population. The qualities that protect Native students, we discovered, were either missing or inappropriately applied in many parts of the original curriculum. A new understanding of those fundamental differences, along with the conviction that prevention interventions must evolve from cultural strengths (rather than deficits) became the principles guiding this adaptation (Marsiglia and Kulis, 2009). Clearly, these analyses revealed that far more than new illustrations and simple adjustments were required to make *kiR* effective for southwest urban American Indian communities.

Competition, for example, is commonly used to motivate students in societies that value individualism and autonomy. Within the classroom it creates an environment that rewards risk-taking, spontaneity, and self-promotion that instructors use to assess individual students' levels of involvement and content mastery. This practice, though, is offensive and culturally incorrect among students from more collective cultures that value harmony and saving face (Waller, Okamoto, Miles, & Hurdle, 2003). For these students, shouting out answers to draw attention to oneself as a means to demonstrate a degree of superiority over classmates that are not as quick or learned, is inappropriate on every level (Covarrubias & Windchief, 2009).

Further, the practice of emphasizing facts apart from the processes and contexts in which those facts, as knowledge and understanding, is applied is a function of individual-focused pedagogy (Pewewardy, 2002). Traditionally, American Indian education, conceptualized as a means for transferring "skills and knowledge from one generation to the next" required students to observe many repetitions of the process before attempting it themselves. Thus mastered, the new skills and knowledge "were an integrated part of daily life and ceremonies, not a separate or isolated activity" (Demmert, 2001, p. 1).

In situations such as this, students from societies that value harmony, balance, and cooperation are more likely to remain mute or to give a deliberately inaccurate answer rather than to single out and shame a classmate (Weaver, 2000). Further, learning that is not connected to a needed practice is considered irrelevant. For these students, a more effective environment for application-based learning is characterized by cooperative helping and thoughtful deliberation.

Culturally-grounded prevention messages—Before 1995, the notion of embedding minority cultural values in prevention messages was novel. Since the development of prevention programs like *kiR* in the late 1990s, evidence supporting the importance of cultural grounding has gained attention in different branches of the prevention science

literature (Dixon et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2007; Okamoto et al., 2006;) and has prompted the movement toward adaptation of existing curricula to meet the needs of minority communities. Evidence from existing evaluations prompted this study as well; data demonstrating lower effectiveness for urban Native youth served to prompt a thorough examination, in concert with the Native community, to determine *why* the effects were lower. The collaboration, enhanced by the CBPR approach, brought key missing elements to light. Missing critical knowledge of American Indian belief systems and culture emerged as the primary reason for less effective outcomes, leading the research team to probe even further the commonalities around which strong culturally-grounded prevention messages could be constructed; elements that would resonate with urban Native families from a wide range of tribal communities. Thus, regardless of which intervention is chosen for any community, applying a structured, precise exploration and adaptation process to the effort to ensure resonance with that community requires working with the targeted group to ensure cultural appropriateness.

Expert groups added dimension: The perspectives of each of the groups added to the identification of the elements; not in a linear manner, but in the connections revealed through data analysis as the CBPR process unfolded. Children *are* experts. They encounter life from myriad angles and interact with circumstances from unique perspectives. They understand human behavior, although they may not have the adult language to convey their encounters. They are faced with serious social challenges and must have strong self-efficacy to address each with resiliency and strength. Regardless of tribal community, without knowledge of cultural expectations and elements of life that are valued by their family and the heritage of their people, challenges to beliefs are without response and Native youth lose the ways of their cultures.

Challenges of evidence gathering: Measuring cultural constructs designed to resonate with a specific culture is challenging. The usual program effectiveness measures focused on substance use behaviors, norms and attitudes, while remaining imperative, do not reflect the causality between sense of belonging to a culture and the strengthening of cultural connectedness that leads to personal resilience. Moreover, items that measure the strength of what adolescents have learned about their personal tribal heritage (e.g., band, clan, celebrations, and stories) may not be reflected in responses to general questions posed to all youth on group survey instruments or even during structured interviews. The work of measuring effectiveness outcomes within the context of cultural learning has only just begun, but must be pursued with alacrity as well as with a vision of cross-cultural applicability. To do so will require exploration of less familiar territory by those interested in measures and measurements of human responses to interventions in which culture plays a central role. This is a challenge we must embrace if we are to learn how to create effective prevention mechanisms for many different peoples.

Dilemmas embedded in historical perspectives: Finally, working with individuals from a wide variety of tribal communities challenged both in-and-outsider perspectives of American Indian history. In-depth discussions with community members posed the interesting dilemma of searching for similarities among people who are accustomed to

emphasizing their tribal differences. Participants, engrossed in telling the stories of their communities, emphasized the differences in how each had been treated. While the need to claim and reinforce tribal identity and legitimate history was completely understandable, given the struggles of individual Indian tribes to survive in the *very near* past, guiding discussions toward common ground proved a challenge. We had to find a way to challenge socially-perpetuated transmission of historical trauma from generation to generation in order to challenge deficit perspectives that persist.

Reframing to reinforce common ground: Insider members of the research team recognized the need to offer a broader view to encompass the diversity of the urban American Indian audience. Facilitators had to become very adept at restating common elements of participant statements and conclusions in order to reframe conversations and return discussions to “What do you want your children to know?” and “How do you want your children to respond?” rather than fostering discussions about how cultural knowledge and expected responses *must be different* because tribes are different.

Challenging deficit perspectives: A sobering and notable aspect of the CBPR discussions was that participant references to themselves as a people were often couched in deficit terms. Comments about desired outcomes for their children began as declaratory statements, but frequently contained a disclaimer at the end about how it would not be possible because of the barriers inherent in the dominant culture’s social structures. After the first group, facilitators were trained specifically to turn the deficit statement on its head, without drawing attention to the act, and to reframe the question in terms of positive action. Although it was hard work, resulting discussions proved invaluable in adding depth to data analysis. From these discussions, communication skills such as word choice and tone of voice were targeted for integration into the adapted curriculum, with a focus on positive expectations for their children, in clearly defined and self-efficacious language.

The surprise of cultural similarities: Beginning in 2001, the team elicited qualitative data from gender specific youth focus groups to generate situational contexts in which they were pressured to drink or use substances (Hurdle et al., 2003; Waller et al., 2003). Youth were queried about culturally based resistance strategies. Themes from this effort were transformed into contextual quantitative survey items which were then posed to separate groups of urban American Indian youth for validation and response. Subsequent survey analyses identified the most frequently encountered risk-laden situations, combined with the greatest degree of difficulty in resisting the offer (Okamoto et al., 2004; Okamoto et al., 2006). The next stage focused on youth identification of socially competent strategies of refusal and resistance using survey scenarios described above to prompt brainstormed lists of strategies. Results of brainstorming sessions were presented to new groups of urban American Indian youth for response enumeration and prioritization (Kulis et al., 2011). Youth prioritization and definition of culturally appropriate resistance behaviors resulted in a range of socially competent strategies. That range of strategies was presented to urban American Indian adults to check for cultural resonance and social acceptability.

CBPR: an Iterative Process

By 2007, the research team's focus shifted from the iterative process of gathering youth-based data to an emphasis on adult perspectives of urban Native life. Adults who were part of the process (i.e., steering group, focus groups, elders, parents, school personnel) were engaged in discussions of differences among tribal communities, specific practices, and spiritual or religious paths advocated by their people. This emphasis on distinctions might have been considered paramount had it not been for the range of data sources and the rigorous and repeated coding of narratives that followed these sessions.

Bringing everyone together, we asked coders to tell us why they put certain behaviors together. We wanted to make sure everyone was using the same word to describe related sets of behaviors. Changes were made that resulted in collapsing some of the categories and expanding others while noting outlier responses. Using confirmed inter-rater lists, we compared categories creating a list of elements that bridged specific cultural contexts.

Adult focus group participants were apprehensive: warning program developers; "Our *own* ceremonies and traditions are what define us," and "Our tribes are distinct. You can't generalize," and, "We have different kinship networks; matriarchal or patriarchal, in clans or bands, reservation or city dwellers," (SIRC, 2007 December). Through the adding to and comparison of data from multiple sources, however, commonalities became apparent. Labels used might differ; stories might have been far-ranging; contexts delivered as distinct proof of difference; but, conceptual convergence became unmistakable. Original participants who became part of the member check amended their initial concerns, commenting "Every tribe has important ceremonies and traditional stories that define them," and "Spirituality—whatever that means to the tribe or the family—plays a protective role," and "Kinship is family, no matter where you live or how it's called," (SIRC, 2008 January). Summing the sentiments of many, one participant concluded, "Creating opportunities to learn about traditional cultures is a way to teach the kids and heal the family as a whole," (SIRC, 2008 April).

Steps taken to utilize community input included crafting two new lessons to recognize culturally specific resistance strategies AI youth were already using, and, developing the cultural heritage component to enhance AI identity. Also important was the reordering of strategies to reflect AI preferences. As a group, they were at once both surprised and pleased that so many people from such varied backgrounds did, indeed, hold the elements in common. They appreciated that all Native youth in the urban setting could be taught strategies and skills in a way that would increase their cultural affiliation and sense of belonging while building personal resiliency and antidrug norms.

Conclusion

Employing CBPR allowed us to complete a thorough assessment of stakeholders, target population, and available interventions prior to creating a culturally adapted prevention curriculum for southwest urban American Indian youth. CBPR was essential because that approach in itself is beneficial in identifying ways to reduce health disparities. Engaging

community members in discussions related not only to substance abuse prevention, but also to essential cultural protective factors, led to the discovery of fundamental inter-tribal cultural elements around which an intervention for urban American Indian communities could be woven, to reduce or eliminate health disparities in many different conditions.

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