Anti-Oppressive Social Work Research: A Model for Research with Urban Indian Youth

Council on Social Work Education Annual Program Meeting: Promoting Sustainability in Social Work
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Project Overview

- Six-year collaborative effort between the Native American Youth and Family Center (NAYA), National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA), and the Research and Training Center on Family Support and Children’s Mental Health (RTC)
Partners

- National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA), Portland, OR
  - Terry Cross

- Research and Training Center on Family Support and Children’s Mental Health (RTC), Portland, OR
  - Barbara Friesen, Pauline Jivanjee, L. Kris Gowen, Abby Bandurraga

- Native American Youth and Family Center (NAYA), Portland, OR
  - Nichole Maher, Cori Matthew, Sara Bastomski, youth advocates and youth
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Workshop Learning Objectives

- Review principles of anti-oppressive social work research
- Describe a partnership project designed to demonstrate effectiveness of services in an urban Native specific agency
- Discuss the implications of our process for other community-based participatory/anti-oppressive research projects
- Draw on lessons learned for teaching anti-oppressive social work research methods
Principles of Anti-Oppressive Practice (AOP)

- Critical analysis of and “acting upon power differences at personal, cultural and structural levels” (Chouhan, 2009)
- Challenges injustice at multiple levels
- Examines the intersections of multiple oppressions on individuals and communities
- Requires on-going self-reflection on part of practitioners/researchers
- Goal is to eliminate oppression through empowerment and liberation

Nine Principles of Anti-Oppressive Social Work Research (AOSWR; Strier, 2006)

1. Goals: Examine oppression and support actions to promote emancipation
2. Populations: Those excluded from traditional research and the oppressed
3. Methodologies: Combination of methodologies that “address the complex, multi-faceted character of oppression, with its objective, structural aspects, as well as its subjective, phenomenological dimensions” (p. 861)
Nine Principles of AOSWR (continued)

4. Research environment: fosters safety with continuous support through research process
5. Role of participants: active, informed participants
6. Research-participant relations: power balanced, researchers are self-reflective about nature of power inherent in research
7. Ownership of knowledge: knowledge produced belongs to participants (control over process and findings)
Nine Principles of AOSWR (continued)

8. Knowledge-action relationship: knowledge is used to create action that counters oppression

9. Boundaries of research: dissemination of research increases knowledge and includes social change as central to research mission – advances social change in social work research
Relevance of AOSWR to AI/AN community

- Historical oppression
- History of misuse of research findings pertaining to AI/AN communities
- Underrepresentation of Urban AI/AN community in research
- Need to develop community defined indicators of success for Urban Native youth which resonate with community
- Acknowledge differences in AI/AN world views and notions of well-being
Relevance of AOSWR to AI/AN community (continued)

- Empower AI/AN agencies to develop own methods of assessment and evaluation
- Linking community defined indicators of success to mainstream indicators to boost robustness of data/findings
Importance of AOSWR in current funding climate

- Program funding increasingly tied to Evidence-Based Practice research
- Need to document the effectiveness of culturally appropriate practices for groups that have been traditionally left out of EBP research
- Increase in policies which require programs to demonstrate effective outcomes to receive state and federal funding
Our Project: Purposes

- To develop strategies for documenting the effectiveness of NAYA’s services.
- To develop a process for conducting evaluation based on known “good outcomes” of community-based programs.
- To contribute to the knowledge base about the strengths and needs of Urban Native youth.
Our Project: Rationale

- To demonstrate the effectiveness of agency-wide services and the organization as a whole.
  - To respond needs within the Urban AI/AN community in Portland, Oregon
  - To begin providing an evidence base for culturally rooted interventions for Native youth
  - To develop a methodology for community based organizations to evaluate their own programs
  - To enable the agency to receive state funding for services
    - Accelerated by state and federal requirements for evidence-based practices (e.g. Oregon SB 267).
Our Project: Philosophy

- Respect for indigenous knowledge
  - Community defined effectiveness
  - Relational World View (RWV) model
- Equality of partners
- Valuing different expertise
- Community as biggest stakeholder
  - Local and Native culturally responsive services
- Each partner needs the other
Methods: Community Based Participatory Research

- Research is collaborative
- Researchers partner with communities in determining research questions, design, methodology, data collection, protocol, and ownership of data
- A participatory research model developed by McDonald (2002) is proposed as “a precursor toward establishing culturally appropriate treatments or community interventions [which] is in the best interest of peoples of all nations.”
Methods: Practice-Based Evidence (PBE)

- **Definition**
  - PBE is information gathered from service providers, families, and youth about programs that reflect our values and get good results.

- **Advantages**
  - Information about desired goals and outcomes come directly from the people receiving services;
  - Cultural factors can be explicitly included in outcomes and interventions;
  - Effectiveness can then be measured according to these outcomes.
Practice-Based Evidence (PBE)

- Concerns
  - Establishing evidence of effectiveness is challenging because it must be accepted as legitimate by
    - the cultural community that is involved,
    - the scientific community, and
    - funding sources
Guiding Principle: Relational Worldview
(Cross, 1995)
Project Methods

- Focus groups with nine groups of stakeholders (youth, agency staff, elders, etc.)
- Member checking with focus group participants
- Collaborative data analysis using the RWV
- Presentation of preliminary report to NAYA community and gathering feedback
- Incorporation of feedback into the analysis
- Use of findings with literature review to develop NAYA Assessment Tool (NAT)
Findings: Youth Success

Connecting with Resources
- Healthy Relationships
  - Service
  - Safety

Balance

Connections to Native Ancestry
- Spiritual Understanding & Practices
- Knowledge/Skills in Traditional Cultural Practices

Coping Capacities - Emotional Health
- Focus & Determination

Personal Capacities
- Personal Qualities
- Education
- Employment
- Cultural Knowledge
- Identity

Context

Mind

Spirit

Body

Finances
- Fitness
- Health Care
- Healthy Lifestyle
- Housing
Identifying Effectiveness

- Used RWV and focus group feedback to develop list of possible indicators of successful outcomes
- Extensive literature review to locate culturally appropriate measures of outcomes
  - Development of new measures where none were found to exist
- Outcomes measures reviewed by core partners, NAYA staff and youth
Cultural identity

- Cultural identity is a person’s sense of ethnic pride, “the awareness and loyalty to one's culture of origin,” (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993) and “the social category individuals decide to adopt or stress” (Waters, 1990).
Example: Linking NAYA Identified Outcomes to Research Literature

- Positive cultural identity is associated with:
  - Reduced prevalence of suicide (AI/AN).
  - School success (AI/AN).
  - Reported increased school belongingness (AI/AN).
  - Stronger adherence to anti-drug norms (AI/AN).
  - Higher self-esteem (AI/AN).
  - Higher social function (AI/AN).
  - Increased resilience (a combination of pro-social and lack of problem behaviors)(AI/AN).
  - Positive physical health.
  - Better psychological health.

See: Herman-Stahl, (2002); Jones, & Galliher, (2007); LaFromboise, et al, (2006); Whitbeck, (2001); Kulis (2002); etc.
Relationship of NAYA-identified outcomes to existing evidence

Outcomes in red are NAYA-identified outcomes; all items in right column are outcomes from the research literature.
Development of the NAYA Assessment Tool (NAT)

- Created on-line, self-administered NAT incorporating new and existing measures
  - Purpose of NAT is to guide case-planning and be vehicle for program evaluation
- Conducted pre-pilot test to elicit feedback from youth and NAYA youth advocates
- Incorporated feedback into fine-tuning of NAT
Development of the NAT: NAYA Staff Role

- Review of ideas
- Critique of measures
  - Cultural review
  - Practical application
- Staff support of pre-pilot and pilot
  - Logistics
  - Preparation of youth and families
  - Consents
Development of the NAT: Youth Review

Steps

- Prepare and test online assessment tool
  - Develop using Survey Monkey
  - Pre-pilot test
    - Review by middle school and high school students
      - Content
      - Clarity
      - Appropriateness
The NAT
Results from Pre-pilot

- The NAT took a lot less time to finish than we thought
- Examples of changes suggested
  - Have all choices presented; i.e., don’t just say “interested” also have “not interested.”
  - Increase cultural sensitivity (e.g., alcohol use, “choose to live by” rather than “live by” other cultures).
  - Update language (e.g., “down in the dumps”).
Development of Case Planning Tool

- Developed case planning protocol based on RWV and NAT identified outcomes
- Conducted large and small group discussions with NAYA staff to identify best-practices
  - List of 23 Strategic Interventions developed based on these discussions
- Identified cross-program philosophy and practices related to NAYA mission and values
23 Strategic Cross-Functional Practices

- Service development
- Mitigating racism
- Safe milieu
- Building community
- Case management
- Family support
- Social justice

- Learning community
- Mentoring
- Role modeling
- Character development
- Emotional development
- Identity enhancement

- Ceremony
- Cultural preservation
- Personal vision
- Future orientation
- Holistic response
- High expectations

- Talent development
- Wellness promotion
- Nurturing
- Activities (recreation+)
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NAYA Outcomes Planning Protocol

- The planning tool consists of 28 items representing the desired outcomes defined by the community.
- Arranged across the four quadrants of the RWV.
- The youth advocate and youth determine which behavioral description is the most closely aligned with the youth’s current status.
- The youth advocate and youth select the behavioral description that the youth would like to achieve in their development plan.
- Together they prioritize one or two items in each quadrant.
- These items are referred to in the development plan as “Focus Areas.”
Building Support for Agency Change

- Building a bridge between the service delivery world and the research world
  - Continuing presence of NAYA staff person throughout process
  - NAYA staff often served as a liaison who facilitated communication between youth advocates and research team
Building Support for Agency Change, (continued)

- Staff training relating to implementation of NAT and case planning tool
- Participatory training to incorporate all perspectives and to receive feedback on refining NAT and case planning tool
How NAYA Is Using Findings

- Measures allow youth and youth advocate to identify areas of strength and areas of need to guide case planning
NAYA’s Use of Findings (continued)

- To identify trends in youth strengths
  - Cultural resilience, conflict management skills, feeling calm and peaceful, etc.
- To identify and respond to needs of specific youth
  - Food insecurity, housing instability, etc.
NAYA’s Use of Findings (continued)

- To tailor programming to respond to trends in youth health behaviors
  - Substance use, sexual health, depression, etc.
- To tailor cultural programming to reflect youth desires
  - Sweat lodge, learning tribal history and history of treaties and AI/AN sovereignty, traditional crafts and ceremonies, etc.
- Program evaluation
- To increase funding opportunities
Where We Are Now – Evaluation

- Quantitative data analysis
- Gathering and analyzing qualitative “ground up” data to help understand quantitative results

Phase 2: Finding Our Way is funded through the Research & Training Center for Pathways to Positive Futures. The purpose of Finding Our Way is to assist NAYA with developing tools and services for urban Native youth in transition.
Challenges encountered when utilizing AOSWR

- AOP values with research principles in current climate
- Managing and troubleshooting data ownership questions when federally funded
- Native and non-Native cultural differences
- Academic and agency cultural differences
  - Timeline differences
- Building continuity with agency staff
Lessons for teaching AOSWR in SW

- Process takes considerable time to build relationships
- Requires constant critical analysis of power dynamics among research team members and with community partners
- AOSWR is a framework that can include qualitative and quantitative methodologies
- AOSWR requires willingness to set aside personal agenda/expertise in order to engage with community’s wants and needs
Products & Dissemination

- NAT
- “Successful strategies for improving the lives of American Indian and Alaska Native youth and families.” in *Focal Point* 21(2), (2007)
- “Literature Support for Intermediate Outcomes” document
- A Map of the Participatory Process to Create Culturally Relevant Outcomes
Products & Dissemination (continued)

- Multiple conference presentations
- Peer review articles in review
- Chapter to appear in *Mental Health Across Racial Groups: Lifespan Perspectives* (2011)
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