Article

Intergenerational Dialogue Exchange and Action: Introducing a Community-Based Participatory Approach to Connect Youth, Adults and Elders in an Alaskan Native Community

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Abstract

The broad goals of the community-based participatory research (CBPR) include community engagement, capacity building, developing practical solutions for community concerns and knowledge building. This article describes the data generation and sharing process as it relates to the goals of CBPR and health promotion in an American Indian/Alaska Native communities. The project described herein, "Investigating Inupiaq Cultural Resilience: A Pilot Study," achieved these goals in a tribal context by fostering intergenerational dialogue through data collection. The intergenerational exchange served to collect data for a community-based participatory study and provide an opportunity for communication between Elders, adults and youth. By providing an arena for intergenerational sharing, the format encouraged cross-age connections and in doing so, supported, in a broad sense, the transmission of cultural knowledge. The article describes the process and articulates the ways it supports the CBPR goals of engagement, practical relevance, knowledge generation and health promotion.

Keywords: Alaska Native, American Indian, community-based participatory research, data generation, digital stories, focus groups, interviews, resilience.

Author's Overview

Community-based participatory research (CBPR) methods have been put forward as a panacea for bridging the gap between research and practice, and extending the benefits of both. CBPR has the potential to include community members—often the subject or researchers' scrutiny—in the knowledge generation process whereby local understandings and priorities are better reflected in the information gained. The process has also been highlighted as a capacity-building exercise that enhances community members' research skills, abilities and interest while engaging them in empirical investigations. Other benefits include generating knowledge that is practical and addresses community needs. These lofty goals are rarely achieved due to different priorities of community and academic groups, power differentials, and the legacy of research abuses, particularly with vulnerable populations. There is a need for examples of successful CBPR processes that achieve some or all of these aims and offer a roadmap for others who are undertaking this kind of inquiry. This paper describes one such method in an Alaska Native (AN) community, and is thus not reflective of all indigenous peoples in North America or globally. Despite the real differences within and between indigenous communities, I believe the processes offered by the Intergenerational Dialogue Exchange and Action (IDEA) process described here offers a versatile and practical CBPR framework to investigate a variety of issues in American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities.

By developing a research agenda that is in-line with local understandings and responds to community priorities, this CBPR project offers a step-by-step IDEA process that can maximize the potential of this approach in AI/AN communities. More specifically, the paper describes how data collection processes can, in themselves, be meaningful to and beneficial for participants. In short, the study actively engaged indigenous young people in doing research while learning about their culture, their community and themselves. It also provided adults and Elders[1] with opportunities for reflecting on their lives and teaching young people important lessons from their experiences.

The project began by working with local AN organizations to identify youth who might like to be participants in a study about resilience. Resilience was described as the process of 'bouncing back' after going through hardship of some sort. Some of these young people chose to be members of the research team. As such, youth became co-researchers who then identified and recruited adults and Elders who they believed could talk about resilience from their life experiences. The interview and focus group protocols were modified from the Roots of Resilience Project[2] to reflect the youth co-researchers' language and additional interests, namely learning more about the challenges and resilience strategies of adults and Elders as they were growing up. These adults and Elders were interviewed individually and in an Elder focus group with the youth co-researchers as an audience. This made the data collection process itself an opportunity for culturally appropriate intergenerational storytelling. After this data collection was complete, young co-researchers were asked to synthesize their learning by producing digital stories, short digital presentations using photographs, voice, and music (Gubrium, 2009). These were then shared with adult and Elder participants and other community members at a community screening. This article describes the data generation and sharing process, dubbed IDEA, as it relates to health promotion.

Community-Based Participatory Research

CBPR can be differentiated from other methodologies by its collaborative approach, orientation

toward social justice, and emphasis on action (Wallerstein & Duran, 2006; Mohatt et al., 2004; Fisher & Ball, 2003; Best et al., 2003; Dickson & Green, 2001). In fact, community change is an expected outcome of this method (Park, 1999). Green and Mercer (2001) note the importance of this approach for improving minority health, because local knowledge is woven into the results. This makes them culturally relevant and viable within the community context (Green, 2001). Through inference, the findings are also possibly transferable to other, similar settings (Gubruim & Holstein, 1997; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Because of these clear benefits, federal support has been growing steadily for health research efforts that partner with communities (Green, 2003). However, "despite the evolution of citizen participation in health care [research] during the last 50 years, articulation of how it forms and functions in communities remains ambiguous" (Downey, Ireson, & Scutchfield, 2009, p. 419).

More specifically, how can studies meet the overlapping and considerable goals of addressing community issues, building local research capacity, and moving findings into a practical realm so that communities (and societies) benefit from the knowledge produced (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003)? These goals are often hard to achieve with the differing priorities and time constraints of academic and community groups (Wallerstein & Duran, 2006) and their unequal power, resources and education levels. Moreover, how can this be done with marginalized groups who suffer clear health disparities and where barriers to doing collaborative, community-based research can be even more pronounced? "These obstacles include community mistrust because of former scientific exploitation, linguistic and cultural dissimilarities, lack of culturally grounded theory and methods, and limited or selective access to community members" (Walters & Simoni, 2009, p.S71). It can be even more difficult to ensure that all the stakeholders are engaged in the inquiry in minority communities (Eng et al., 2005). Given these difficulties, it is no wonder that although community engagement is lauded within health promotion research, it is not widely practiced in a way that reaches the methodological and practical goals (Green, 2001). To move the field of CBPR from theory into practice, more examples of successful processes can provide practical step-by-step guidance to researchers and communities interested in doing this work.

Practical knowledge is particularly important for AI/AN communities who suffer from health inequalities (Jones, 2006; Wallerstein & Duran, 2006). These communities have been subject to centuries of decisions that affect their health and welfare, and yet have had little opportunity to participate as equals in decision making processes that directly affect them (LaVeaux & Christopher, 2009). As a continuation of this, indigenous people have often been the 'subjects' of research, and yet have rarely experienced any direct benefits from it (Pyett, 2002; Dixon & Roubideaux , 2001). This has made many AI/AN communities wary of efforts to study them. It has also created a climate in which indigenous communities feel the need to defend themselves against further scrutiny and take control of it (Fisher & Ball, 2003). "As an indigenous man explained to the Canadian Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 'we have been researched to death…it's time we started researching ourselves back to life' (quoted in Hawes & Castellano, 1993, p. 5)" (Chataway, 1997, p. 748). This sentiment has been forcefully repeated by Alaska Natives (Graves, Shavings & Rose, 2005), and drives home the importance of identifying research strategies that meaningfully include indigenous community members in the inquiry process in order to achieve the valuable aims of doing truly CBPR research in AI/AN communities.

Doing CBPR requires that researchers acknowledge local priorities and utilize processes that will yield information that is meaningful to indigenous as well as academic ways of knowing (Smith, 1999). Broadly stated, this means going beyond objective measures, respecting the importance of direct and personal experiences, and valuing the interconnectedness of community members (Cajate, 2000). More researchers might utilize CBPR methods if more examples of successful

projects were available. More specifically, researchers and community members would benefit from learning from others' experiences about (1) how collaborative relationships are maintained in all phases of the research, (2) integrating knowledge and action for the mutual benefit of all partners, and (3) successful strategies for promoting co-learning and empowerment (Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998). This knowledge sharing can provide a roadmap for future researchers interested in this promising approach.

The paper does just this by describing a process—IDEA—that, I believe, fulfills many of the goals of CBPR. IDEA is a process that also tackles an often-lamented problem in AI/AN communities: the gap between youth and Elders which exacerbates feelings of cultural identity loss (see for example, Durie, Milroy & Hunter, 2009; Kirmayer, Brass, & Valaskakis, 2009; Wexler, 2006). Over the last fifty to one hundred years, forced schooling away from home, punishments for children speaking their indigenous languages and practicing their traditional cultures have taken their toll in a myriad of ways. One outcome has been the perceived disconnection between Elders and youth. As a community member described in a previous study, "Our young people were gone—off to boarding schools. The government against the Inupiaq language made us not be able to communicate with our Elders…" (Wexler, 2006, p. 2944).

In AI/AN communities where Elders—their experiences and knowledge—historically were (and are) the primary source of learning for young people, the divide between generations is particularly problematic. Government policies over the last century forcibly removed young people from their homes and communities, limited their exposure to indigenous cultural practices, language, and the social organization of their home communities. These policies, along with on-going and historic racism on personal and institutional levels, have been associated with poor health outcomes for indigenous people (e.g. King, Smith, & Gracey, 2009; Kral & Idlout, 2009; Walters & Simoni, 2009). Conversely, having strong mentors for young people offers them opportunities to better understand how to internalize culture and can foster positive ethnic identification based on cultural strengths (Durie et al., 2009). This paper describes a CBPR process that begins to do this through participatory data collection, and thus contributes to the research priority of knowledge generation and to a community priority of culturally-based, health promotion. IDEA as a process of inquiry has relevance and utility for other AI/ANand possibly other marginalized communities.

Method

Collaborative Relationship

The collaboration between myself, the academic researcher, and my community and organizational partners—Maniilaq Association, Aqqaluk Trust and the Kotzebue Tribal Council—developed over the last decade and a half. I first worked in the region as a counselor in 1995, and began doing my dissertation research in 1999 (Wexler, 2005), which used community-based participatory methods to explore local beliefs, attitudes and practices surrounding suicide. A regional suicide prevention taskforce with over 30 members provided guidance for the study, overseeing data collection efforts and collaboratively analyzing narrative data. This previous work led to a deeper understanding of the effects of rapid social change on young people's lives (Wexler, 2006; Wexler, 2009a; Wexler, 2009b; Wexler, DiFulvio, & Burke, 2009) and of the discrepancies in meaning about suicide and prevention found between youth and adults (Wexler & Goodwin, 2006). It also gave community members experience participating in a research project (Hill, Perkins, & Wexler, 2007). With the strong local interest in indigenous youth resilience spurred by this previous work, this project focused on the processes by which

individuals and families adopt and adapt traditional cultural norms, values and practices to foster well-being and resilience in the modern world. Other findings from this research are published elsewhere (Wexler, In press).

Informed Consent

All participants in this study identified themselves as Inupiaq, a cultural group also referred to as Alaska Native ("AN" for the purpose of this article) or as indigenous people of North America. Research protocols were reviewed by the collaborating organization, and each individual who participated in the study was informed about the study's purpose, the procedures and the risks and benefits of joining the study. Each person was also told about their rights as research participants before signing a participant consent form. This form and all the research protocols were approved of by the University of Massachusetts Amherst's Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. In addition, each participant was sent his or her transcript to review before analyses were conducted.

Participants

The participants were organized into three different age-based cohort groups, and identified as Elder, adult and youth. Each of these age cohorts had distinct historical experiences. The oldest cohort (aged 60+, n=7) lived a primarily subsistence lifestyle, growing up without many modern conveniences and living at least part of the year in remote, seasonal camp settings. Many Elders were sent to distant boarding high schools where the expression of their culture was systematically forbidden. Some, particularly older men, joined the military to fight in WWII, Korea or Vietnam where they, alone, identified as Alaska Native. The middle-aged cohort (ages 35-50, n=7) spent much of their childhood in permanent village settlements, under the supervision of non-Native teachers and the care of non-Native physicians and nurses. They traced some of their growing up struggles to the oppression and historical trauma that was experienced by their parents. The youngest study participants (ages 14-21) (n=9) spent relatively little time doing subsistence activities (traditional hunting and gathering) and attended secondary school in their home community (unless they chose to go to boarding school, n=1). Still the majority of teachers, physicians and nurses were non-Native. Members of this youngest age cohort, however, have had unprecedented access to global media when compared to the other two generations in the study. These distinct historical experiences provide a range of perspectives that can inform understanding of how cultural identity serves as an organizing framework for self-understandings and for identifying culturally appropriate responses when faced with adversity.

Youth participants were recruited by asking social service staff and youth workers of AN nonprofit organizations in the remote arctic region to identify young, AN people who might be interested in the participating in a research project during the summer months, and who might "have something to say about resilience, overcoming life challenges." Twenty-three names and contact information were sent to the PI (Wexler) who contacted each young person to tell them about the study and invite them to participate. Nine youth agreed to participate. All of these young people were actively engaged in the data collection in accordance with CBPR principles and AI/AN preferences (Wallerstein & Duran, 2006). In particular, these young people were first interviewed about their struggles and how they got through them, and then were asked to identify and recruit adults and Elders in their community that they felt could talk about resilience, the ability to overcome life challenges successfully. All of the adults and Elders who participated in the study were recruited by these youth.

Interviews and Focus Groups

Narrative data was generated through focus groups and interviews based on protocols established through Roots of Resilience: Stories of Resilience, Healing and Transformation.[2] The open-ended interview and focus group protocols were modified in accordance with the preferences of the collaborating institution and the youth co-researchers' suggestions. A young AN woman from the community and myself conducted the interviews and the youth and Elder focus groups. All of the participants in this study identified themselves as Inupiaq (AN). Elder and youth focus groups were conducted, with four and nine participants respectively. An adult focus group was not done due to the busy schedules of adult participants and the timing. It was Ugruk (bearded seal) hunting season and many adult men were out hunting; adult women were 'on call' in case the hunt was successful. Getting a group of adults at this time proved to be extremely difficult, but two men were interviewed together as was their preference. Focus group questions were more general in scope than those used in the interviews, asking participants to describe "problems in the community" and typical strategies used to address or overcome them. Answers to these kinds of queries were then added into the individual interview protocols so that each participant could refute or expand on what was previously said as it related to their own experiences. All focus groups and interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Interviews were done with seven youth (five of whom were actively involved in data collection), seven adults and three Elders. Interviews lasted from one to two hours. During the interviews, participants were asked about the challenges they had experienced throughout their lives and the resources that helped them get through those challenges. For the purpose of this study, challenges were defined as any life event that the participant identified as a hardship, and resources were defined as anything that helped the participant overcome hardship. Youth interviews were conducted in private settings, but the Elder focus group and the adult and Elder interviews were done with young people as the audience. More specifically, before agreeing to participate in a focus group, the Elders were told that young people would be listening to their stories and answers. When adults and Elders were invited to participate, they were asked if a youth or several young people could "sit in" on their interview. In one instance, the adult participant said he would feel more comfortable with only one additional person listening to the interview. In all other cases, adults and Elders were excited about the prospect of telling their stories of resilience to a number of young people.

This 'sitting in' process provided a means to train youth in data collection, but more importantly, made this component of the research meaningful for adult and Elder participants as well as for youth. Elders and adults often spoke directly to their young audience while sharing personal, sometimes painful, stories. In every case, this format seemed to spur participants to carefully and fully tell their stories, and to draw out the lessons they had learned from them. Many of the interviewees thanked the young people for listening, and several stated that they appreciated being able to share their stories with youth. Providing further evidence of the interviewees' positive assessment of the experience, none of the adult or Elder participants accepted the $50 participant stipend, they instead donated it to a local youth institution. Additionally, every adult and Elder participant also thanked the researchers for providing them with the opportunity to share their stories with young people.

After the data collection was complete, youth co-researchers were interviewed about their participation in the project and what they learned. The young people were asked to reflect on their experience and to share what they learned from the process. These interviews were video recorded and lasted between 10 and 20 minutes. The youth co-researchers were also asked to synthesize their 'take away' learning by producing digital stories. Maniilaq Association's Project

Life supported this effort.[3] Digital stories are 3 to 5 minute digital productions that include pictures, music, and voice (Gubrium, 2009). Digital stories made by youth were shared through a community screening. Adult and Elder participants along with other guests were invited to attend this event by the youth co-researchers.

Intergenerational exchange: How it worked

The data collection process proved to be meaningful for adult and Elder participants and for youth. Although the interview format was imposed, the open-ended questions and 'teller-listener' venue provided an opportunity for adults and Elders to reflect on their memories and decide which stories were important for both answering the questions and influencing the young people who were listening. Since youth co-researchers helped to shape the interview questions, their interests were incorporated into the protocol. It is not considered appropriate for youth to question their Elders in a direct manner in this community. Rather, young people are expected to watch and listen, not ask specific questions. Keeping with this format, the process afforded youth an opportunity to learn from Elders about topics they thought particularly interesting without confronting or breaking traditional roles.

The learning that took place from the process was surprisingly fluid and personal, and resulted in conclusions much different from findings reached through the formal research analysis (Wexler, In press). This is an important distinction when considering the twin goals of CBPR, namely generating new knowledge and facilitating local action and learning. The adults and Elders used the open dialogue to reflect on their lives and to articulate their personal learning. They typically ended the sessions by summing up key lessons, and giving advice to the youth audience.

As for the young people who participated as interviewees, audience members for adult and Elder interviews, and digital story producers, they all talked about enjoying the process, "learning a lot" and that "it was fun." Although most of the youth co-researchers did not (and perhaps could not) articulate a comprehensive definition of 'resilience' by the end of the data collection process, they all talked—albeit indirectly—about how they gained new ideas about themselves, their communities and their future through the process. In this way, the new insights gained by the young co-researchers from this process were highly individual and interpretive.

This kind of learning was evident in the young peoples' digital storytelling process. Digital storytelling requires thoughtful picture taking, learning new computer programs, selecting music, developing a narrative (if included), and compiling these into a coherent whole. Interestingly, the young co-researchers resisted my attempts at orchestrating this learning process through story circles and reflective dialogue (Gubrium, 2009). The youth co-researchers were not interested in discussing the content of their digital stories or even articulating what they learned in explicit terms. They were also unwilling to talk about other people's stories or describe how they made meaning out of them. After a series of failed attempts to follow digital storytelling protocol, I was told that what I was asking of the youth was culturally inappropriate and unnecessary. This happened during the fourth youth meeting focused on digital storytelling. I was asking the youth co-researchers questions and giving suggestions for how they could shape their digital stories. I said things like, "Think about what you want to say. Do you have any ideas? Remember that story you told me, well you could put it into your digital story." My questions and suggestions were mostly being met with blank stares, with a few of the participants helpfully offering one word answers. After a half-hour of this, one older youth said, quite forcefully, that it was important to "never interfere with other people's ideas. It gets them confused and stuck. If people were left alone [to create a digital story], they will do good, 100% 'A' work." After this, all the other young people quickly got involved with their computers, but I perceived that they all

agreed: the best way forward was to let them figure it out without my input. I followed this advice, and what came from the process were not generalized findings. Instead, so many of the lessons learned were fully integrated into the stories and orientations of highly personal digital stories.

All the young people who participated as co-researchers completed their digital stories. These youth-produced movies were then shown at a community screening. The added value of providing young people with the opportunity to reflect on the stories they heard and (re)present them through their own digital stories was both educational and culturally consonant. Historically, young people retold the stories they heard from Elders to each other (Kendal, 1989), and in so doing, translated the lessons they learn from the process into personally poignant representations. All adult and Elder participants were invited to this event as well as family and friends of the participants. Approximately twenty people attended, including many of the adults and some of the Elders who participated. All of the youth co-researchers came to this event.

Community results

The exchange of ideas between generations was evident after listening to the adult and Elder interviews and focus groups and seeing the seven youth-produced digital stories. Many of the digital stories focused on the important relationships in the lives of the teller. Coinciding with the life histories of Elders and adults that emphasized the importance of family and friends, the most common theme in the digital stories was relationships. The stories featured the people who helped, supported and 'had fun with' the youth producers (Wexler, Eglinton, & Gubrium, In review). Young people identified each of these people in turn and many described how each was "there for me." Some of these included a caption, such as "I call her mom," to specify the importance of a particular relationship. This not only reinforced key relationships in the young people's lives, but also gave the young people a chance to call attention to the ways in which their current relationships were meaningful to them. I believe this kind of acknowledgement reinforces positive relationships by calling attention to the ways particular people matter to the young producer.

Many of the digital stories framed the spaces young people inhabit in the community and showed how they use them. These places and activities were sometimes markedly different from those of adults. Youth were clearly communicating with other generations through these digital compilations; sometimes even framing select photographs with captions making fun of the potential approbation of the adult viewers. For instance, in one digital story, a group of young people was shown swimming in an area that is sometimes accessed by trespassing. The digital story mentioned trespassing and then in the next frame had the words, "I jokes," meaning that the producer was kidding with the audience. Clearly, the youth representations were created with older people in mind. The visual representations of everyday youth life offered insight into the way the community is experienced by young people. By inviting respected adults and Elders to these screening, the older community members developed increased awareness of youth perspectives and needs, giving them opportunities to become more involved in youth efforts on both personal and community levels. These digital stories sparked conversations among adults about the need for more, safe and fun places for young people to socialize.

Several digital stories also identified personal accomplishments (i.e. graduation, going to college) or highlighted positive aspects in the lives of the youth that made them. These digital stories served essentially as Hope Kits (this parallel was first identified in collaboration with Vivian Gonzalez, August 19, 2011). The Hope Kit intervention is a suicide prevention approach with empirical support. Specifically, a Hope Kit is comprised of pictures and other tangible mementos

that remind the client of reasons for living (Brown et al., 2005; Wenzel, Brown, & Beck, 2009). For young people, digital media is particularly powerful and appropriate for the construction of a Hope Kit (Wenzel et al., 2009), and from a motivational perspective can also serve to promote better health (e.g. reduce substance use).

Youth-produced digital stories focused on strategies for getting through difficulties in both commonplace and noteworthy ways. One youth wrote, "We have good days and bad days, but my friends are always there for me." Another focused on the significant tragedies that had occurred in her short life, but honed in on her (and her people's) strength and endurance. These kinds of resilience perspectives and life markers were framed and discussed in detail through the Elder and adult interviews. Young people used this kind of discourse when thinking about and (re)presenting their lives through digital stories. Using terminology that echoed language used in the older people's life stories, one young person wrote, "A turning point [in my life] is right now." In another example, a youth co-researcher put written phrases into his digital story to convey his main points. One of these stated, "It's just a matter of putting your mind to it and you know you can do it." This kind of personal motto was heard almost verbatim in several adult interviews. Another digital story focused on the theme: "Life is short, take advantage." Reflecting the fortitude that was emblematic of many of the life stories heard, youth digital stories asserted, "It's never too late."

Not only did young people learn life lessons, they also began to discern how their culture shows up in both subtle and overt ways in the adult and Elder's life histories. The young people talked about how they got to hear more about "what it was like" not only for the Elders, but also for the adults. In hearing both, they got to see how some of the repressive actions committed against one generation also had an impact on the next. One young person mentioned to me that he had not thought about how the Elders—who had been punished for speaking their language—might feel about Inupiaq being taught in the schools today. This was discussed in the Elder focus group where one participant did not understand how or even why the schools in the region now condone and even support language revitalization after what she went through. This kind of discontinuity between generations was also illustrated by an adult participant's story about wanting to learn how to do traditional, cultural dance while growing up. She talked about how her mother—who had been punished for traditional dancing—would not allow her to do it. Some young people who listened to this story mentioned how lucky they were to be allowed to learn how to do traditional dances.

Although few of these kinds of insights showed up explicitly in the youth digital stories, the youth talked about "learning about their culture." They also highlighted their cultural identity through their digital stories. This was often done by using their "Eskimo name" instead of just their English one. In one digital story, a youth co-researcher recited the "Inupiaq Ilitqusiat"[4] (cultural values), and tied these into her narrative as a way to articulate the right way to live. Many digital stories also included images of themselves in "the country," or spotlighted their connection to nature as a way to pay homage to their sense of culture and place. This emphasis on home and one's connection to it was evident in many digital stories, and parallels the ways that Elders and adults talked about their own homecoming after attending school, being in the military or moving away for a job.

The telling-listening-reflecting through digital stories invited a rekindling of past relationships. At the end of most interviews, adult participants would ask each young person who they were and who their parents were. The adult would then typically place that youth in their family context and highlight a personal connection with either him/her as a younger person, or with a family member. In one instance, the young co-researcher had been in an institution for the previous two

years and had not reached out to many people since his return only a few months earlier. The adult participant noted his absence, and told him that he had been missed. Then, she asked him if he remembered that he used to call her "Auntie," and said that she would be honored if he did so again. In this way, the data collection process facilitated a (sometimes renewed) feeling of connection between the participants and those youth who heard their stories.

Lastly, the youth-produced digital stories have been used to advocate for youth programs, material resources and cultural outreach. They have been shown at resilience conferences, been featured on Canadian television and used for advocacy at state and federal levels by representatives of AI/AN organizations. These varied purposes continue to expand and underscore the significance of these forms of knowledge production and the value added to a research project through the use of an intergenerational exchange.

Discussion

The intergenerational processes of IDEA served to collect data for a community-based participatory study and provide opportunities for communication, teaching and learning between Elders, adults and youth. The process of asking Elders and adults to share their stories for the benefit of youth listeners offers a clear way for older AI/AN people to impart cultural lessons to youth. Youth are also invited to integrate this learning into their own (re)presentations of themselves and their lives through digital stories. The process, then, provides the opportunities to accomplish the goals of knowledge production, community engagement and health promotion. Because the IDEA process addresses the often lamented gap between AI/AN youth and other age groups in the community, it offers a culturally-consonant approach to knowledge sharing and production. Because it built upon the participants' self-selected stories and representations, it worked within the sensibilities of the community and gave young people the opportunity to gain insights in a very personal and interpretive way.

By providing an arena for intergenerational sharing, the IDEA process encourages cross-age connections and, in doing so, broadly supports the transmission of cultural knowledge.

> The value of myth and storytelling can be easily appreciated in terms of psychological processes of making meaning and coherence from often chaotic life experience. But traditional stories and myths are also emblems of identity that circulate among Aboriginal peoples, providing opportunities for mutual understanding and participation in a shared world. (Kirmayer, Brass, & Tait, 2000, p. 614)

This kind of personal and collective understanding of selfhood—or the establishment of an ethnic identity (belonging)—and actively contributing to one's shared world (purpose/mattering) has been linked to thriving in diverse populations (Phinney, 2000; Phinney & Chavara, 1992). This sense of identity and purpose is perhaps especially important for people, in this case ANs, whose traditional ways have been systematically marginalized. Without clear intergenerational guidance, it is harder for AI/AN youth to consider their own problems in (cultural) context, and to glean strength, and a sense of control and purpose from the effort (Jervis, et al, 2006; Wexler et al., 2009). Without this perspective, youth are less able to access cultural resources when facing challenges (Walters & Simoni, 2009; King, Smith, & Gracey, 2009; Wexler, In press).

This is important since previous research has emphasized the health benefits of youth cultural identity and enculturation, specifically in reducing AI/AN substance use and suicidality (see for

example, Lehti, et. al, 2009; Adelson, 2000; Borowsky, Ireland, & Resnik, 2001; Whitbeck, Adams, Hoyt, & Chen, 2004). These connections are not well understood, but cultural lessons incorporated as personal life learning, can provide a sense of self-worth, social belonging, and purpose to help youth avoid and overcome challenges (Wexler et al., 2009). These factors are important elements in healthy youth development (Erikson, 1968; Hunter & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003). Although the adult and Elder participants were asked to tell traditional stories related to resilience, the cultural learning went beyond this. Young people learned about their culture by hearing stories of growing up that were shaped by and constituted through cultural lenses.

Traditionally, lessons were integrated in story content so that they were understood subjectively (Adam, & Fosdick, 1983). This kind of knowing can be juxtaposed with objective, explicit, decontextualized forms of knowledge, like being able to recite the definition of 'resilience.' In traditional storytelling, details of the protagonist's thoughts and actions were told so that youth could discern the emotional spaces, relationships, and motivations that were important for the decisions made or actions taken. Similarly, through the in-depth interviews, Elders and adults were asked to discuss these kinds of subjective experiences so that the young people could make sense of what happened to participants, how they made meaning from their experiences, and the ways these events and choices affected their life's paths. This is significantly different from generating generalizable results for the community.

Through the IDEA process, the youth who were listening were invited to consider their own lives and to apply the implicit and explicit lessons in an intuitive way to their own lives. This kind of making personal sense through listening and paying attention to individual motivations and priorities can be likened to more traditional forms of education. In her dissertation research, Kendal (1989) describes the ways that traditional learning involved watching for subtle cues to determine appropriate action. She noted how children from a similar community (in the same region) are raised to perceive the social context, the flow of interaction, and the intentionality of the social players so that they understand the parameters of acceptable behaviors. She states, "A highly prized Inupiat skill is that of reading implicit messages below the surface of a conversation, much like the reading of subtle features of the Arctic tundra during hunting expeditions" (p. 29). This kind of reading aptitude is both personal and collective. The meaning gained from a story is at once highly individualized; it can mean several different things depending on how the listener makes sense of it in the context of larger, shared understandings.

In several instances, the interviewer (myself) asked participants to explicitly decipher the meaning of a story by asking, "What does that mean?" or "What does that story tell me about _____ ?" This kind of questioning does not follow the communication norms in the community, and I was sometimes squarely rebuffed. In a couple cases, I was humored, and asked what I thought the story meant. If my interpretation was clearly not one that was shared by the teller and audience, the group would erupt in laughter. One of these times, the participant explained that I "only said that because [I was] Naluabmiu (White)." Clearly, my need for clarification along with my misinterpretation of the story emphasized my outsider status. In contrast, Inupiat stories are expected to be understood in an intuitive and personal way that follows certain cultural sensibilities. This can make some interpretations of the story patently wrong as in the example above. Adam and Fosdick (1983) reflect on the traditional educational practices in a similar community by writing,

> Insights [through storytelling] are in the best sense original, which means they are
> rooted in personal experience, and also traditional [understandings], which means
> that the originality has been woven into the fabric of group life. It is this combination
> that makes cultures both stable and lifegiving. (p. 73)

The process of asking Elders and adults to share their stories for the benefit of youth listeners offers a clear opportunity to impart cultural lessons that are embedded in both the story format and content. This exchange is important in itself, aside from the data it generates.

By asking Elders and adults to tell their life stories to young people, they are making meaning out of their lives and formulating it in a particular way for the audience (MacAdams, 1996). This meaning making happens both in terms of how they understand themselves as individuals and as social beings who are defined by their life stage, gender, ethnicity and culture (Singer, 2004). By telling stories to youth, the participants tended to highlight cultural ways of behaving and understanding the world. As Baumeister and Newman (1994) posit, there are four basic needs that are accomplished by storytelling. The first is a need for purpose which presents past circumstances in relation to what happens next. The second relates to the value placed upon the situation and outcome. Justifications for actions are based on moral judgments about oneself and the world. The third element that is achieved through the telling of stories is the need for efficacy, meaning that one's actions, thoughts, and circumstances drive the narrative. Lastly, self-worth is affirmed by the morality and order conceptualized through the narrative. In this way, stories can offer insight into the moral patterns and value systems of the tellers. This is important for the transmission of cultural knowledge.

These lessons or shared priorities were common threads that showed up in the interviews and digital stories, in one form or another. One such theme was the prominence of family relationships in all the stories regardless of generation. Although manifested differently, all older participants talked about their commitment to "their people." This commitment drove them to greater accomplishments, influenced their personal choices and shaped the ways they parented their children or contributed to their community. This also came through the young people's reflections about "our people" and the ways they hoped to "help them." In these kinds of ways, the Elder and adult interviews reinforced a shared notion of cultural identity. Additionally, many of the older generation participants described how they had overcome significant challenges by believing in themselves, knowing that they could rely on others, and having a strong sense of cultural pride. Although the youth did not articulate this as such, many gained a stronger sense of cultural identity by listening to and learning from the Elder and adult participants. This was expressed as "learning about what the Elders have been through," and "hearing how they overcame hard times," and "knowing that, as Inupiaq, we are strong." In this way, the process itself contributed to a positive sense of cultural selfhood.

> The creation of an explicit ethnic identity requires that certain beliefs, practices, or characteristics be elevated to core values and claimed as shared experiences. This naturally tends to obscure individual variation and the constant flux of personal and social definitions of self and other. (Kirmayer et al., 2000, p. 611)

This kind of personal and collective understanding of selfhood—or the development of an ethnic identity—has been linked to thriving in diverse populations (Phinney, 2000; Phinney & Chavira, 1992). This is perhaps especially important for people who have been systematically marginalized and whose social roles are not well defined by the dominant culture (Wexler et al., 2009; Wexler, 2009b). It is also vital for young people because as they become adults they begin to take on less fluid self-definitions. These notions of identity establish sets of rules for behavior/interactions (Erikson, 1959) and, therefore, situate people's parameters for acting in their everyday lives. Identity constructions, then, provide important symbolic frames for determining appropriate situational behavior. The IDEA process—as health promotion—carves out time and space for Elders and adults to impart important life and cultural lessons to AI/AN young people, who are at a critical point in their development to receive these lessons.

Conclusion

The intergenerational exchange process described in this paper (IDEA) meets the community-focused goals embedded in CBPR methodology. It offers a clear way to bridge research and practice, and extends the benefits of both. It does so by actively engaging community members—youth, adults and Elders—in the knowledge generation process. In addition, it invites local understandings and personal learning to be an integral part of the research process. This not only generates theories and more generalizable knowledge, but also provides ways for local people—in this case AN community members—the opportunity to tell their own stories to each other and gain different, personal insights from the process. In this way, data collection becomes a form of health promotion as generations reformulate and share aspects of their cultural identity.

> Any approach to mental health services and promotion with Aboriginal peoples must consider… ongoing uses of tradition to assert cultural identity. However, it is important to recognize that tradition itself is both received and invented: built in equal measure of wisdom transmitted across generations and of creative visions of how many strands of knowledge available today from diverse cultures of the world can be woven together in new patterns. Even though oral tradition works to maintain an unbroken chain of teachings, collective history is retold in new ways in each generation, using contemporary images and vocabulary. Living traditions are always works in progress. (Kirmayer, Brass, & Tait, 2009, p. 440)

Using intergenerational dialogue, exchange and action (IDEA) as a CBPR process does just that, and, in so doing, clearly contributes to larger cultural revitalization efforts in the community and beyond.

Notes

1. The title Elder is capitalized due to the status this role confers in the participating community. The idea of Elder within the community refers to more than age in that it emphasizes the wisdom gained throughout a lifetime and the responsibility of sharing this with younger generations.

2. The original protocols were developed in collaboration in Canadian Aboriginal communities (see http://www.mcgill.ca/resilience/). Please see Kirmayer, Dandeneau, Marshall, Phillips, and Williamson (2011) for description of the project in greater depth and discussion of key findings.

3. For more information about this project, see projectlifealaska.org

4. See McNabb, S. (1991) for a description of how the development and propagation of the Inupiat Itilqusiat in this region can be considered both reformative and redemptive.

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