Adapting Evidence-based Practices for Specific Populations: The intersection between utilizing effective practices and ensuring fit and relevancy

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Centre for School Mental Health Projects

https://www.csmh.uwo.ca/
Key Questions

- How do we find that optimal spot between programming that has been shown to be effective in one context and the specific context we are working in?
- How do we extend evidence-based programs in an intentional way to meet the strengths and needs of particular groups of youth?
Overview

- Identify aspects that are important and challenging about evidence-based practices
- Provide an overview of the Fourth R and Healthy Relationships Plus programs
- Consider lessons from implementation science
- Use two examples of programs we have adapted for specific groups to highlight promising practices
What do we mean by evidence-based?
Why are evidence-based practices important?

• Funders and policy-makers increasingly demanding them
• Well-loved, well-intentioned programs can cause harm!
• Ineffective programs take resources that could be better used
• Process and qualitative evaluations have certain biases
What are some of the thorny issues?

- Programs tested in one context
- Lack of EBP for specific groups
- Programs evolve
- Implementation issues often invisible
- Most evaluations are conducted within one worldview – neglects other equally valid ways of knowing
- Takes a long time to reach the threshold
- Needs to be balanced with innovation
Why relationships?

- Impact on developmental outcomes undeniable
- Need to harness for intervention and growth
Fourth R Healthy Relationships Programming
Fourth R Skills

- Active Listening
- Assertive Communication
- Delay, Refusal, Negotiation
- Help Seeking
- Providing Support
- Apologizing
- Ending a Relationship
- Coping Skills
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The Healthy Relationships PLUS (HRP) Program

- The HRP is a small group Fourth R program designed to promote positive mental health, and relationship violence and related risk behaviours.
HRP – Emerging evidence

- RCT in Southwestern Ontario:
  - Decreased bullying victimization one year after intervention
  - Mediated by increase in help-seeking
  - Decreased cannabis among those with higher adversity scores

- National implementation study
  - Decreased depression
Fourth R / Healthy Relationships Plus as EBP

• Range of outcomes increasing protective factors and reducing risk behaviours
• Biggest impact on those who need it most
• Robust to different implementation settings
• Widely recognized as an effective, evidence-based program
Are we asking the right question?

Does this program work?
Are we asking the right questions?

- What works for whom?
- Under what circumstances?
- In the real world?
- Does this program work?
Implementation of Evidence-based programs

- Existence of evidence-based programs is a necessary but not sufficient criteria!
- Effective programs can sit and gather dust just as easily as ineffective ones
Flexibility of Implementation at the Individual Level: Our evolution
Phase I: Ignored implementation
(2001-2010)

“We have created an awesome program that in the context of a rigidly managed, well funded Randomized Controlled Trial leads to desirable outcomes. You’re welcome.”
How to Draw an Owl

1. Draw some circles

2. Draw the rest of the owl
“This is what we did to get the good research outcomes, so if you want the good outcomes you have to do EXACTLY what we did”
HRP National Implementation Study – Important Group Level Variables

- Group size
- Mean age of student
- Age range of students
- Mixed or single gender groups
- Experience of facilitator

- Duration of intervention
- School-based versus community-based
- Aggregated risk level of group
- Presence of co-facilitator
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None of this mattered!
Complicated versus Complex Systems

Complicated problems:
- Inputs
- Series of steps
- Predictable outcomes

Complex problems:
- Dense interdependencies
- Non-linear change
- Quickly unpredictable
Building airplanes is a complicated undertaking
Complicated versus Complex Systems

**Complicated problems**
- Inputs
- Series of steps
- Predictable outcomes

**Complex problems**
- Dense interdependencies
- Non-linear change
- Quickly unpredictable
School-based interventions are complex by design!
Phase III: Intentional adaptability

“We know you are going to modify materials and implementation to best meet the needs of your students. Here are some thoughts about how to do that in an intentional manner.”
Core Components

– Manualized programs still have lots of ways to be adapted to fit the personality of the group and facilitator

– Most important core components for the Fourth R and HRP are:
  • **skills building** – provides them with opportunity to develop key skills and try in different contexts; increases self-efficacy
  • **discussion** – helps youth develop the vocabulary they need and the comfort to use their skills
Making more adaptations – The Stoplight approach

Unhelpful changes – avoid!
• Skipping skills development
• Adding materials with different underlying approach (e.g., scared straight)

Changes to make with caution
• Adding new videos and activities from other sources
• Do additions support the core messages and skills?

Changes to enhance fit for your group – go ahead!
• Altering role plays or letting group develop them
• Extending time for discussion (if you can accommodate)
• Adding material to address basic knowledge gaps
Adaptation at a Group Level
Fourth R for Americans

- Chosen by Robert Wood Johnson Foundation as one of two programming options for their Start Strong initiative
- Process
- Outcome
Fourth R for Americans

Behaviour
Fourth R for Americans

Behaviour

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What about other Groups?

- Groups who experience persistent inequities and disproportionate risk?
- We know very little about what works for vulnerable youth in real world settings!
EBP versus locally developed

Implementation of an existing EBP
EBP versus locally developed programs

Adapted from O’Connell, Boat, Warner, and NRC, 2009
Finding Middle Ground
Is there a middle ground?

Adaptation of an existing program to meet community needs

Implementation of an existing EBP

Community-driven / locally developed programs

Adapted from O’Connell, Boat, Warner, and NRC, 2009
Principles of all Fourth R programs

- Relationship context
- Positive youth development
- Skills development focus
Uniting our Nations
Uniting Our Nations Partnerships

- Three main messages from partners (2004):
  - Programming needs to be connected to culture
  - Importance of transition to secondary school
  - Importance of culturally similar mentors
# Comparison of Fourth R and Uniting Our Nations

## Similarities
- Emphasis on healthy relationships
- Focus on skill development
- Positive youth development framework
- School-based programs aligned with curricula expectations
- Commitment to documentation and development of manuals

## Differences
- Cultural connectedness as an underlying framework
- Greater focus on mentorship
- Higher degree of community partner involvement
- Use of more holistic frameworks
- More programming options outside of classroom time
Elementary and Secondary Mentoring Programs

- Program runs weekly during school year
- Group or peer mentoring format
- Adult mentor oversees whole process
- Sessions tied to cultural teachings
- Still focus on relationship skills

See mentor.org resource on SEL and mentoring
Evaluation

• Began with focus on feasibility and acceptability
• Cross-sectional designs
• Case studies
• Foundation for more rigorous evaluation
Mixed-methods longitudinal evaluation

- Followed a cohort of 105 youth from grade 7/8 to grade 9/10
- Evaluated impacts of two years of mentoring on emotional wellbeing and cultural connectedness
- Positive impacts on both outcomes, even accounting for Wave 1 scores
- Qualitative and quantitative data converged

Culture as an Additional Core Component
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Theory and literature
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Qualitative reports of increased cultural connectedness preceded changes in positive mental health
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Increases in cultural connectedness co-occurred with increases in positive mental health
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Case study with adult stakeholders
Strengthening identity

… it gives them the identity that they are searching for. Who am I? Where do I come from? What am I about? I find that they don’t feel so lost. They can ground themselves. It is hard to explain. They can ground their spirit. They know who they are. It is not like they are wandering around searching for an identity and then they can expand on that and find the sweat lodges and find the Elders and the teachings. (Female educator)
Uniting Our Nations Summary

- Mentoring programs increased positive mental health, cultural connectedness, and academic success
- Core components still beneficial
- Importance of cultural identity framework
HRP for LGBT2Q+ Youth
Development process

• Three year development and pilot process in southern Ontario school board

• Initial version focused on preventing dating violence in same sex relationships

• Lessons learned

• Youth involvement

• Revision process

• Resource development
HRP for LGBT2Q+ Youth

- Affirms, validates, and celebrates sexual and gender diversity
- Cultivates a caring and supportive community
- Helps youth develop skills and strategies that promote healthy relationships
- Explores stressors unique to LGBT2Q+ youth
Advice for facilitators

Dear facilitator,

“I want you to keep in mind not everyone is on a binary, is sexual, only has one identity. There are many identities and many are on a spectrum. People might get triggered. Respect their identity. LGBTQ+ people are people, once you take out the hate we’re pretty much the same. Don’t rely on LGBTQ+ folks to define and explain your questions. Do research first – hear the stories straight from LGBTQ+ people (i.e., YouTube, Tumblr, etc.)”

“Respect pronouns, Do your research, Genitals do not equal gender.”

“Pronouns are a must, Accept all genders/sexualities/romantic orientations, Listen, Treat all with respect, Love all.”

“I need you to know that pronouns are very significant to some people so please never assume someone’s pronouns and always do the check in! I need you to know that not all of us students are walking, talking LGBTQ+ encyclopaedias. If you don’t know a term, research it instead of asking students.”

“I want you to remember to allow and remind students to leave whenever they feel uncomfortable. I want you to remember to respect pronouns, sexuality, genders of students/people in general.”

...and I am a part of this program
Evaluation

- Feasibility and acceptability focus since 2015
- Youth participated in focus groups in the 2016-2017 school year
- Youth enjoyed participating in a structured program within their school-based clubs
- Furthermore, participants:
  - Appreciated opportunities to discuss topics in depth that might otherwise have been glossed over
  - Appreciated the program’s identity affirmative focus
  - Found the skills very applicable - particularly for those who were experiencing challenges associated with coming out

Identity affirming

I think I discovered a little more of myself. You know, I started kind of realizing, 'Hey, like, maybe there's more to gender for me personally’…kind of like figuring out who I am…because, you know, when you talk about…the spectrum and, you know, where you can fit. And, like, I was kind of imagining in my head and I was like, 'hey, this kind of makes sense’…just helping me personally with things like that.
Promotes coping skills

I feel like these lessons don't only teach us more about the community. They also see just how to cope with what could be going on at home. Because at home, like, it is just like a hellhole every time I go home. And so it's taught me how to cope with going home; it's taught me how to cope with my parents at home and I feel like it's done that for a lot of our other kids because a lot of our kids are in the same boat I am. They're either out and facing hell. They're out and they're facing some type of neglect, whether they're being blatantly ignored, or they're not out and they're terrified to come out. So…it really set up coping mechanisms for a lot of our kids…it opened up our club and let other kids know that, 'hey, you're not the only one going through this. There's somebody else out there who understands. If you need to talk to anybody we're all here and we'll listen to you and we'll support you.' And some of us even have a support system that, if it gets really bad at home, 'call me and I will set up a bed for you somewhere. I don't know, but you can come and bunk at my house if it gets really bad.'
Additional Core Components?

• Exploring role of identity affirmation
• Looking at GSA functioning as a mechanism of change
• Testing within context of 30 school quasi-experimental design
Finding the Middle Ground: What has worked for us and where do we go from here?
Considerations for Finding the Middle Ground

1. Keep core components

- Look for unique risk and protective factors
- Co-create with stakeholders
- Plan for iterative process
- Evaluate as you go
- Look for harm
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6. Look for harm
Future Directions
We need sturdier evidence-based practices
More co-creation and co-evaluation with educators, clinicians, and youth
More creative methodologies
Questions and Discussion

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Research information: https://www.csmh.uwo.ca/
Program information: www.youthrelationships.org