CULTURALLY INFORMED SCHOOL-BASED MENTAL HEALTH: A 23 YEAR ARCHIVE AND PERSPECTIVE ON HONORING THE LIVES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ELEMENTARY STUDENTS AND FAMILIES IN SAINT PAUL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, 2015
Outline of our time together

- **Introductions:** Kofi History and program design (5 minutes)
- Developing **counter-narratives** that promote cultural resiliency (10 minutes)
- **Culturally affirming and informed strategies** that strengthen our effectiveness (10 minutes)
- **Q&A** (5 minutes)
“As an educator in a system of oppression, you are either a revolutionary or an oppressor.” —Lerone Bennett, Jr.
Kofi Services: History & Program Design

- **History**
  - Program Origins; Context: racial disparities, 1990’s MN

- **Current Program Design**
  - Psychotherapy by licensed (or licensure-track) clinicians
    - Individual, family or group
  - Culturally- and trauma-informed consultation with school staff

- **Effectiveness**
  - 95-100% of parents feel their cultural background was respected throughout service
  - For more information (i.e. evaluation results), please e-mail rudy.rousseau@wilder.org
Mission of Kofi Services

- Honoring Ancestral Strength: We provide culturally-affirming, holistic therapeutic services and consultation for children and families in school, home, and community.
Kofi’s Core Values

- Cultural Affirmation and Awareness
  - We infuse culturally rich material into our services and events.
  - We consistently acknowledge how history affects the present and integrate themes of social justice into our practice.
  - We increase awareness of cultural strengths through consultation, modeling, and reflection.

- Excellence in Mental Health
  - We deliver mental health services with an emphasis on attachment, self-regulation, trauma-informed, person-centered, culturally affirming, and strength-based therapy.
  - We model, teach, and coach healthy ways of being with children and families.
  - We embrace innovative approaches to deliver high quality care through continual professional development.

- Strong, Meaningful Relationships
  - We invest in building relationships with school staff and other stakeholders through education and reflective consultation.
  - We model healthy, safe relationships and different ways of being to increase positive community connections.
  - We acknowledge that positive social connections are life-sustaining.
Counter-Narratives

That celebrate and promote resiliency in the African American community
Definitions

- **Narratives:**
  - Stories, messages, tools for meaning-making
  - “We tell ourselves stories in order to live.” – Joan Didion
  - Stories are the threads of our lives and weave together to form the fabric of human cultures.
Definitions (continued)

- **Master Narrative**: The Master Narrative is generally described as the colonially-derived story of events, emphasizing European perspectives.

- Identifying Master Narratives:
  - What are some common Master Narratives about African American youth?
Definitions (continued)

- **Counter-Narrative**: A narrative that goes against another narrative...an argument that disputes a commonly held belief.
  - The Counter Narrative offers accounts of history from diverse perspectives, with a *critical examination* of the widely accepted, colonially-derived story.
  - Developing counter-narratives → process of de-colonizing
“Until the story of the hunt is told by the lion,

the tale of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.”

–African Proverb
Frameworks for Developing Counter-Narratives: Historical Trauma

- Definition: Historical trauma is cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma.
  
  (Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Braveheart, http://www.historicaltrauma.com/)

- U of MN, CFYC, “What is Historical Trauma?”:
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AWmK314NVrs&list=PLyfdph9zmJxSOI_qbBhe_LurrCQ6VQvQ&index=1
Frameworks for Developing Counter-Narratives: Cultural Resiliency Skills

Dr. JuanCarlos Arauz, E3

- One cannot have Educational Excellence without Equity.

CULTURAL RESILIENCY SKILLS:

- Innovation
- Adaptability
- Cross-cultural communication
- Critical Analysis
- Teamwork

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZBEi6iLDv0&list=PLZV3AWhH7cqQhk1zkzDjCJKSjAgENd_Nc
Counter-Narratives: making new meaning

- Samples:
  - Oppositional ➔ ____________________________
  - “Can’t speak proper English” ➔ ____________________________
  - Hostile/abusive parent ➔ ____________________________
Master Narrative

Oppositional
"To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a rage almost all the time."

~James Baldwin
Counter-Narrative

Oppositional ➔ RIGHTEOUSLY RAGEFUL
“Doesn’t speak proper English”
Steven Willis, “Ebonics 101”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CB8pBiUavtg
Counter-Narrative

“Doesn’t speak proper English” → BILINGUAL
Hostile/Abusive parent
Your silence will not protect you.

(Audre Lorde)
Counter-Narrative

- Hostile/abusive parent ➔ PROTECTING THEIR CHILD
“In an African-centered reality, we wish to advance the notion that therapists are really healers. Healers are individuals who participate with clients, not simply direct and control them. Healers help clients confront their mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual debilitations.”

The association of Black Psychologists defines African-centered psychology as:

- 'the dynamic manifestation of the unifying African principles, values and traditions. It is the self-conscious “centering” of psychological analysis and applications in African reality, culture and epistemology. African-Centered Psychology examines the process that allows for the illumination and liberation of the spirit. Relying on the principles of harmony within the universe as a natural order of existence, African-centered Psychology recognizes: the Spirit that permeates everything that is; the value that the collective is the most salient element of existence; and the idea that communal self-knowledge is the key to mental health.' (Parham, White, & Ajamu, 1999, p. 95)

5 Essential Features of African-centered psychology

1.) Self-definition
2.) Spirit
3.) Nature
4.) Metaphysical interconnectedness
5.) Communal order and self-knowledge

Our Culturally Affirming Practices

- In our work within ourselves:
  - We are **mindful to not commit** Microaggressions
  - We create a **safe space** for children and families to talk about **lived experience** of Microaggressions.

Our Culturally Affirming Practices

- In our work with individuals:
  - We incorporate cultural strengths into regulation, integrating brain research with righteous indignation:

  - “You should be angry. You must not be bitter. Bitterness is like cancer. It eats upon the host. It doesn’t do anything to the object of its displeasure. So use that anger. You write it. You paint it. You dance it. You march it. You vote it. You do everything about it. You talk it. Never stop talking it.” —Maya Angelou
Our Culturally Affirming Practices

- In our work with families:
  - We deliver Family Therapy that:
    - Is Nonjudgmental
    - Addresses Parenting styles

- We also provide some case management.


http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2015/10/13/peds.2015-2577.abstract
Our Culturally Affirming Practices

- In our work with systems:
  - We consult with school staff to:
    - Inform on how trauma affects learning
    - Reinforce the need for relationships with kids and parents
    - Shine light on and counter Master narratives
Our Culturally Affirming Practices: RITES OF PASSAGE

In our work with groups:

- We start with identifying Master Narratives→ Countering them with healthy messages about who we are as a people.
  - Teach HISTORY.
  - Involve FAMILIES.
  - Use ARTS. (i.e. regulation through drumming)
  - Promote self-awareness. (i.e. I Am From Poem)
  - Integrate SOCIAL JUSTICE. (i.e. inviting community activist)
  - Engage in SERVICE. (i.e. reading to younger children; packing food)
We utilize African-centered (Kwanzaa) principles. Nguzo Saba.

- Umoja (Unity)
- Kujichagulia (Self-determination)
- Ujima (Collective work and responsibility)
- Ujamaa (Cooperative economics)
- Nia (Purpose)
- Kuumba (Creativity)
- Imani (Faith)
Our Guiding Theme: SANKOFA

We look back to go forward, honoring the legacy of those who came before us and learning from our history and our story of resilience. We will know ourselves and feel proud. We will recognize and be grateful for our many strengths. We are on our way and the future is bright!
I Am From Poem

I come from hearing screaming every day from my parents as a baby.
I come from a family that likes FUN and doing fun things together.
I come from a family that loves to be silly.
I come from a family that always cares about me no matter what I do, even when I’m bad.
I come from a family with anxiety.
I come from giving life to my auntie in Chicago.
I come from a family that loves to watch me play sports.
I come from dancing to the beat of my mom’s stereo.
I come from being short and being made fun of.
I come from horrible bad behavior.
I come from meeting my Kofi brothers and sisters and overcoming my struggles.
I overcame my struggles by seeing Ms. Alma and working on my self control.
I come from Kofi where I explored my African American history.
I come from making beats on the table to keep myself going.
In the future I will play basketball and football and I will always be a team player.
“A PEOPLE WITHOUT THE KNOWLEDGE OF THEIR PAST HISTORY, ORIGIN AND CULTURE IS LIKE A TREE WITHOUT ROOTS”