Adapting Evidence-based Practices for Specific Populations:

The intersection between utilizing effective practices and ensuring fit and relevancy

Claire Crooks, Ph.D., C.Psych.

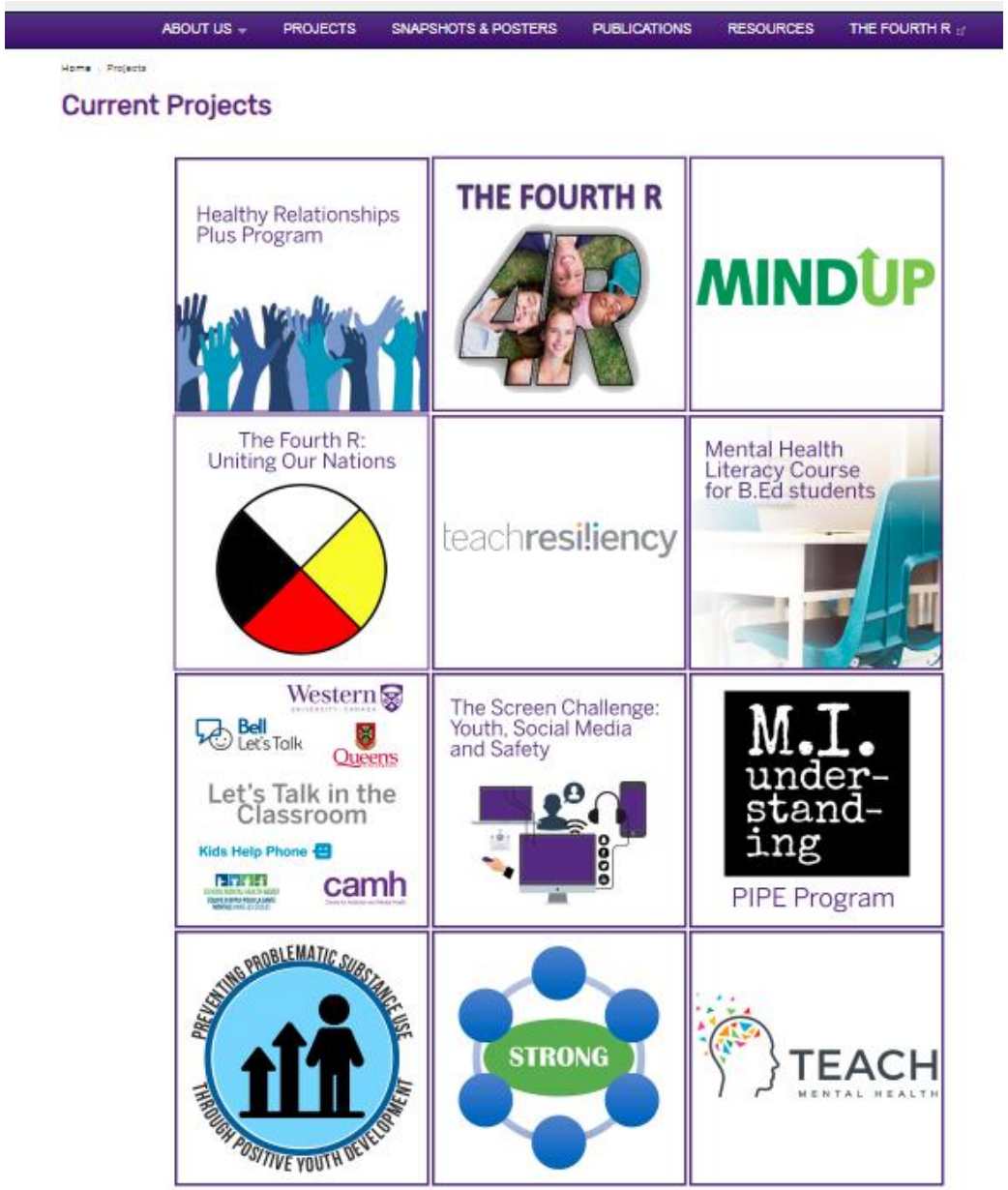
Centre for School Mental Health, Western University

Acknowledgements

- Whole Centre for School Mental Health team!
- Co-creators of original Fourth R: David Wolfe, Ray Hughes & Peter Jaffe
- Development and evaluation funded by:
  - Public Health Agency of Canada
  - Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR)
  - Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)
  - Health Canada
  - NIAAA (US)

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

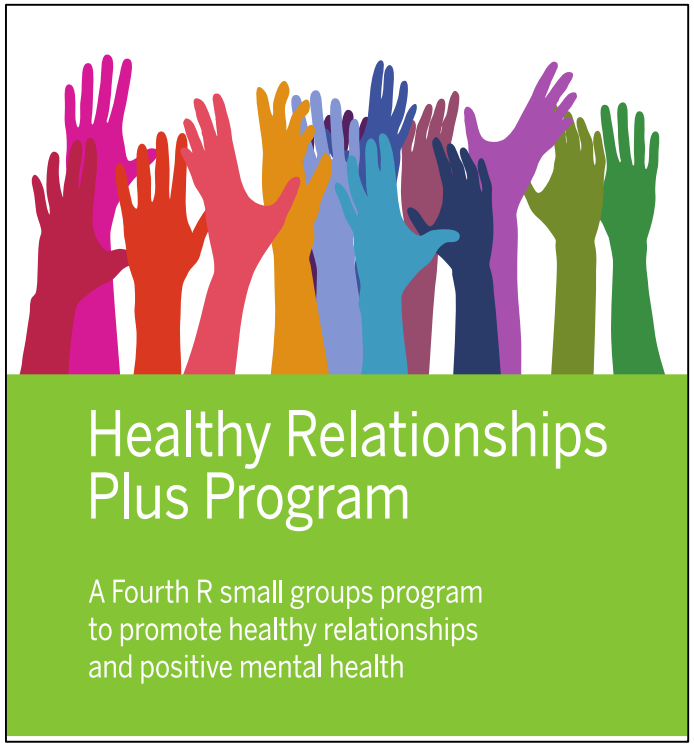
- Active Listening
- Assertive Communication
- Delay, Refusal, Negotiation
- Help Seeking
- Providing Support
- Apologizing
- Ending a Relationship
- Coping Skills

Fourth R Skills

- Active Listening
- Assertive Communication
- Delay, Refusal, Negotiation
- Help Seeking
- Providing Support
- Apologizing
- Ending a Relationship
- Coping Skills

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

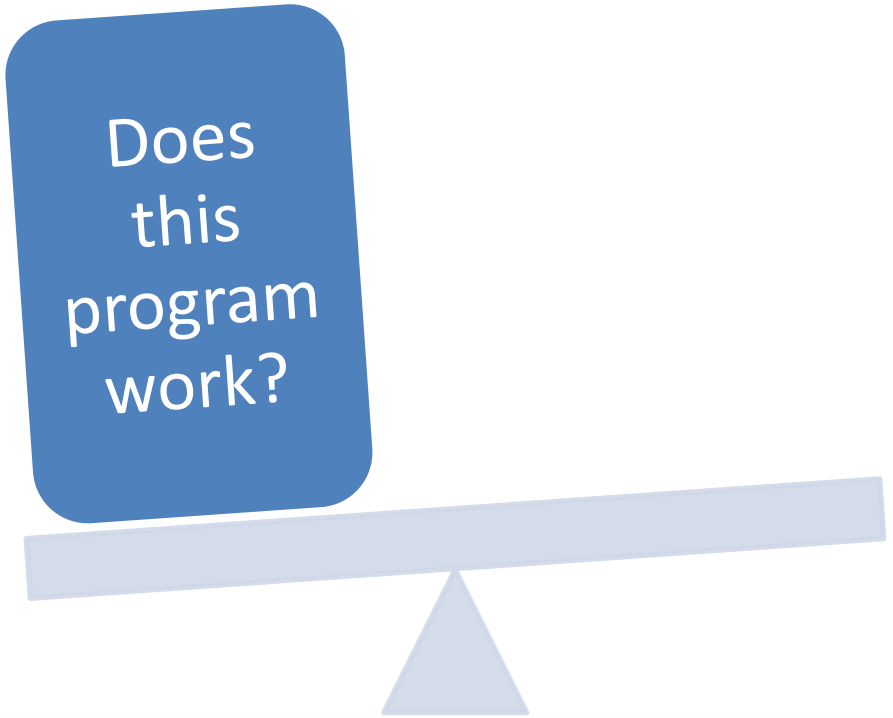
Exner-Cortens, D., Wolfe, D. A., Crooks, C. V., & Chiodo, D. (2019). A randomized controlled evaluation of a universal healthy relationships promotion program for youth. *Canadian Journal of School Psychology*.

Lapshina, N., Crooks, C. V., & Kerry, A. (2018). Changes in depression and positive mental health among youth in a healthy relationships program: A latent class growth analysis. *Canadian Journal of School Psychology*. DOI:10.1177/0829573518777154.

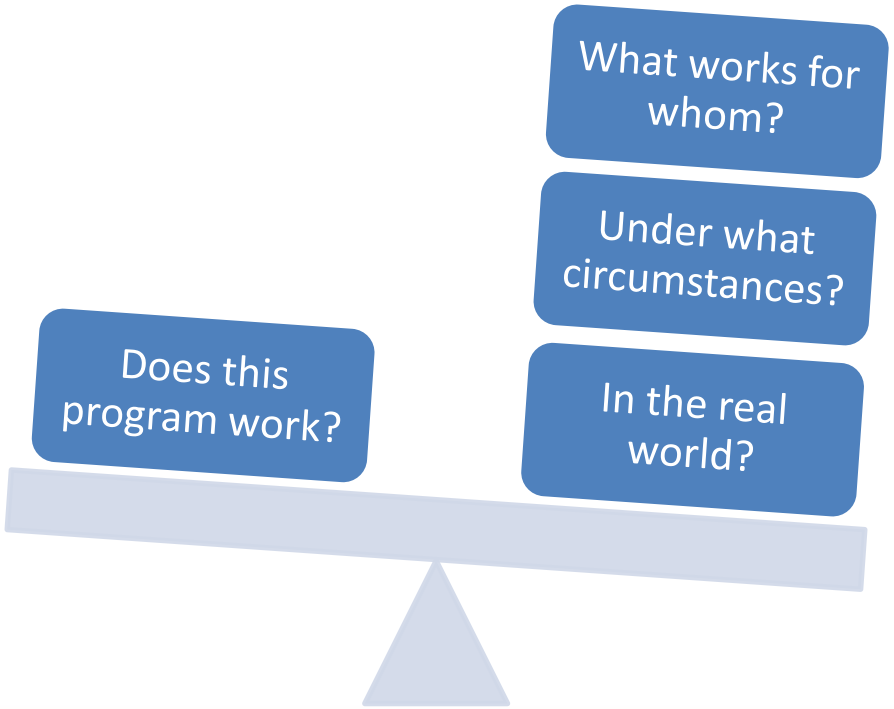
Fourth R / Healthy Relationships Plus as EBP

- 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?



Are we asking the right questions?



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

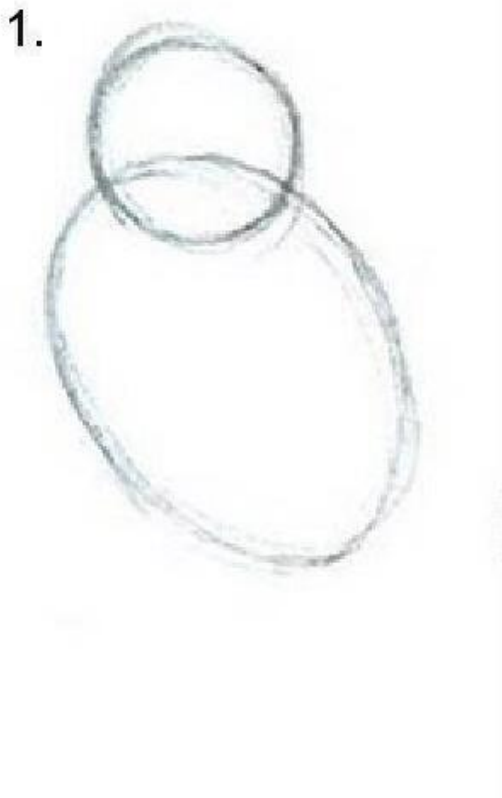
Flickr photo by TJ Blackwell
http://www.flickr.com/photos/tjblackwell/5629360808/

Flexibility of Implementation at the Individual Level: Our evolution

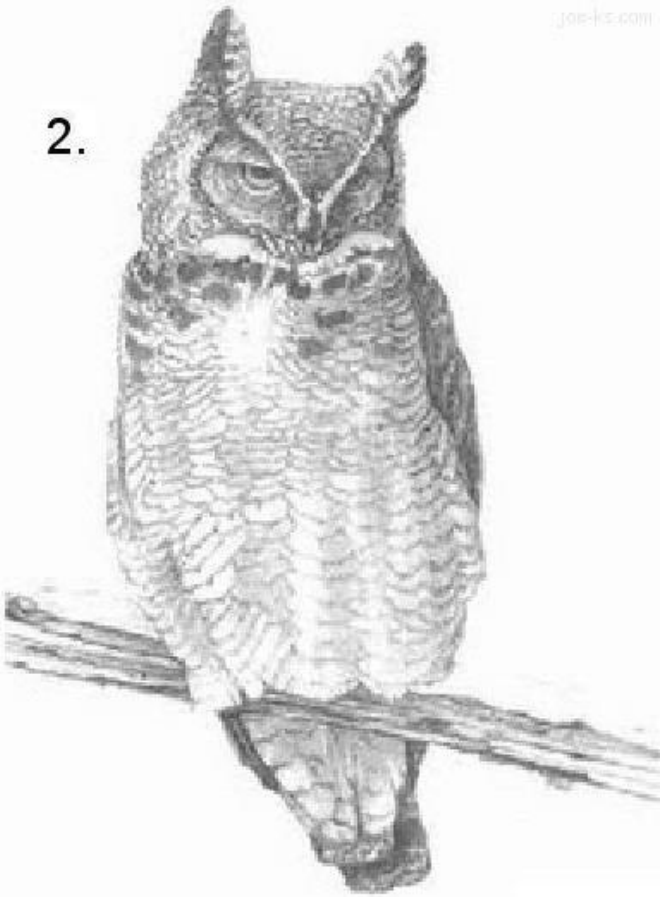
Phase I: Ignored implementation
(2001-2010)

"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

Phase II: Rigid and preachy
(2010-2015)

"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

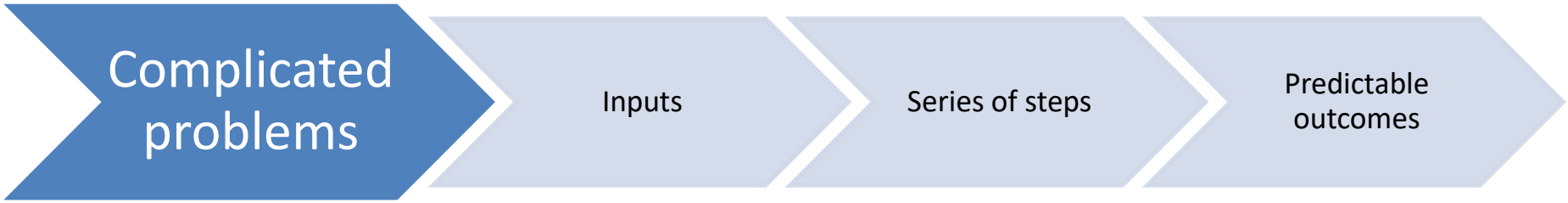
- Group size
- Mean age of student
- Age range of students
- Mixed or single gender groups
- Experience of facilitator
- Duration of intervention
- School-based versus community-based
- Aggregated risk level of group
- Presence of co-facilitator

HRP National Implementation Study – Important Group Level Variables

- Group size
- Mean age of student
- Age range of students
- Mixed or single gender groups
- Duration of intervention
- School-based versus community-based
- Aggregated risk level of group
- Presence of co-facilitator

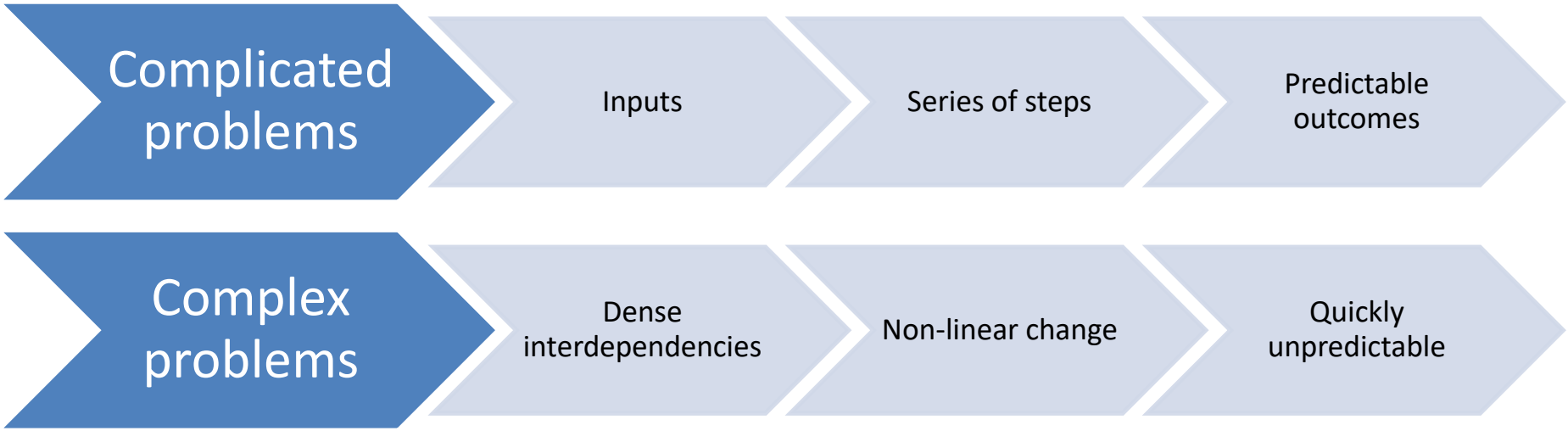
None of this mattered!

Complicated versus Complex Systems



Building airplanes is a complicated undertaking

Complicated versus Complex Systems



School-based interventions are complex by design!

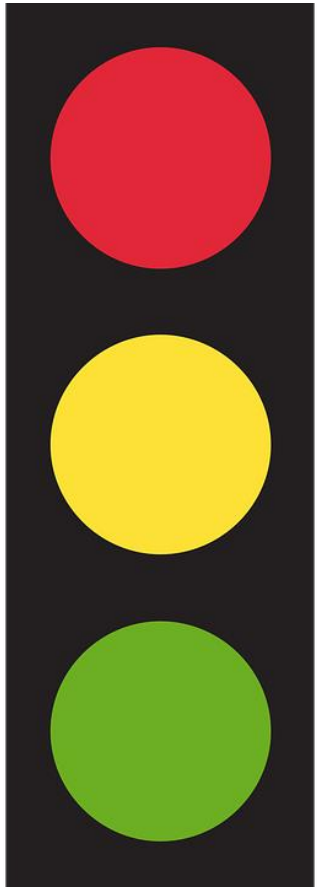
Phase III: Intentional adaptability

"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

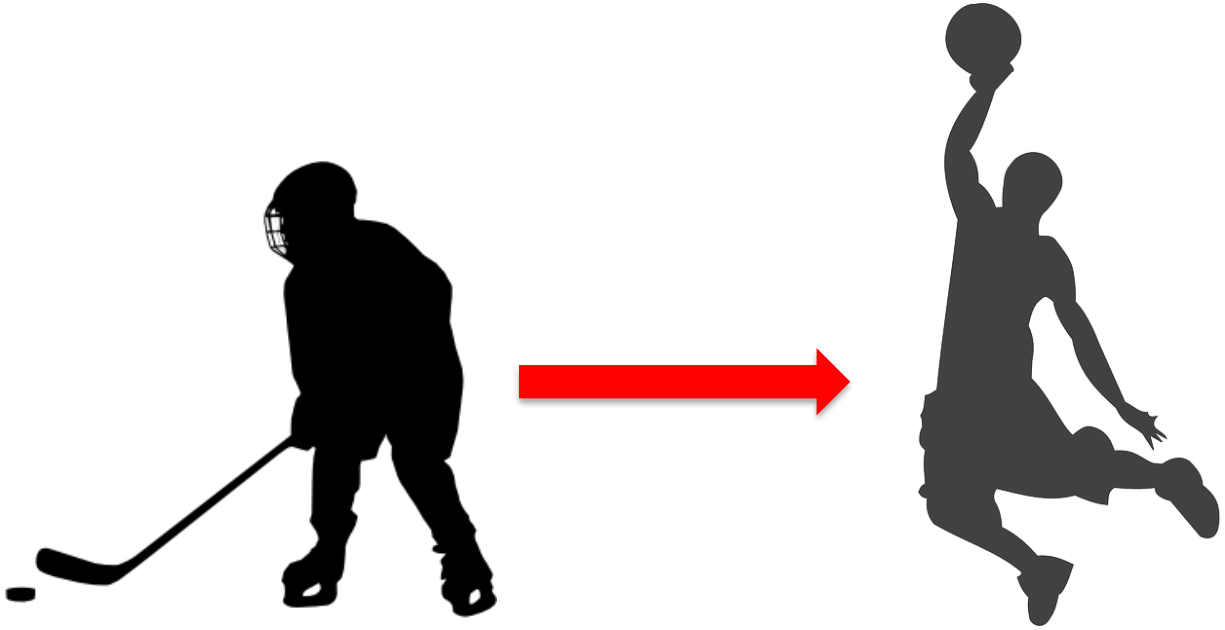
Fourth R for Americans

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

Fourth R for Americans

Fourth R for Americans

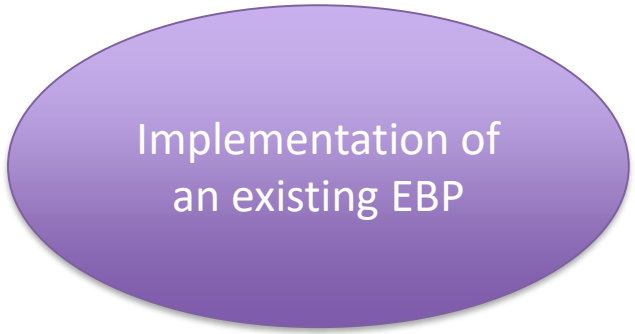
~~Behaviour~~



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



Adapted from O'Connell, Boat, Warner, and NRC, 2009

EBP versus locally developed

Adapted from O'Connell, Boat, Warner, and NRC, 2009

Finding Middle Ground

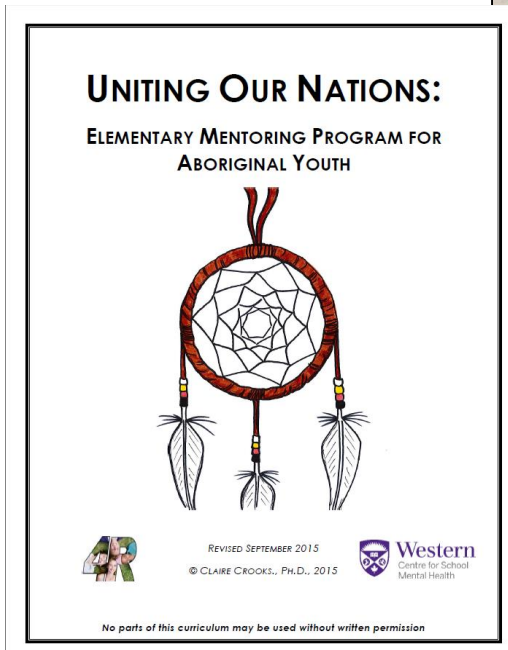
Is there a middle ground?

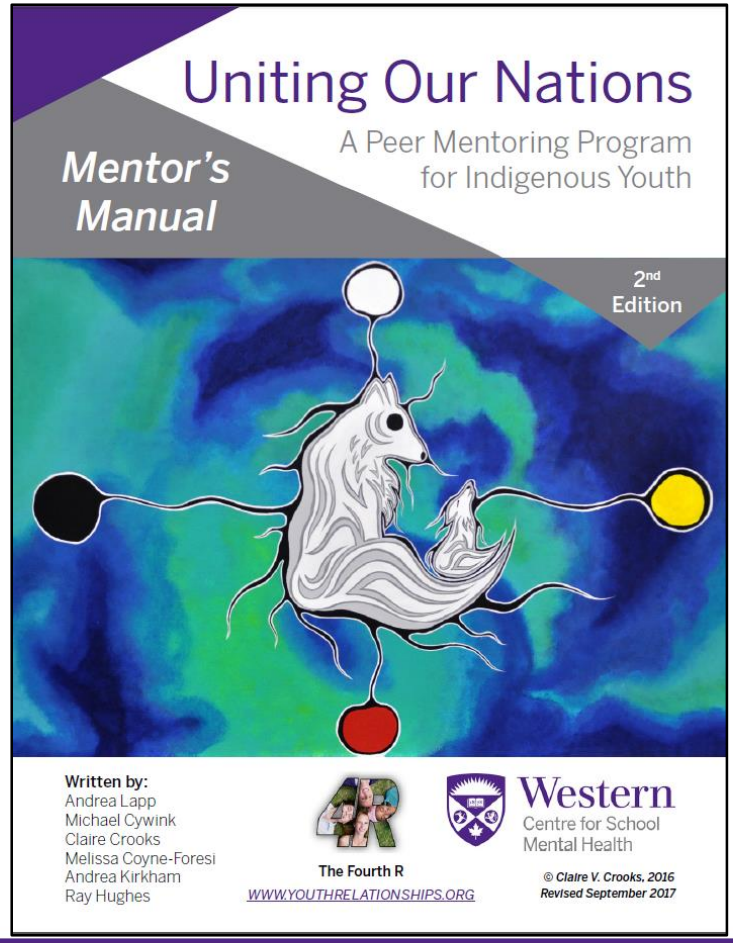
Adapted from O'Connell, Boat, Warner, and NRC, 2009

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

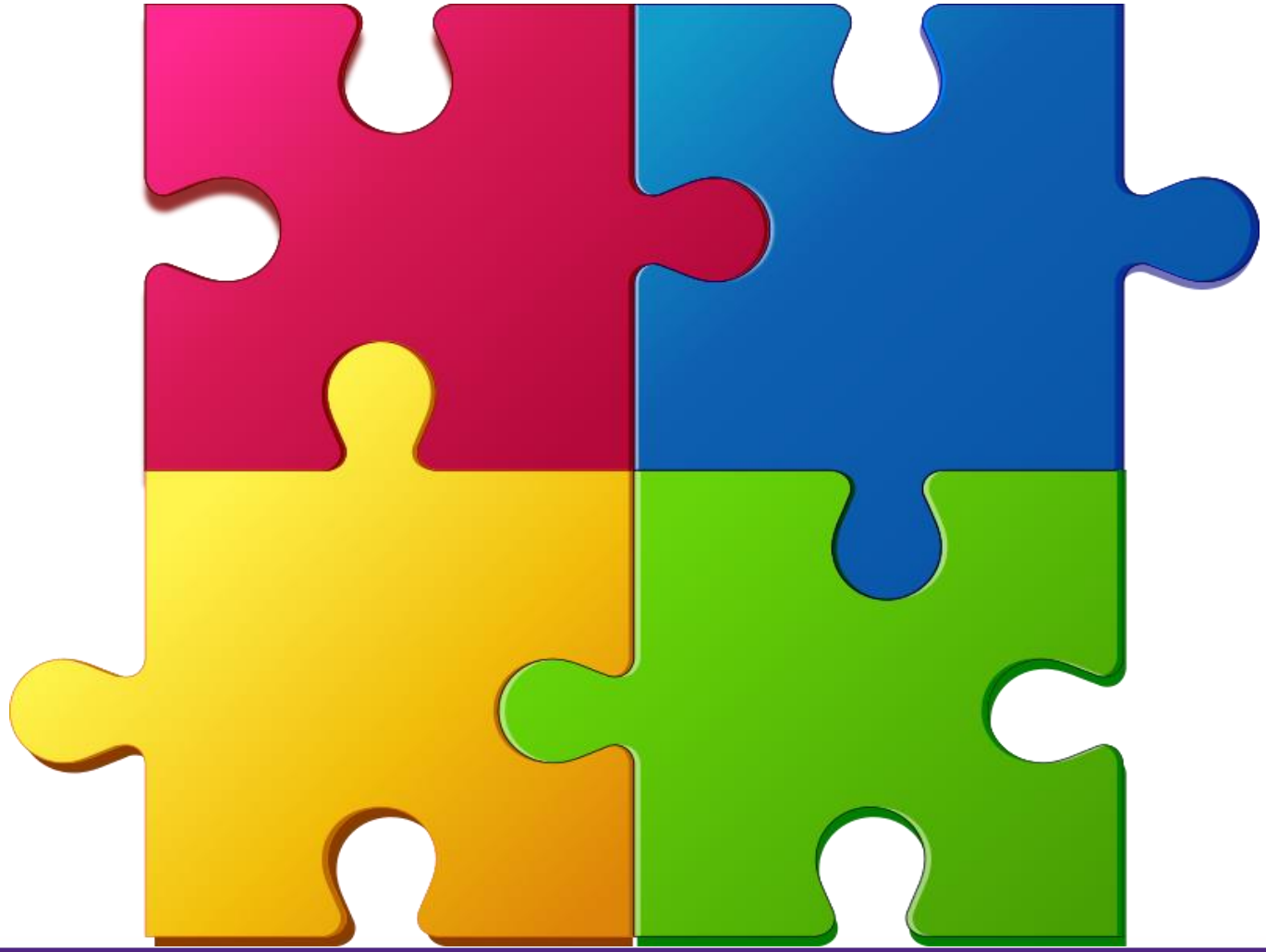
- Began with focus on feasibility and acceptability
- Cross-sectional designs
- Case studies
- Foundation for more rigorous evaluation

Mixed-methods longitudinal evaluation

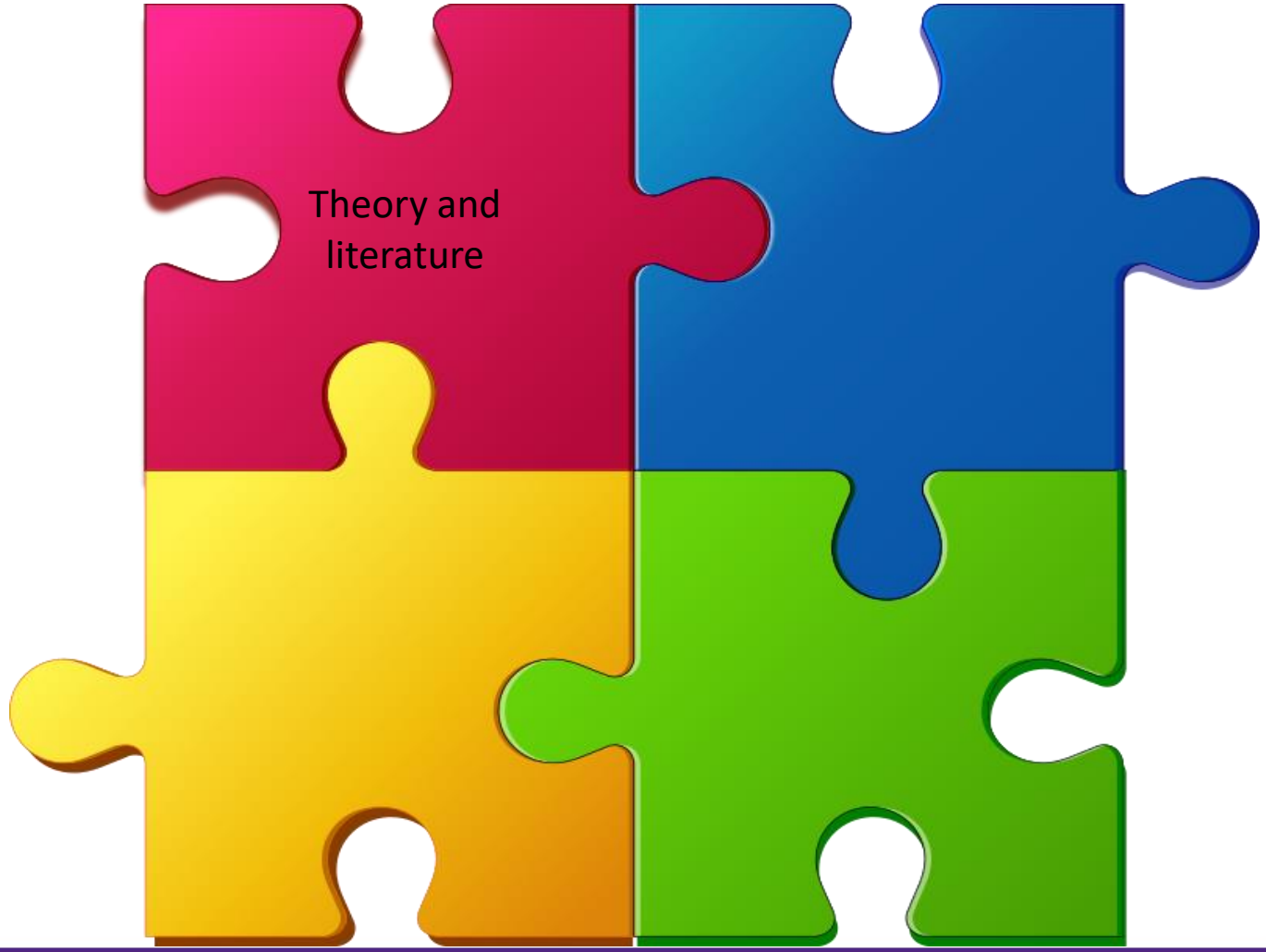
- Followed a cohort of 105 youth from grade 7/8 to grade 9/10
  - Evaluated impacts of two years of mentoring on emotional wellbeing and cultural connectedness
  - Positive impacts on both outcomes, even accounting for Wave 1 scores
  - Qualitative and quantitative data converged

Crooks, C.V., Exner-Cortens, D., Burm., S., Lapointe, A., & Chiodo, D. (2015). Mentoring for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Adolescents: Promoting positive mental health. *Journal of Primary Prevention, 38*(1-2), 87-104. DOI 10.1007/s10935-016-0457-0

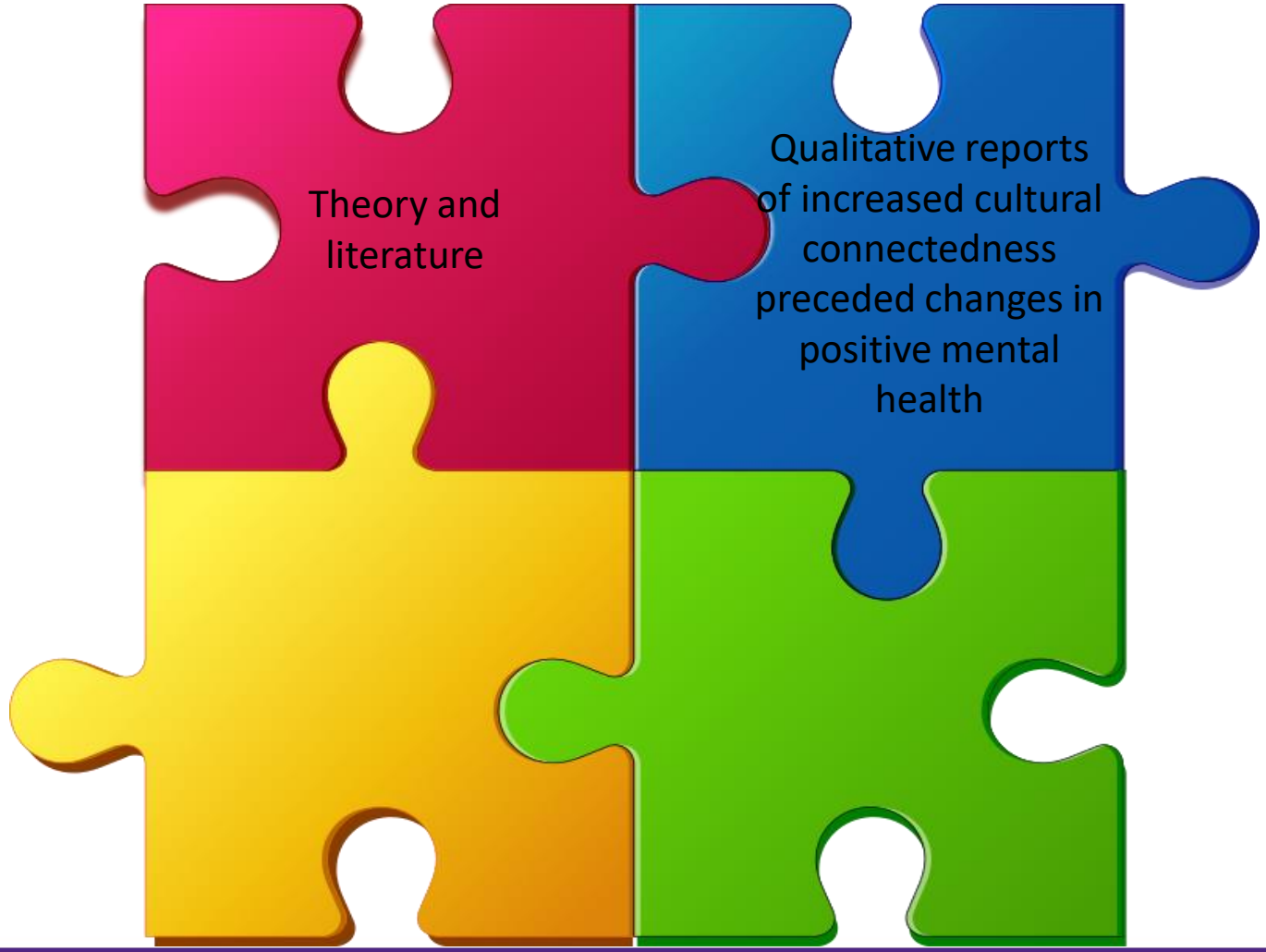
Culture as an Additional Core Component



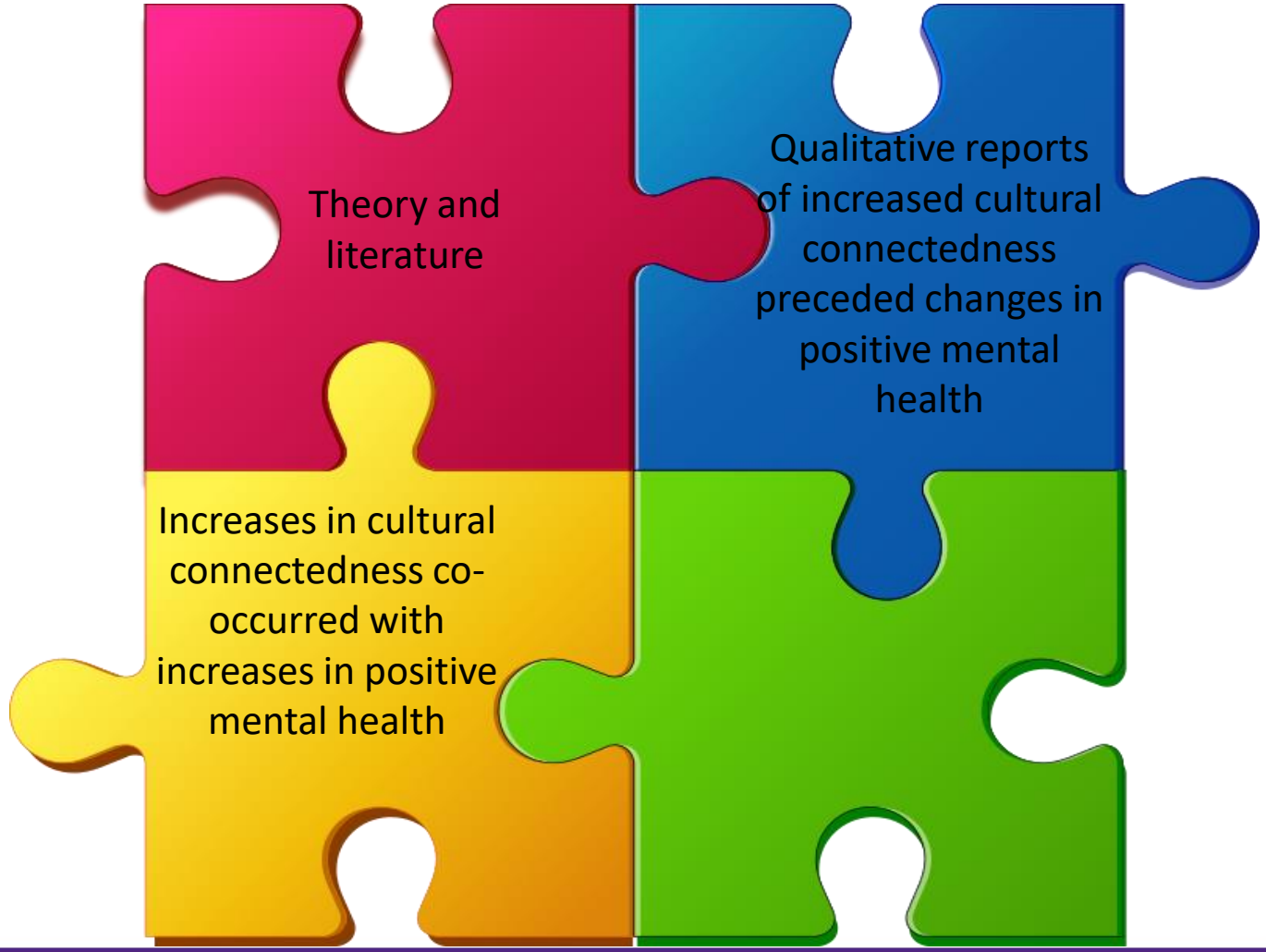
Culture as an Additional Core Component



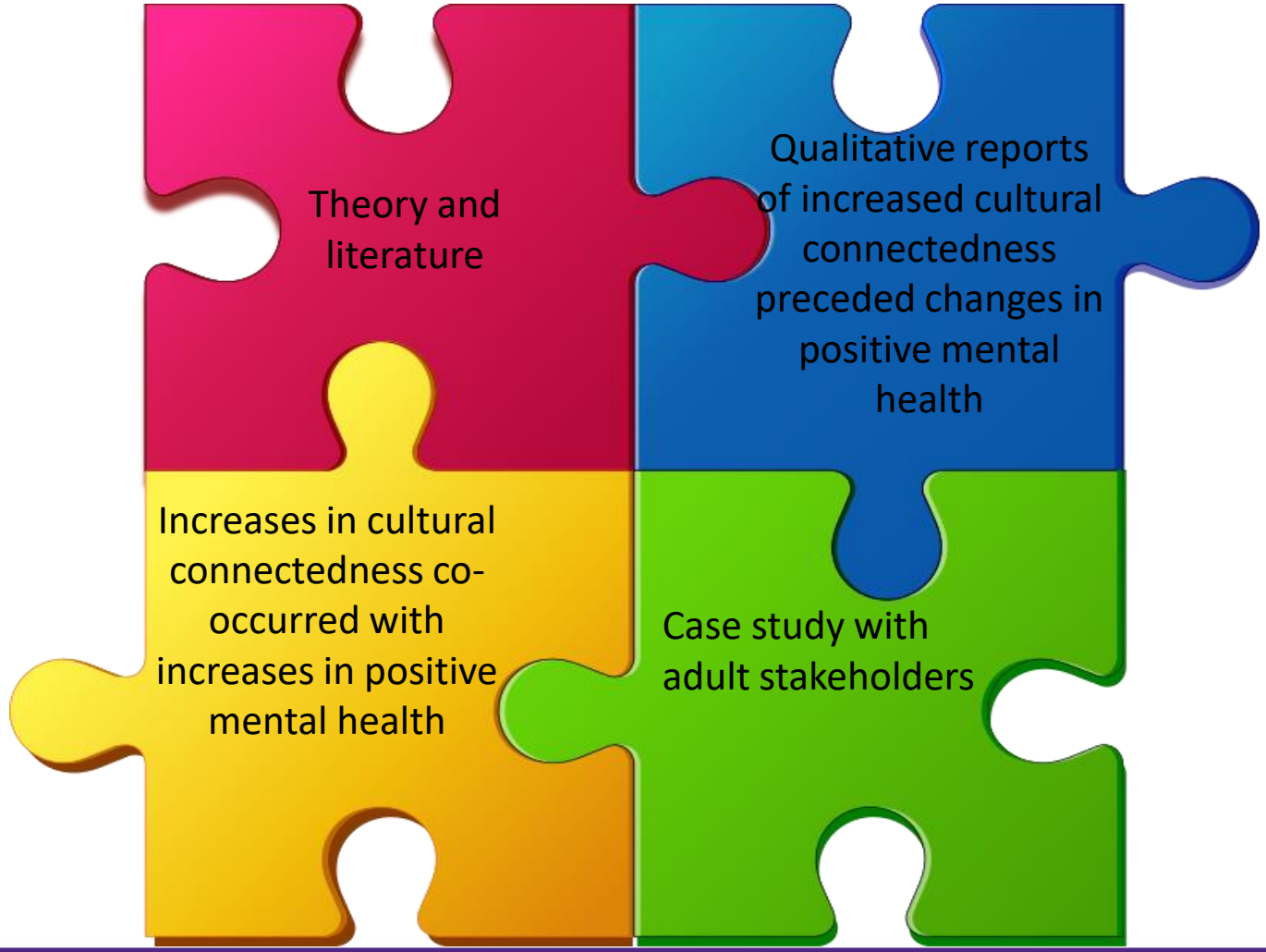
Culture as an Additional Core Component



Culture as an Additional Core Component



Culture as an Additional Core Component



Strengthening identity

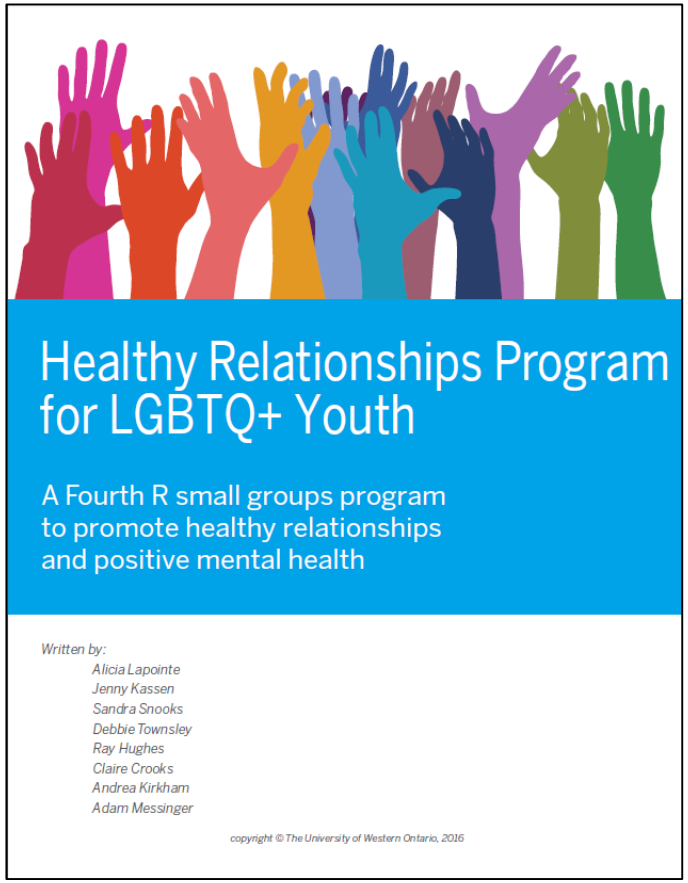
… it gives them the identity that they are searching for. Who am I? Where do I come from? What am I about? I find that they don't feel so lost. They can ground themselves. It is hard to explain. They can ground their spirit. They know who they are. It is not like they are wandering around searching for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

Crooks, C. V., Burleigh, D., & Sisco, A. (2015). Promoting First Nations, Métis, and Inuit youth wellbeing through culturally-relevant programming: The role of cultural connectedness and identity. *International Journal of Child and Adolescent Resilience.*

Uniting Our Nations Summary

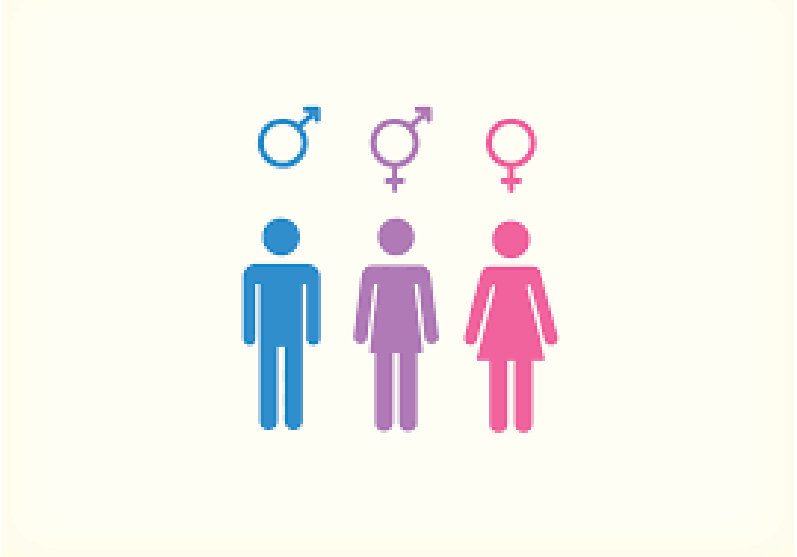
- Mentoring programs increased positive mental health, cultural connectedness, and academic success
- Core components still beneficial
- Importance of cultural identity framework

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 LGBT2Q+ 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

Lapointe, A., & Crooks, C. (2018). GSA members' experiences with a structured program to promote well-being. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, *15*(4), 300-318.

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

Considerations for Finding the Middle Ground

1. Keep core components
2. Look for unique risk and protective factors

Considerations for Finding the Middle Ground

1. Keep core components
2. Look for unique risk and protective factors
3. Co-create with stakeholders

Considerations for Finding the Middle Ground

1. Keep core components
2. Look for unique risk and protective factors
3. Co-create with stakeholders
4. Plan for iterative process

Considerations for Finding the Middle Ground

1. Keep core components
2. Look for unique risk and protective factors
3. Co-create with stakeholders
4. Plan for iterative process
5. Evaluate as you go

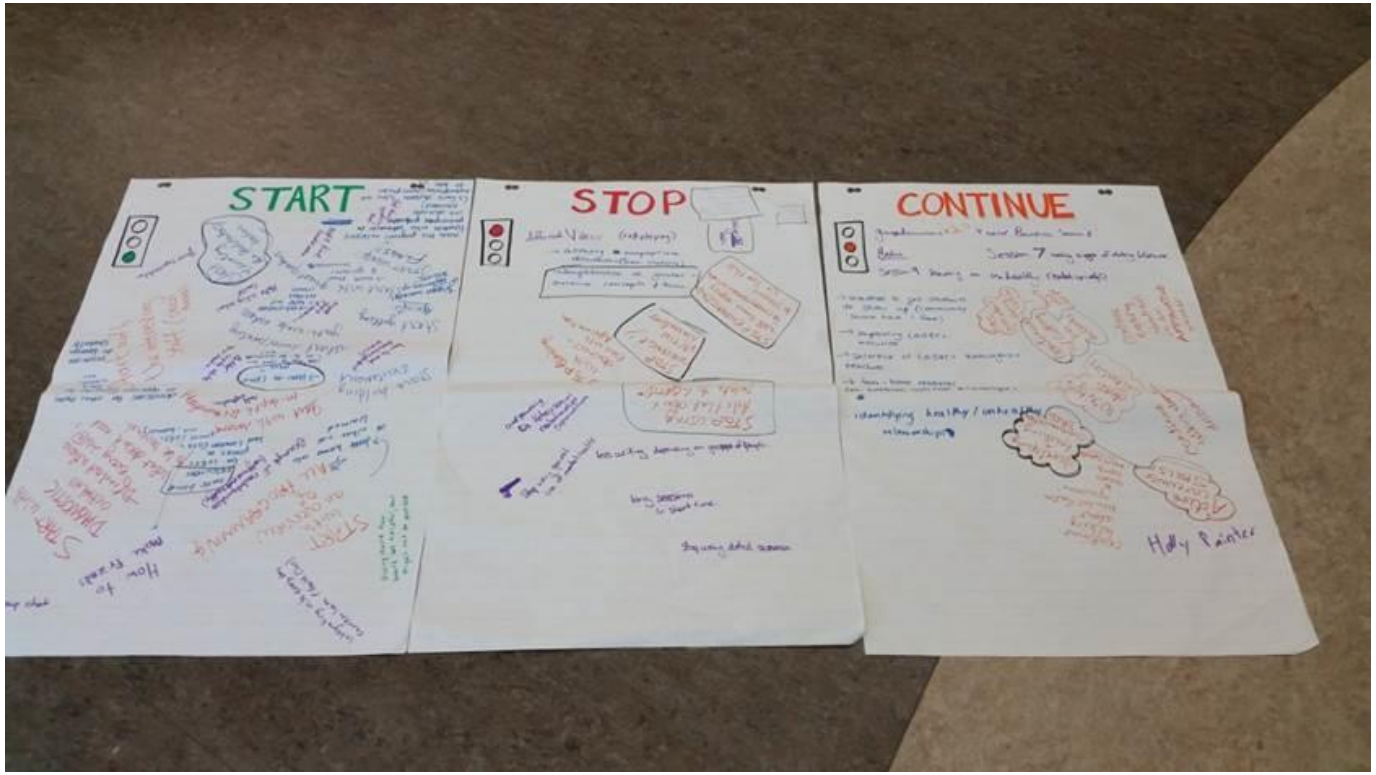
Considerations for Finding the Middle Ground

1. Keep core components
2. Look for unique risk and protective factors
3. Co-create with stakeholders
4. Plan for iterative process
5. Evaluate as you go
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

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