



Journeying With Youth: Re-Centering Indigeneity in Child and Youth

Key Details

KEY WORDS

Diversity, equity, Indigeneity, mentorship

POPULATION GROUP

Aboriginal youth

STEPPING UP THEMES

Diversity, Social Inclusion and Safety

RESEARCH ORIGIN

Canada

SOURCE

Academic

“It is time for mainstream individuals, agencies and levels of government to question their understanding of the contested histories [of Canada] and to acknowledge and actively work to recognize and support the sovereignty of First Nations communities” (p. 275).

1. What is the research about?

This research is an exploration of a Youth Mentoring Program (YMP) that was designed to re-centre Indigeneity in child and youth services. Whereas western approaches to youth work typically focus on individual and behavioral interventions, Indigenous ways of knowing require a different approach. This research explores the impact of implementing a “culturally relevant framework [...] based on community understandings of traditional teaching” within the YMP.

The program was designed to intentionally integrate Indigenous culture and practices into YMP, recognizing that non-Indigenous approaches were not meeting the needs of the Indigenous youth. The program model was adapted from the Panyappi Indigenous Youth Mentoring Program in Australia. It included the following program design elements:

- a) Intense focus on individual needs and self-actualization
- b) Rebuilding family connections
- c) Building relationships
- d) Culturally appropriate mentoring
- e) Maintaining a community-based focus

2. Where did the research take place?

The research took place in an unidentified First Nations community in Canada. To assure confidentiality neither the First Nations community nor the organization is named in this research.

3. Who is this research about?

This research draws on the experiences of youth program participants and the program’s youth workers, as well as the researcher’s personal and critical reflections. Youth participants joined the program through referral. The youth involved faced challenges related to leaving school, social disengagement, and criminal activity. All program participants and workers are Indigenous.

4. How was the research done?

Indigenous community members invited the researcher to conduct an external review of the YMP. This community-based research developed out of a trusting relationship between the researcher, the community, and program participants. The researcher conducted individual and group interviews with program participants and youth workers. Research participants had control over the research process; they chose how and what

to share with the researcher. The researcher also engaged in critical reflection throughout the process.

5. What are the key findings?

The YMP provided “journeying” supports to youth and their families. “Journeying” is a relational and narrative process that intentionally and holistically develops social and community connections. The two youth workers in the YMP took different approaches to supporting “journeying”. One youth worker employed “supportive mentoring” with older youth (14 years and older) to develop goals and create plans to reach the goals. The other worker used “intensive mentoring” with younger youth (14 years and under) and offered a mix of individual and family-based supports.

Youth valued that the youth workers were Indigenous. This created a shared connection that enabled deeper work. One youth describes the importance of a program that centres Indigeneity: “other programs are White. They are not me, they don’t care about me. They just want to make me into something else and that’s why I dropped out of school in the first place” (p. 270).

Strategies to “centre Indigeneity” differed based on the individual youth worker. One made an effort to maintain “professional boundaries” while the other did not. One expressed tensions between mainstream and Indigenous values and the other did not. The differences with which the youth workers responded to the task of centering Indigeneity show that there is no one approach – each youth worker will enter the work from a different place. Colonization and its effects entered into the YMP despite efforts at centering Indigeneity. The work of decolonization is multi-faceted and requires everyone.

6. Why does this research matter for youth work?

This research describes the necessity of re-centering Indigenous ways of knowing and worldviews into work with Indigenous youth and communities. It also reveals tensions associated with challenging mainstream and western approaches to youth work. For example, there is an inherent contradiction in using mainstream program evaluation, or evaluations by non-Indigenous people of Indigenous programs, to validate an Indigenous approach to youth work. The work of decolonization must be expansive and touch every aspect of youth work. The underlying assumptions implied in mainstream youth program design need to be examined through the lens of decolonization. Finally, changes within the youth sector to better meet the needs of Indigenous youth need to be led by Indigenous youth and communities.



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